

When Beth Israel built the Center Street synagogue in 1897, Louis Goldberg was one of the co-signers of the first mortgage. Father Hennessey, a curate of St. Mary's Parish, and personal friend of Louis Goldberg, had such admiration for the spirit of the handful of Jewish families, that he personally canvassed the Catholic business establishments on Exchange Street. The priest raised a considerable sum of money to aid the construction of the synagogue.



Louis Goldberg

Louis Goldberg, son of Mr. and Mrs. Moishe Goldberg, was born in Poland on Dec. 15, 1865. He came to America at the age of 14. He lived in New York, then moved to Philadelphia, where he married Minnie Myers. The couple made their home in Boston. The Goldbergs moved to Bangor in 1890, so that Mrs. Goldberg could be near her only sister, Sarah, the wife of Morris Golden.

Mr. Goldberg operated a tailor shop on the top floor of the old Wheelright & Clark building on the corner of Main and Hammond streets.

By modern standards the shul was a tiny edifice, being described by the building committee, which consisted of Max Cohen, Simon Kominsky and Harry Cohen, as "40 feet from south to north and 60 feet from east to west." Philip Hillson pointed out that space should be left in the rear for the future addition of a ritual bath or a residence for a hazan. Solomon Harris, who seemed most concerned with the details, insisted upon a rabbinic opinion on the necessity of having the door toward the west in order that the Ark be placed in an eastward position. Religious custom, however, did not prevail over architectural preference, and those who passed along the street saw a solid, almost square, typical small synagogue of that period — a wooden building, no doubt with white painted trim. The contract with the builders, Cutter and Cutter, copied into the minutes, gives the details of the construction.

Knowing that the funds already raised would be insufficient to take care of all the building costs, the congregation looked to other Jewish communities for help. A letter of appeal went to the wealthy philanthropist, Jacob Schiff. This kind of solicitation of congregations was one of the accepted means for a new congregation to get financial help. It is recorded that a "substantial sum was received." Schiff later acquired

## DAILY WHIG AND COURIER

Monday, Aug. 23, 1897

### CORNERSTONE LAID

At the Jewish Synagogue on Center Street

The ceremony of laying the cornerstone of the Jewish synagogue on Center Street occurred on Sunday afternoon beginning at 2:30 o'clock, with quite a large number in attendance. A platform was erected upon the foundation and the exercises were held there in a successful manner.

Mr. Louis Goldberg presided and made some remarks appropriate to the occasion and the presentation of the other participants in the exercises. Prayer in the \*Hindoo language was then offered by Rabbi Goldenkopf, of Bangor, after which Rabbi Shasher, of Boston, delivered an address, which was heard with much interest by all in attendance.

Appropriate remarks were made by Hon. Joseph F. Snow and Mr. F. H. Parkhurst. At the conclusion of the speaking the cornerstone was placed in position, Hon. J. F. Snow guiding it into place. The cornerstone has a sealed receptacle containing some synagogue records, names of the worshippers and other documents of interest.

The synagogue is being built by the Beth Israel Society and will be the first in Maine. It will be 60x40 feet, of attractive design and will have a large auditorium with galleries. It is intended to have it ready for occupancy by the first of next January.

\*The word Hindoo was printed in error by the Daily Whig and Courier.

### From The Cornerstone Of 1897

"Perhaps that this paper will ever have the opportunity to be read again by our Posterity. And, it may be then, that we all who are inserted here will be passed away in the world of truth. Our desire is that our succeeding Brethren shall try their best to fortify and strengthen our faith. Not to be misled and deluded by those who pay much stress to the 'vanities of this world.' You shall follow our religion according to the regulations and dictations by our Rabbis of old, — After the 'Shulchan Orach' You shall adhere to our faith with the best of your knowledge and ability, in a way that you may not go astray from the traditions which we have received from our wise men, —

"Do all you can to extoll and magnify our 'Holy Torah,' until our righteous Redeemer will come. Amen.

"We the Congregation Beth Israel of Bangor, Maine, lay this cornerstone with great gladness and delight. We thank and praise our Creator that he enabled us to build this modest sanctuary."

\*In order to preserve the original flavor the above is a literal translation from the Yiddish as recorded in the minutes. The membership list was not included.

an estate in Bar Harbor and made it a point to observe his yahrzeit in the newly built synagogue.

The financial difficulties of the congregation remained critical enough to plague the Bangor Jews for some years to come and to create friction among them. Israel Goldman, Hyman Lait, David Snyder and Harry Cohen had endorsed a note which long remained unsettled.

Meanwhile, as the work on the synagogue progressed, it was necessary to equip it with ritual objects. One Sefer Torah was already in possession of the congregation, and now the board of directors applied to Ohabei Shalom to borrow still another scroll and ornamental crowns for use on the day of dedication. Lemke Allen presented a silver havdalah cup. The women busied themselves conducting a subscription which netted funds for curtains for the Ark, a silk cloth



for the reader's desk, and covers for the scrolls. The only items which had to be purchased out of congregational funds were additional crowns for the scrolls.

Morris N. Golden was appointed to prepare plans for the consecration, which was to take place in December. Invitations were sent to the mayor and many other dignitaries. The joyful event took place Dec. 19, 1897. Mr. Golden in his entry notes "the officers followed by members of the congregation solemnly but happily met at the shul to recite the Mincha prayers." After the Amidah, the president of the congregation, Max Cohen, announced the mitzvoh, or honors for the ceremony: the opening of the synagogue door, the opening of the ark, and the carrying of the Scroll of the Law. After appropriate blessings, the line of congregants made the hakafoth, or circuits around the bimah, with the honored members bearing the Sefer Torahs. They all chanted the Baruch Haba, following it with the customary Psalms. At the close of the ceremonies, Mi sheberach, or the blessings, were asked for those who had contributed so generously to the subscription fund which had made the building possible. At last the Jews of Bangor had their own place of worship. Beth Israel had succeeded where the previous attempts to form a permanent synagogue had failed.

Meanwhile, Jews around the world were shocked by the actions France took against Capt. Alfred Dreyfus. In 1894 France arrested the Alsatian Jewish officer on suspicion of having betrayed military secrets to the Germans. The anti-Semitism of the period had greater influence in his arrest than the facts of the case.

This anti-Semitism spurred Theodor Herzl to organize the movement for a Jewish state. In 1897, the very same year the first Beth Israel synagogue was dedicated, Herzl convened the first Zionist Congress in Basel.

## BANGOR DAILY COMMERCIAL, OCT. 7, 1897

### THE NEW HEBREW SYNAGOGUE

The Hebrews of Bangor are rejoicing in the possession of a fine new house of worship, which is just arriving at completion on Center Street, above Cumberland. A picture of the building and a drawing of its main floor plan appears herewith, and gives some idea of the synagogue as it will look when it is wholly ready for use. The building was designed and built by Hodgins & Packard, the architects of this city, designers of the Bangor Auditorium and other important public buildings recently mentioned in these columns. Hodgins & Packard have put up the building with wonderful rapidity. To the time of putting on the clapboards, they were at work but 12½ days, and for the clapboarding and all they occupied 15½ days, which is sort of a record for this vicinity.

The synagogue is wood throughout. It is 48 feet wide and 96 feet long, and is remarkably commodious through a felicitous



On Jan. 2, 1898, Morris L. Rosen and Bessie Kominsky became the first couple married in the Center Street synagogue. Morris N. Golden officiated.

Silver and war now filled the headlines. The Spanish-American War was triggered by the explosion of the Battleship Maine in Havana Harbor in 1898. Myer Kominsky, son of Simon Kominsky, obtained his father's permission and became the first of the Beth Israel family to serve in the armed forces of the United States.

interior arrangement, which gives a use to every inch of space. Entering the building by the main double doors in front, the visitor comes into the vestibule, a broad apartment with cloak rooms opening from either side, together with stairways to the gallery and to the basement. These anterooms are duplicates of each other. Both of them open into the gallery stairs and are to be fitted comfortably for the convenience of the worshippers.

From the vestibule one steps into the main auditorium, the room in which the Hebraic rites are to be celebrated in this city. This room is high and long, 39 by 48 feet. There are seats for several hundred persons, and the pulpit at the front is ample. In the center, raised by several feet, is the sacrificial altar. Upon the pulpit will be erected a magnificently carved ark, now being designed by Hodgins & Packard. It will be decorated with the sacred symbols of the church and will be one of the most beautiful specimens of wood-carving in Maine. Morse & Co. will do the carving for this



expensive piece, which will not be ready to set up for some weeks yet.

In the rear of the auditorium, over the entrances and anterooms, is the spacious gallery, capable of seating 150 persons and admirably arranged.

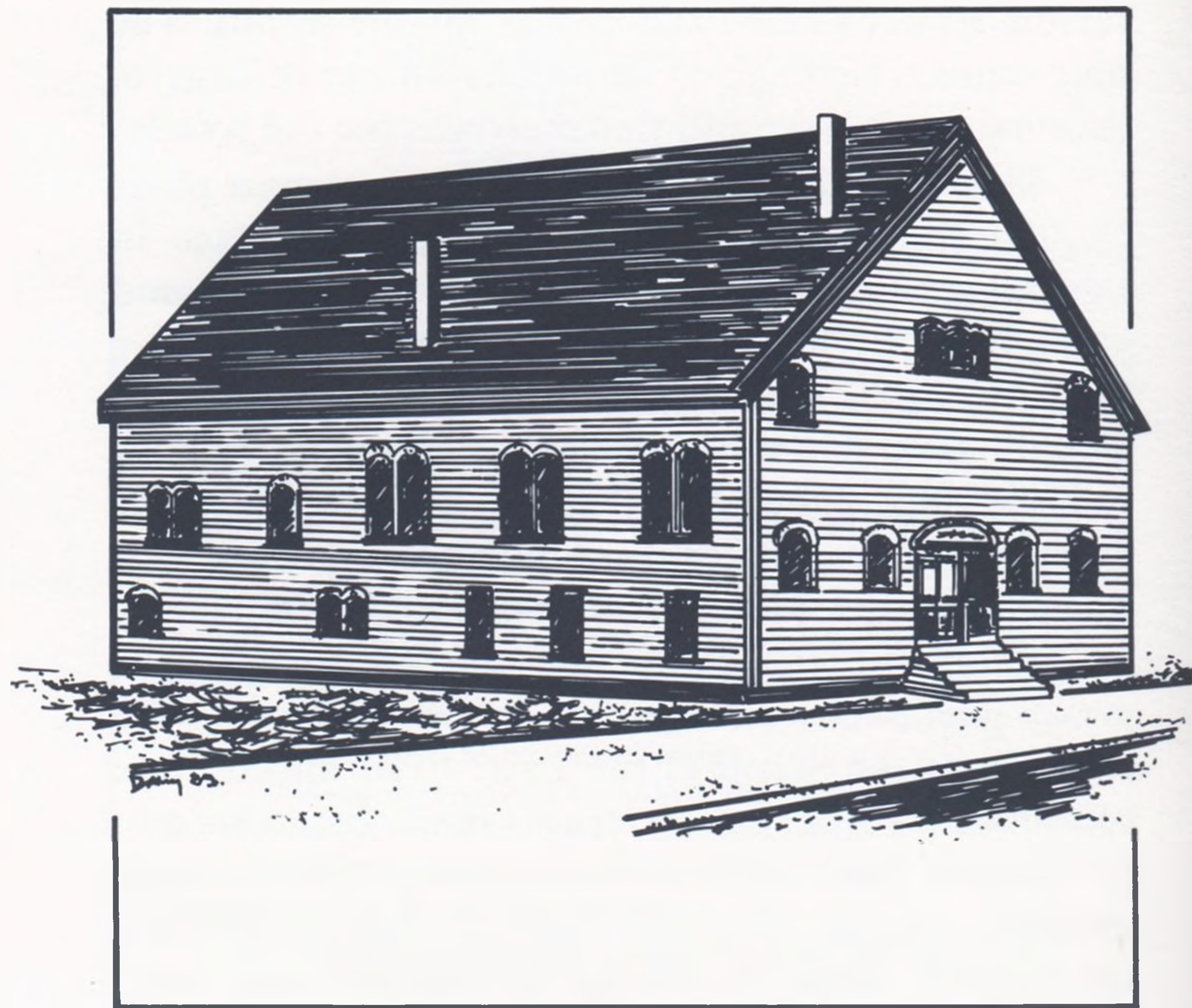
The room is ventilated adequately and is lighted by numerous windows. At night it will be illuminated by electricity. More than 50 incandescents are now being put in for that purpose. The four altar posts, commonly lit with candles, will be fitted, in this modern tabernacle, with crowns, where they will do duty in the place of the ancient flickering wicks.

Below stairs the synagogue contains school rooms, lavatories and a vestry which measures 22 by 40 feet on the floor.

The building will be heated by steam.

Already services have been held in the synagogue, though the windows are not yet in. The building is an ornament to its neighborhood and to the city, and the worshippers whose contributions have made it possible are to be congratulated upon its completion.

Under the easterly corner is a granite stone bearing the inscription, in English: "Congregation Beth Israel." On the other side is a legend in Hebrew characters which have so far defied the utmost attacks of newspaper reporters.



## BANGOR DAILY NEWS, MONDAY, DEC. 20, 1897

### DEDICATION OF BETH ISRAEL

#### Bangor Has the First Jewish Synagogue Erected in Maine

#### SERMON BY RABBI LASKER

Sunday was a happy day for the Hebrews of Bangor. After years of constant work, economy and self denial the little handful of the sons of Abraham who nine years ago met for the first time to worship in their faith in Bangor in the house of one of their number, were able to consecrate to the God of their fathers a fine new house of public worship, spacious and well appointed; a place where they can come to renew their faith; where heart can be united to heart as hand to hand; where the widow can receive support, the orphan protection and the penitent come for supplication and prayer.

The dedication ceremonies of the substantial new structure which occupies a prominent site on Center Street, took place at 4 p.m.

The church was brilliant with the numerous and nicely arranged incandescent lights even to the altar lights and the ever-burning blue light in front of the ark. Everything in the interior is bright and shining in oil finish relieved by the handiwork of florist Beers in festoons of laurel, evergreen and holly with bouquets of lilies, chrysanthemums and cut flowers in profusion.

The congregation, now numbering nearly one hundred persons and a good attendance of the Gentiles including many prominent people of the city filled nearly every seat in the house. Pullen's full orchestra was stationed in the gallery and played an opening selection and also during and after the services. The usual opening service of the church followed the processional being led by Rabbi Goldinkoff and escorting Rabbi Raphael Lasker of the church of Ohabei Shalom of Boston, one of the most distinguished rabbis of the church in New England.

After an invocation Rabbi Lasker announced the subject of his afternoon's discourse from the text: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who bringeth tidings, good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation," Isa. 52-7. In the brief sermon that followed

Rabbi Lasker held the closest attention of every hearer, Jew and Gentile as well. He is a man of grand personality, of magnificent physique and imposing dignity. A richly modulated voice and expression carries feeling with every sentence. His diction was elegant in its pure English, amazing in its simplicity yet conveying the fullest meaning even intensified when he repeated in the Hebrew tongue the words which meant so much to him, the words of peace, happiness, salvation. In his opening he extended hearty congratulations, praise and thanks to the people of congregation Beth Israel for the almost wonderful fruition of their earnest efforts. He brought from his church in Boston, Ohabei Shalom, greetings of love and sympathy. In his sermon proper he followed the words of the prophet and continued the passage as three messages: First, a message of peace; second, a message of happiness; third, a message of salvation. Each he analyzed carefully and thoroughly and besought his people to live in peace with all men; that happiness came not of wealth, not of position, not of knowledge but by the salvation of faith in the living God. He charged the people that as the chosen messengers of God, the bearers of the law forever, that they should bear in mind the education of their children in the principles of the faith, the ten commandments and the Pentateuch.

The sermon was orthodox and not out of place from any pulpit in the land and its soundness of its teachings.

The actual consecration was a simple but beautiful declaration delivered by the rabbi with uplifted hand consecrating the house to the only and living God.

After the sermon ended there was a selection by the orchestra and the benediction in the usual form of Christian churches in English and Hebrew.

The orchestra gave several numbers after the service.

From a Gentile's standpoint the services were differed but little from the ordinary Christian worship. The ceremony was impressive and decorous. The custom of the congregation as well as all connected with the service wearing their headgear seemed rather odd at first but was soon forgotten. The new church is practically completed lacking but a few of its furnishings including an elaborately carved ark of the covenant now being constructed.



# The Formative Years

Whether or not Rabbi Lasker directly aided in the formation of Beth Israel, there is no question about the fact that he was often called upon as a “friend in need” in the early days. It was he who dedicated the synagogue on Center Street. It was he to whom the congregation turned for advice and it was he who assisted the leaders of the congregation in their search for a rabbi.

Hazan Goldenkopf, having served the congregation for nearly four years, expressed the desire to return to New York in the not too distant future. Although it was not openly discussed at the meetings of the congregation, the committee began to look around for a successor to him. The congregation was steadily growing and it was decided to call an ordained rabbi as its spiritual leader.

It is an interesting commentary upon the religious life of the young community to note that Goldenkopf, who had already served a New York congregation with distinction and who was an acknowledged leader, was not a rabbi in the European or modern sense. He was a highly qualified shoet and mohel as well as an excellent reader and cantor. He was respected by his congregants for his spirituality and eloquence. Reluctantly, Beth Israel accepted Goldenkopf's resignation and speedily re-engaged Morris Golden who had served Beth Israel in these capacities before the arrival of Goldenkopf. Mr. Golden had no desire to serve in an official capacity and urged the membership to seek the services of a full-time shoet so that he might return to his private affairs.

In the continuing search for a rabbi, the congregation published notices in the leading Jewish journals of both America and Europe. Beth Israel was not alone in seeking a rabbi. Not only in America, but in Europe as well, congregations were looking for spiritual leaders who had been well indoctrinated. In explaining to Rabbi Seltzer that the Bangor post at \$1,000 a year was preferable to a New York pulpit at \$1,200 a year because of lower living costs and “greater opportunities,” Rabbi Lasker wrote:

“In my eyes, the congregation is honorable and generous, and you will have a good chance to live quite a satisfied life, especially since a sphere of activity is open before you which cannot be found in New York as far as extent and fruitfulness is concerned. Our Jews in



Rabbi Raphael Lasker

America suffer, it is true, from a lack of general education, but indifference finds no name here, and basically they are able to be educated. They do count amongst their membership a few baale battim with yeshiva backgrounds.”

An invitation was extended and accepted, and Rabbi Seltzer was elected rabbi of Beth Israel in April 1903 at a salary of \$1,000 per year. The choice was a most fortunate one. Seltzer was a vigorous, dynamic man of 35 when he came to Bangor, and proved to be one of those great personalities who shaped the destiny of Beth Israel.



Seltzer was a man of great erudition, combined with simple candor, that verged on the humble. He loathed pomp and pretense of any kind. He considered his gifts of intellect as a public trust.

When he accepted Beth Israel's invitation, he was a seasoned master of traditional Hebrew literature and an eager student of philosophy and the secular classics. The vigorous content of the sermons as well as their weekly regularity attracted good sized audiences. He had a remarkable ability to make the profoundest thoughts simple. It is assumed that then as now Jews attended the synagogue to drink in the wisdom of the rabbi more than they did to pray.

The building of the synagogue had been financed with notes, and when these came due, the congregation was strained to the utmost to meet them. Rabbi Seltzer volunteered to have his salary reduced from \$20 to \$17 per week, with the understanding that it would be restored when times got better. Many of the members were in arrears on their dues and efforts to collect them met only rebuffs and insults that only a diplomat like Solomon Harris could counter.

The need for funds to keep the synagogue going was always a dire problem. Having exhausted the charity of the local Jews and the out of town sources as well, the congregation turned to what had proved in other religious institutions to be the most practical way of raising money — a lottery. It is not recorded whether or not official permission for such a venture was ever granted. The committee in charge was appealing to the gambling instincts of the public. Later that year Simon Kominsky, Louis Goldberg, and F. H. Rosen were able to report that a "gold watch had been offered as a prize and the winner (no name mentioned) turned the watch back to the synagogue." Mr. Kominsky suggested that the watch be presented to Rabbi Seltzer and it was so voted. The turn of the lottery wheel marked the end of a temporary crisis.

Before Seltzer was hired, a knotty problem arose that required an immediate solution. An itinerant peddler died in a nearby town. He was not a member of the congregation, although a year before, fearing that he was about to die, he called in several Jews and recited the vidui, or confession of faith; and he had been married to a non-Jew by a Christian minister. The question was: should he, or could he, be buried according to Jewish custom? One group in the congregation at first insisted upon a legal interpretation from a Boston rabbi as the congregation at that time did not have a rabbi of its own. But another group, somewhat more realistically, believed that an immediate decision would have to be made. After all, the corpse could not be kept unburied until an answer would be forthcoming. Consequently, the decision was left to a panel

## Morris N. Golden

After the departure of Hazan Goldenkopf, the congregation continued without a hazan-shohet for nearly five years. In the interim Morris N. Golden filled the void. He was not an ordained rabbi, but was a man of great learning, well versed in Torah and Talmud, and he consented to act as rabbi until a professional leader could be obtained. Golden also served as secretary of the Chevra Kadisha



Morris N. Golden

and his beautiful handwriting has been compared to some of the finest Jewish manuscripts. His Judeo-German is succinct and expressive — the Yiddish literary style of an era long gone.

Golden conducted a meatery that was known for its strict supervision, and his name became a trademark known all over central and northern Maine. Many families in the rural areas were able to obtain kosher meat through his efforts. Moreover, there was no denying that the standards of Golden were an improvement in terms of the religious values to which the observing Jews adhered. Golden died in 1916.

of experts, consisting of Rudman, Harris and Philip Hillson. It was their judgment that this wayward Jew be buried in a corner of the cemetery, without ritual washing, without a shroud and without a ceremony.

Traditionally, Jews always took care of their co-religionists in trouble or need; the Jews of Bangor, even though their congregation was in financial difficulties, were determined to do what they could. In those days, a Jew in a strange city went straight to the synagogue for help. Hence, it was logical that the new society should have been organized by and in Congregation Beth Israel. There always had been a tsedaka, or synagogal charity fund, which used free-will offerings for the relief of the needy; but in 1898 the need was felt for a specialized branch of the fund. As a result the Ezrath Orechim, or Society for Destitute Strangers — the first Bangor Jewish charitable organization, and the earliest one in the state of Maine whose records have survived



— was created, with Israel Frank as its president and Philip Hillson its secretary, and Samuel E. Dennis its treasurer.

The financial problems of Beth Israel continued to be a source of worry to the leaders of the congregation, and the cause of serious friction between some of them. Those who had signed notes at the bank for the loan to build the shul were pressed by the creditors for payment. They appealed for help. One of the signatories even hired a lawyer to represent him against the congregation should the bank take legal action. The complicated arrangements that had to be made to meet payments falling due, the collection of subscription promises, the claims of men who had advanced money on the congregation's behalf — all the struggles of a young, and far from affluent, religious group — fill the minutes of Beth Israel. Yet, the difficulties did not discourage the Jews of Bangor. Squabble and scrape they might, but they were determined to care for their religious needs, and expand they would if that proved necessary.

The handful of men who formed the congregation in 1888 were confronted, as Jews, by three basic needs fundamental to their religion; circumcision for their sons; hallowed ground in which to bury their dead; and kosher meat, which equalled the other two needs in importance as far as these devout and strictly Orthodox Jews were concerned. And so the story of this congregation during its early years is replete with the constant struggle to obtain these services. The Rev. Kemer had been servicing the community but it was decided to send him to Boston "to be examined with regard to his capabilities to act as shohet." Mr. Kemer, perhaps motivated by prudence, refused to go, and the congregation was faced with the problem of finding a replacement.

And now began a long succession of reverend gentlemen, hired with high hopes, disappointing the membership after a few months or a year, to be followed by another and another. Time and time again the official minutes in faded handwriting tell of advertisements being placed in the Yiddish periodicals of the day, for "hazan, shohet, mohel, a teacher being preferred." Either the congregation was fantastically unlucky in its selections, or the skills required were not to be found in one man. This search for a master-of-all religious functions continued to dog the congregation up to the 1920s.

Yet one cannot help but feel a secret sympathy for the reverend gentlemen in their difficult position. Take the case of the Rev. P . . . . who had been tendered a special vote of thanks for his "noble exertions" and assured that his own feelings "as a sincere Jew in advancing the cause of the Kehila will be sufficient

stimulus for continuing the same." Six months later disillusionment set in and complaints were made by members of the "incapability of mohelshaft." A committee of three was set up to visit the alleged injured children and the committee formally reported, in full anatomical detail, the results of their inspection. The complaints were found to be justified, and the gentleman received his marching papers forthwith.

Other shohetim had other troubles. A Mr. Rubenovitz had a charge of slander preferred against him by a member, and in return, one year later, he formally complained in writing that "Mr. Wolper had grossly insulted him in the public market." Then there was the case of a temporary shohet who was discharged "owing to him being no mohel, also of his incapability of teaching on account of a defect in hearing." Perhaps the congregation was too hasty, for the following month a desperate telegram was sent to Rabbi Margolis of Boston: "Situation is open. Have no meat. Send shohet at once." Signed: S. E. Rudman, Simon Kominsky.

There were social problems in those days, too. Take the case of the shohet, who was brought to Bangor from New York, at a cost of \$20. It seems that the reverend gentleman liked to relax his spirit with spirits. He was accused of conduct unbecoming a shohet and placed on probation. He was requested to take an oath in the presence of a quorum of the board of directors, that while engaged by the congregation he would "never imbibe any alcoholic beverages except when prescribed by a physician for medical relief." But alas for human frailty! Six weeks later a complaint was made by Max Ginsberg that the shohet had violated his oath.

After its first decade, Beth Israel endured and survived many changes. Achieving stability and a degree of affluence, the congregation had been joined by a fresh group of newcomers drifting in from the Chassidic strongholds of Russia and Poland. The Ashkenazic or German ritual was firmly entrenched at Beth Israel. It was the ritual of the progenitors of the founding fathers. This change from the Sephardic ritual for these "Russishe" Jews concealed a tension among the members of the congregation, for those favoring the Spanish ritual could find no ground for mutual compromise. As is often the case, debate centered not so much on the profundities of faith as on its incidentals. A familiar gesture, a well-loved phrase, a simple melody — these were the divisive forces that brought discord to Beth Israel in 1902.

At the outset the Sephardim proposed not a separate synagogue, but only a separate service, retaining membership in Beth Israel. They seem, primarily,



to have been asking for a method of maintaining unity which would have allowed them a measure of autonomy and self-expression. Had Beth Israel accepted this plan, the Jewish community might have continued united, even when, at some time later, separate houses of worship were erected. Financial control and the administration of all necessary activities in the community would have remained centralized. We learn, however, from the minutes of Beth Israel that this compromise was not effected. The Sephardic group headed by Pinchos Striar sent its petition for a separate service to the board of directors. The request was rejected. The opposition was led by Joseph Byer and Morris Rosen. Simon Kominsky and Nathan Ginsberg were the advocates of compromise. In addition a petition signed by the majority of the Beth Israel membership, upheld the action of the board of directors in refusing to permit a separate service. The petitioners expressed their full and entire approbation of the conduct of the board, and asked them to continue to oppose any measure or proposition having a tendency to destroy the well-known and established rules and customs of the founding fathers.

The synagogue seems to have been permeated with the fear that if these newcomers were permitted a voice in determining the conduct of the congregation, they would, sooner or later, abolish the established ritual and transform the synagogue into a Sephardic place of worship. To the older members, the very existence of the Ashkenazic ritual seemed to be at stake.

Immediate and decisive action had to be taken. Beth Israel, in desperation, decided on a plan which destroyed all possibility of reconciliation between the two groups and which made secession and the consequent disruption of the Jewish community inevitable. This decision of the board of directors had as its purpose the restriction of control to the dominant Ashkenazic membership, the majority group which favored the retention of the Ashkenazic ritual. Joe Byer argued that if the admission of newcomers was restricted, or, perhaps, if they were barred from membership unless they accepted the prevailing customs, there would be little opportunity for complications to arise in connection with any future attempt to change the mode of worship.

Following this decision of the board, a group of persons waiting for the usual automatic admission to membership were informed that they must apply to the board of directors for admission and that their applications would be placed before the investigating committee at a regularly assembled meeting. At the meeting of the committee in July 1902, only two out of the nine who had applied for admission were accepted.

Compromise was no longer possible and the

“Russishe” group headed by Pinchos Striar seceded, taking with them enough families to constitute a minyan of their own. Thus was Congregation Beth Abraham Anshe Sphard, the mother synagogue’s first daughter, born. The reasons which were officially advanced for this decision were: A.) a desire to permit the Sephardim to worship according to their own customs; B.) the increase of the Jewish population, which necessitated the formation of another synagogue; and C.) the distance at which



Pinchos Striar

many lived from the Center Street location. In a polite letter, they informed the board of directors of their intentions; they added that they would contribute a fair sum for the services of the Beth Israel shohet-mohel.

The board did not manifest any great enthusiasm over the rift. A heated meeting indicates that the president, Harry Cohen, was instructed to advise the seceders that the services of a shohet-mohel would be provided for a fee to be determined at a meeting of representatives of both factions. The use of a Sefer Torah was offered until such time that the new synagogue could provide one of its own. Underlying these amenities was the feeling that the secession could have and should have been avoided.

Two years later, due to internal strife, Striar with a bare following returned to Beth Israel disgruntled but far from disillusioned.

In time, however, the hatchet was buried; relations between the mother synagogue and her offspring began to improve. It is difficult, indeed, to determine where to place the blame. The Beth Abraham people had suggested the separate service as a solution for the problem of mixed groups. The Beth Israel leadership had opposed the plan for fear that it would divide the united Jewish community. The motives of both sides may have been noble; by their actions, nevertheless, they destroyed the very institution both sought to save — the united Jewish community of Bangor. Seven years later the recriminations of shohetim of both Beth Israel and Beth Abraham sparked a controversy that continued unabated for a decade.

Beth Israel, however, continued to be sovereign among the Jews of Bangor.



no exception. In the early days the founding fathers were without doubt scrupulous in religious observance. But as the community became larger religious laxity continued to crop up. It is difficult to discover the extent of dissent in the formative years for the sources are meager, but we do have reference to religious laxity and the appeal of Rabbi Seltzer to the board of directors to institute a series of fines and penalties for these offenses. The threat of non-burial, excommunication, and loss of membership were no longer effective measures in democratic America of the 20th century. Perhaps among the non-observing Jews were some who were kith and kin of members of the board of directors; one sometimes hesitates to pass sanctions against near relations.

This new-found tolerance pertained only to members of the congregation, not to its officials. There is a case on record in which a suspicion of religious laxity on the part of a teacher in the Talmud Torah of the synagogue was sufficient to call forth an investigation. The teacher was called to account for having allegedly eaten in a home where the food was considered to be in question with regard to strict kashruth enforcement. During the investigation it could not be proved that the teacher had actually eaten the questionable food; he was, therefore, acquitted and shortly after he resigned his position.

Matters as kashruth, the general lack of Jewish education and the growing need to counteract the influence of the New World both divided the Jewish community and brought it together. From both congregations arose adjunct organizations, like mutual-aid societies. Intra-communal philanthropic groups were formed which were the pioneers of present-day institutions. Although Jewish religious life under the constant pressure of integration retrogressed somewhat, the first three decades of the 20th century witnessed the progress of Jewish organizational growth which enabled succeeding generations to build and further expand.

Another aspect of ritual law with regard to which synagogue control weakened in this period relates to the preparation and sale of kosher meat. In the earliest times, this was in the hands of synagogue authorities. Although the synagogue paid the salary of the shohet, no charge was made, at first, to the butchers for the service. In the early 1900s, the butchers began to pay a fee to the congregation. The shohet was still an employee of the congregation, however, and still under the supervision of the synagogue authorities, even though the fees of the butcher paid his salary.

The fiscal affairs of the congregation, as conveyed in the minutes of the early years, breathe an air of order, moderation and prudence. Many months were

to elapse between the recommendation urging the purchase of new curtains and appropriation of the requisite sum of \$50. The donation of shulchen covers and chupah dress covers by the Kominsky and Wolpert families respectively added appreciably to Beth Israel's reserves of sacred linen. "Green trees" decorated the synagogue on Shavuot but the committee did not indulge this enthusiasm beyond the expenditure of \$1.

The single-entry bookkeeping of the early years (the funds in the treasury sank to a slim \$82.40 in 1899) of necessity cast the chazan-shohet office in a pallid light. Versatility rather than incandescent eloquence or erudite learning was the prime requisite for filling the roles of reader, teacher and shohet. The annual compensation to Chazan Rubinstein for the multiple role rose from a scant \$500 in 1899 to \$700 in 1901. The more imposing credentials of Rabbi Seltzer merited a more respectable salary of \$1,000 in 1903.

## The Beginnings Of Education

The perpetuation of the basic values and ideals of a community through education is essential for its existence and survival. From its beginning, the Jewish people have been known as the People of the Book, because it has lavished more attention on education and study, particularly of the Sacred Scriptures, than most other nations in history. Twice daily the Orthodox Jew recites the command of teaching one's children in the most important of all prayers.



Dov Reb Yehudah Wasserman

The Talmud Torah, originally established in 1897, and the forerunner of our present community school, was founded by a group of spirited "Baale Battim." These individuals wanted more than the usual smattering of "Amerikaner" Jewish education. Classes were held in the basement of the shul until 1903 when a house was acquired on the corner of Carr and York streets for the exclusive use of a Hebrew school and the residence of the teacher.

The Hebrew Free School, as its name would indicate, reveals that there were poor people in the Jewish community, and free religious education was offered to all who could not afford to pay. We are also informed that the school had the traditional, Orthodox curriculum and that the highest subject of study was



## Solomon Harris

Solomon Harris was an outstanding pioneer in this community in the field of Jewish education, combining great knowledge with ineffable charm and wit. He served as one of the teachers in the first Talmud Torah sponsored by Beth Israel in 1903. In later years he conducted his own private academy more commonly called a Hedar. He fascinated his students by his masterly art of shedding new light on biblical exegesis, and he knew how to demonstrate the eternal truth of Judaism and its immutable validity for every generation. He served faithfully for many years as secretary and sexton of the synagogue.

His lectures to his colleagues on Talmud and Bible, still remembered, kept his audience spell-bound from beginning to end. Of him it can be said that he brought the spirit of his dynamic personality into the Jewish community. He was truly a part of the founding movement and sustaining effort that nourished Beth Israel to its present status. He was a master of the enormous spiritual and religious heritage of Judaism. Because of Solomon Harris' work and his great qualities, the people of Bangor, both Jews and non-Jews held him in profound regard.

After a short illness, the hand of death brought to a close the distinguished and fruitful career of Solomon Harris on Feb. 1, 1943. He was 76.

He was active until a short time before his demise. Even the affliction which clouded the last few months of his life could not diminish his zeal for service nor his concern for his congregation and its affairs. For Solomon Harris was of that caliber of God's ministers who throughout his years gave himself wholly to his congregation, his community and his fellow men. An entire city bowed in grief at



Solomon Harris

his passing, their sorrow shared by men in all walks of life throughout the community who had felt the warm influence of his personality, his profound wisdom that commanded the respect and esteem of all who knew him, the deep and abiding humanity of the man that brought glory upon Klal Yisrael and increasing modesty unto himself. Bangor was a small city when he came to it in 1888 and with its growth the congregation grew in stature, dominated by the great and good qualities of this man that taught our children.

But of all the honors and respect that bestowed upon him during his lifetime, none pleased Solomon Harris more than the affection and esteem of his pupils. He is remembered for his paternal affection, solicitude and guidance. There was a gentleness and sternness combined. Such was the nature of the man — modest, loyal, sympathetic. No one could escape his endearing qualities. It was only natural that the congregation revered him without reservation.

the translation of the Pentateuch and the Prophets. The children who came from "prosperous" homes and who could afford to pay also attended the Hebrew Free School.

When the Hebrew Free School was chartered in 1903, the necessary legal corporate papers were written in longhand by attorney Albert Blanchard. The minutes make special reference to the fact that "only a small fee was charged the congregation because Mr. Blanchard was a great believer in all kinds of religious education."

Increased enrollment necessitated the purchase of a building on Carr Street. The downstairs was devoted to classrooms while the upper story provided housing

for the "Rebbe." The school was under the direct supervision of Rabbi Seltzer.

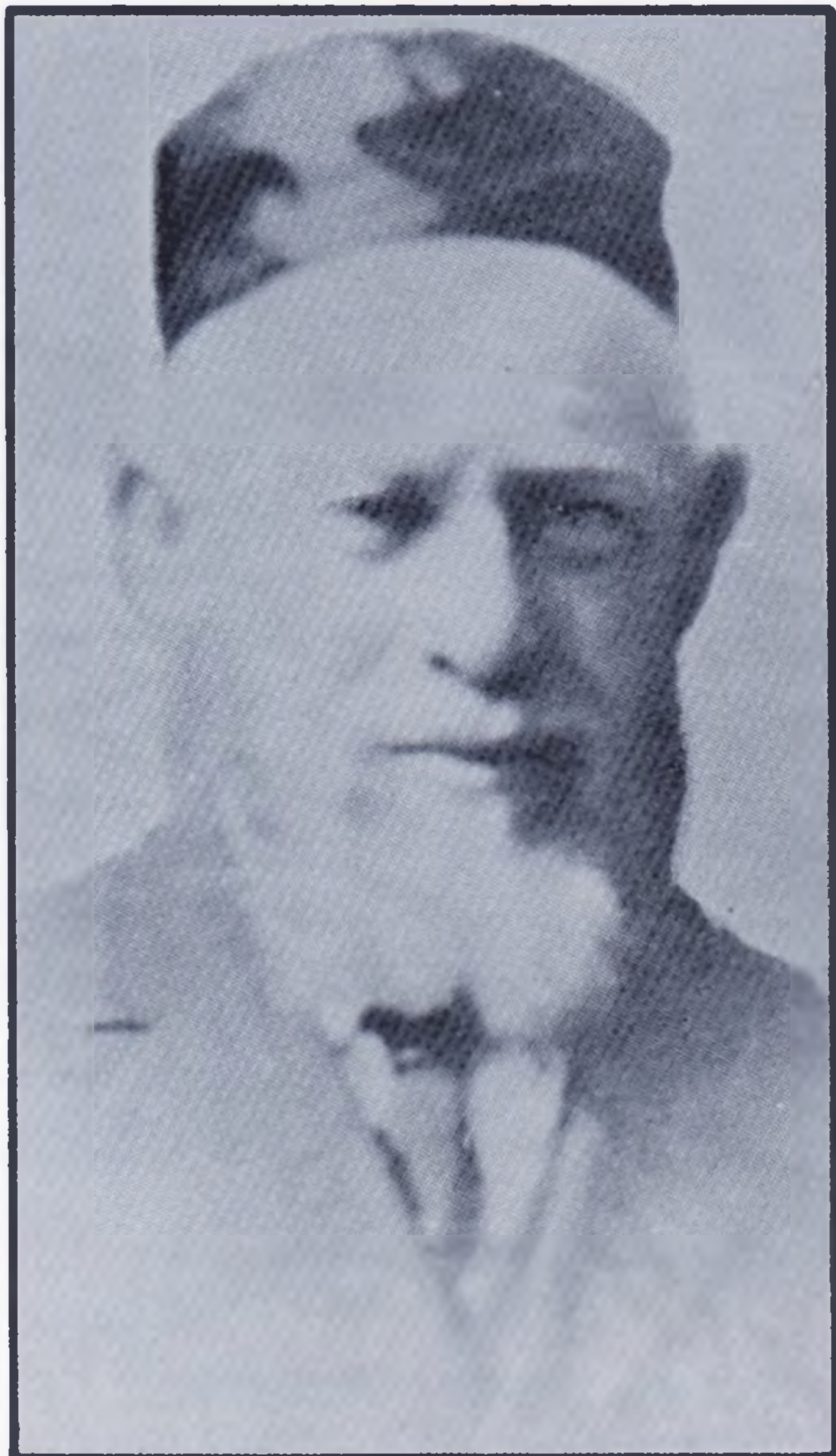
By a very happy accident, we are in possession of a most important document. It is a buckram bound ledger containing the constitution, bylaws and minutes of the Board of Education of Congregation Beth Israel. The secretary of the board, Morris N. Golden, portrays the fascinating record of the school in his splendid calligraphy.

Dov Reb Yehudah Wasserman (Bernard S. Waterman) was chosen as principal-teacher and Solomon Harris volunteered to assist. Some of the names appearing on the class rolls include: Louis Byer, Moe Byer, Max Kominsky, the Hillson boys, Sam Lipsky,



## Jacob David Leavitt

To own books has always been the ambition of all cultivated gentlemen, but when setting out to settle in a new country, it is not to be expected that even the most devoted book-lover would find much cargo space at his disposal for such impractical baggage. Bibles and Talmudic tomes were in large part all that many Jewish immigrants counted as necessities.



Jacob David Leavitt

Jacob David Leavitt was indeed in this category. The writer recalls that his small study was virtually crammed with Hebrew literature of every description. It is impossible within the natural limits of this publication to do even the scantiest justice to one who was a gigantic spirit of Judaism in our community.

"Rebbe" Leavitt was richly endowed with all the gifts of mind and soul. A bit of a mystic and philosopher, he was a veritable religious genius. He would have been a noble soul even if he had not read a single book, for his fine spirit came not from his books, but from the inner welling forth of a richly

endowed soul. His personality had something ethereal about it. His large tender eyes, inscrutable and dreamy, gazing, as it were, into eternity, lent mystery to his aspect. Under the spell of his discourses one often felt that peace was returning to the tortured soul.

He is recognized as a scholar, endowed with extraordinary mental gifts. His learning, coupled with an unusually wide acquaintanceship, tempered by long experience with humankind and mellowed by the passage of years, all contributed to make him a man of exceptionally broad vision, of tolerant understanding and warm sympathies.

He was a friend and teacher who always was genial, kind and cordial. Everyone was at home in his presence. In conversation with those who had known him but briefly, as well as with others whose contacts were of long duration, one sensed immediately a kinship and a knowing, ready response. In the very best sense of the word, he had the human touch.

But above all else, we know him as a man of God, a man of deep religious convictions which made themselves felt in every phase of his life. There would have been little need for "Rebbe" Leavitt by word of mouth to urge men to the love of God and of our neighbor. He did not have to preach it, he lived it. No one could escape the inspiring influence of his manly virtue. He walked among us with a simple dignity that won not only our hearts, but our deep and sincere respect. Leavitt died in 1948.

Joe Glazier, the Koritzkys, Snyder and Harry Allen. In keeping with the practice of European Jews, only boys received a Jewish education in the early days; the religious training of girls was very much neglected. The first mention of girls at the Talmud Torah was in 1913 at the completion of the present synagogue building. The present kitchen area once served as a classroom.

The management of the school and the setting of its policies attracted the care of the leading citizens of the congregation. Joseph Byer was the chairman of the board. Philip Hillson served as treasurer; Morris Golden, secretary; and Robert Cooper was a director for the entire existence of the school — his annual re-election becoming more and more in the nature of routine business.

The roll call of those who attended its monthly meetings include such names as: Simon Kominsky, Jonah Wallace, Snyder, Koritzky, Nathan Ginsberg, Richardson, Israel Goldman, Ratchkovsky and Morris Rosen.

In 1907 Beth Israel made a gift of the Talmud Torah building to the Jewish community as it became apparent that the community was growing and that Jewish education would be best served on a community basis. The same officeholders served until 1912.

## The Russian Pogroms

Rabbi Seltzer became ill in October 1905, and had to spend some weeks away from his pulpit. But the troubles of the congregation were forgotten in November of that year when it, together with all members of Bangor's Jewish community, were plunged into deep sorrow by the Russian pogroms of 1905, a large scale repetition of the Kishineff pogroms of 1903. Jews all over America shared in the great mass demonstrations as reported in the local press of Dec. 5 under the headline, "Jews Bow in Grief."

It was reported that the rabbi "addressed the congregation in anger." The rabbi's anger stemmed



from the events that were taking place in Russia. The pogroms of Russia were of deep concern to the entire Bangor Jewish community. Jacob Schiff, the American Jewish leader, had wired Max Cohen to collect funds for the Russian Jews. The rarely united Jewish community joined together and appointed Rabbi Seltzer chairman of the newly created "Central Committee for the Russian Jews." As chairman he spoke for the community at every possible occasion. At one mass meeting at the synagogue the interior was dramatically "draped in black, with American flags draped conspicuously among the folds."

Many Christians sprinkled the audience, with the sympathetic press reporting that a "Jewish rabbi speaking from the pulpit and almost sobbing forth the soul cry of his down-trodden race in Russia, was the spectacle which presented itself to a large audience." At the end of his address he was recalled to the pulpit for a few more words, after which "almost sobbing, he sat down, while the audience remained fixed and immobile."

## Synagogue Rivalries

Personality clashes and rivalries frequently disrupted the incipient religious organizations of the settlers in the new communities. Reflecting this condition, the early history of the religious organizations in Bangor, as in other cities, abounds in clashes, secessions, reconciliations, lawsuits and counter lawsuits. The early settlers disagreed most violently on matters of ritual, on the selection of a hazan — a cantor — or a rabbi, and on lesser administrative matters. Thus the Congregation Beth Israel, which was organized in 1888, saw itself split wide open in 1909.

Although Beth Israel became the leading spiritual center in the community, it was, for a long time, far from being a united congregation. It was made up of diverse, independent groups, often at odds with one another. More and more frequent were the quarrels that raged within the congregation. A second and more far-reaching struggle struck a new chip off "old" Beth Israel in 1909 as some of its early and vigorous leadership seceded to form still another congregation. The causes of this intra-congregational conflict were diverse in character. The serious rift which led to the formation of a new Ashkenazic synagogue was motivated by the refusal of the secessionists to conform to the rules concerning the purchase of kosher meat from the officially designated butcher.

In 1909, the election of a shohet was the occasion for conflict between the board of directors and certain members of the congregation. The board was dissatisfied with the incumbent and wished to supplant him with a new candidate.



Nathan Ginsberg



Lewis Rudman



Israel Epstein

It was agreed by both factions that the man elected would not be engaged if a hard and fast contract could not be made with him, and that the candidate receiving the next highest number of votes would be considered as elected. The board took advantage of a technicality to declare that Shohet Rubinstein was elected though he did not receive the highest number of votes.

The synagogue members, who were already divided over other issues, now separated into two groups, one purchasing meat slaughtered by the temporary shohet, the other patronizing Rubinstein. The trustees thereupon requested a decision from a rabbinical authority in Boston. Nathan Ginsberg, Israel Epstein and Lewis Rudman were not to be outdone. They, too, directed



an inquiry to the same authority, and prevailed upon him to annul the synagogue ordinance on the ground that a schism had taken place at Beth Israel over this question, and that it was a matter of "conscience" to choose meats slaughtered by one man or the other. The board was now placed in an extremely uncomfortable position. They admitted that a Jew had the right to purchase meat from the shehita of any man he saw fit; they contended, however, that no man had a right to seal the meat in the manner used by Beth Israel unless he was permitted to do so by the congregation. They denied that an actual schism had occurred, but they admitted that differences of opinion existed. Attempts at reconciliation failed and barely more than a minyan organized themselves into a new congregation which they named Tifereth Israel (Glory of Israel). Thus, the second major breakdown in Jewish community life had come to pass.

The Jews of 1909 were unwittingly sowing the seeds of disunion and of the breakdown of synagogal control. For quite a while after Tifereth Israel seceded from Beth Israel, the old arrangements were still in force. The shohetim were still employed and controlled by their respective synagogues. With multiple shohetim, however, the Jewish community lost control over the vital religious practice of shehita. The situation continued to worsen throughout the 1960s and 1970s. By the early 1980s it was difficult to acquire kosher meat in the Bangor area. Bangor Jews who sought kosher meat had to purchase it in Portland or Boston, or they could place orders with Richard Zobot, owner of the Bagel Shop in Bangor.

It was clearly a quarrel precipitated by the refusal of a defeated minority to submit to the will of the majority. The immediate effect of these two secessions in the first decade of the 1900s is difficult to ascertain. The breach, however, was healed in 1933 when a handful of the recalcitrant members and their offspring rejoined Beth Israel. Until the rift of 1900 occurred there was a more or less united Jewish community in Bangor. One synagogue and one set of officials meant one mode of accepted behavior. The secession of Tifereth Israel, however, and a revolt of Toldoth Yitzchak from Beth Abraham in 1920, nearly brought about a state of anarchy in the Jewish community. Men

performed marriage ceremonies, handed down decisions on ritual law and set themselves up as supreme authorities without the sanction of the existing synagogues. The resulting disruption of the community was in essence, an outgrowth of carrying to an extreme American freedom of religion, thought and action.

The disintegration of the community was hastened by the decay of its most potent disciplinary agent. In the old Jewish communities in Europe, the Jews had a tremendously powerful weapon against dissenters which, when applied, brought erring sheep swiftly back into the fold. This was the herem, or excommunication. Its preliminary stages involved admonition and the loss of the privilege of attending services; its final stages entailed complete social ostracism and the forfeit of burial rights. No Jew, living as he did within the confines of the ghetto and having social and cultural relations only with Jews, could afford to ignore this communal ban.

In America, excommunication could not be applied. Each synagogue wished to guide its own affairs without dictation from above. Each religious group jealously guarded its rights and privileges in true American fashion.

At times the synagogues of Bangor worked together harmoniously; at other times they clashed with one another. Beth Israel and Tifereth Israel were unfriendly toward each other after the 1909 rift; with the years, the immediate resentment over the secession faded and for some time the two congregations were able to collaborate. Their amity was again disturbed by a controversy over cemetery boundaries in the early 1920s; a second estrangement followed.

The casual visitor to Bangor would have thought that the community was united and that harmony was its watchword. Only on the surface, however, were matters so pleasant and unruffled. In matters of real importance each synagogue was a law unto itself, and each guarded its rights from encroachments of any other group. Attempts to persuade the synagogues to collaborate on communal projects almost invariably failed. This was so because each synagogue considered itself a completely independent entity, whose interests came before those of any other synagogue or of other Jews in the community at large.



# Bangor Fire Destroys Synagogue

For many years the congregation was composed almost wholly of shopkeepers, pant and sweater manufacturers, and dealers in used wares of all kinds. At first the proportion of peddlers was high. But very soon, itinerant trade led to more lucrative and respectable highways of commerce. The building of the synagogue in 1897 already gave evidence of more extensive mercantile pursuits. Largely retailers of apparel, shoes, dry goods, jewelry, there were also some tailors, grocers, and wholesalers among them. By the late 1890s many had become solidly rooted in the Yankee business community.

Max Cohen was the first to enter politics and prior to World War I was elected to the Board of Aldermen.

Congregation Beth Israel now found the wooden structure on Center Street unworthy of the aspirations of its members.

As in every religious community which had increased in size and in which more and more members had attained higher social and economic positions, a house of worship befitting the size and the status of its congregation became a matter of both pride and necessity. The little synagogue on Center Street had been big enough for the original founders. The Jews of Beth Israel now wanted an edifice which would match the respect in which they were held by their fellow citizens. The concentration of the Jewish population in the first ward also demanded a change of locale.

In 1909, Max Cohen was called back to the presidency for a second time, and his leadership and enthusiasm inspired the congregation to commit itself officially to a new synagogue building. A committee was appointed to secure an appropriate site for the new shul. Kol Nidre marked the beginning of an effort to cope with the requirements of a rapidly growing Jewish community. In his Yom Kippur appeal Cohen proclaimed, "We can feel confident that this effort will be pursued with vigor and enthusiasm till our hopes are realized and our needs met in the creation of a dignified spacious synagogue that will be a credit to the entire community."

To ensure the success of the campaign for funds for the new synagogue, letters were addressed to other congregations as well as to a few individual Jews of world-famed wealth. Even before all these generous gifts were received, the building committee had been instructed to sell the original building and commence building a new one in the "Jewish Settlement." The cost

of such an undertaking "should not be more than \$25,000."

In the early spring of 1911, the Building Committee reported, "The results achieved thus far have been most encouraging and we all feel confident that a new edifice shall be built this summer."

The deteriorating synagogue continued to need repairs. The board of directors appointed Hyman Epstein, Jonah Wallace and Arthur Allen to determine how much it would cost to put the building in condition. Before the committee could complete its study and make its recommendations to the board, the synagogue was destroyed in the great Bangor Fire of April 30, 1911.

## Story Of The Catastrophe

Shortly after 4 p.m. Sunday, April 30, fire broke out in the hay shed of J. Frank Green on lower Broad Street. Cinders were carried across Kenduskeag Stream, igniting the Stetson building, occupied by the New England Telephone Co. on Exchange Street at the foot of York. From there the flames spread with irresistible force, sweeping through the city, straight toward the outskirts along Harlow, Center and French streets and Broadway.

It was the most destructive fire to strike a Maine city, save for the Portland conflagration of 1866. Two people were killed and many were injured. The property loss was estimated between \$2.5 million and \$3 million, but there was only about \$1.5 million insurance on the burned buildings. The fire burned more than 55 acres and it was not brought under control until 5 a.m. Monday. About 100 business blocks, some of them the finest in the city, were burned. Some 285 dwellings were destroyed and between 50 and 75 families, made up of nearly 300 people, lost everything.

Soon after the fire started aid was hurriedly summoned from Brewer and Old Town. Mayor Mullen then telegraphed Waterville, Augusta, Lewiston and Portland and firefighters from those cities were rushed here on special Maine Central trains. They arrived during the evening, when the fire was at its height, and their services proved indispensable. The special train brought the Portland firemen to Bangor in a little more than three hours.

Norumbega Hall where Edwin Booth once played Hamlet was destroyed. Among the first structures to go



was the Central Fire Station. The Bangor Daily News carried on through the fire. In the path of the flames, its staff worked by candlelight through the night, setting type by hand and operating hand presses, so that the Monday morning edition reached the streets at the usual time, small in size but informative in content. The fire was stopped short of the News' plant.

It is safe to say that few people in the city of 25,000 slept during that grim night as the National Guard patrolled the streets and weary firefighters struggled to keep the flames from spreading, using dynamite to destroy buildings in its path.

Entirely wiped out were the business blocks on Exchange Street from York Street to East Market Square, and on State Street from the Merrill Trust Co. building to Broadway; Park Street, its entire length and a large section of Central and Franklin streets.

The residential portion of the city also suffered a most terrible loss. Many of the beautiful residences on the east side of Broadway between State Street and South Park, went up in flames. Between the same limits on French Street nearly every residence was burned, while starting from Harlow Street the flames cut an almost clean swath clear to the east side of Broadway between State and South Park, burning hundreds of dwellings on Harlow, Spring, Penobscot, Prospect, Cumberland, Center, Somerset, Garland and Park streets. Partial or total losses were sustained by Beth Israel members, L. Rudman, Wolf Lipsky, Israel Frank and Lena Rosen.

In addition, several houses of worship were destroyed by the raging flames. Those destroyed included the First Parish Congregational on Broadway, the Central Congregational and St. John's Episcopal on French Street, the Universalist, First Baptist, the Christian Advent on Center Street and our own Beth Israel Synagogue on Center Street.

Tom Gibbons, a lineman, had just gone into the synagogue to dynamite it as a barricade to the advancing flames when a huge beam fell across the door, holding it shut. The building was already on fire. For two or three minutes onlookers watched helplessly. Then Gibbons hauled himself through a cellar window



A general view of Bangor after the devastating fire of 1911.

## BANGOR DAILY NEWS, MAY 24, 1911

### SCIENTIST CHURCH IS AIDING THE CHURCHES THAT PLAN TO REBUILD JEWISH CONGREGATION GETS \$22.42

Treasurer Max Cohen of the Beth Israel Congregation, which lost its synagogue in the fire, received on Tuesday from G. C. Eames, treasurer of the First Church of Christ Scientist, a check for \$22.42. That being the apportionment of the contribution made by the executive board of the latter church for the rebuilding or refinishing of those churches or organizations destroyed.

#### The Letter From G. C. Eames

Bangor, Maine  
May 22, 1911

Mr. Max Cohen, Treas.  
Bangor, Maine

Dear Sir:

By vote of our Executive Board, our contribution of Sunday, May 21st, is to be given to the building funds of the several churches and organizations, who are to rebuild or to refinish church homes.

I am, therefore, enclosing a check for one-eighth of the amount collected.

Sincerely yours,

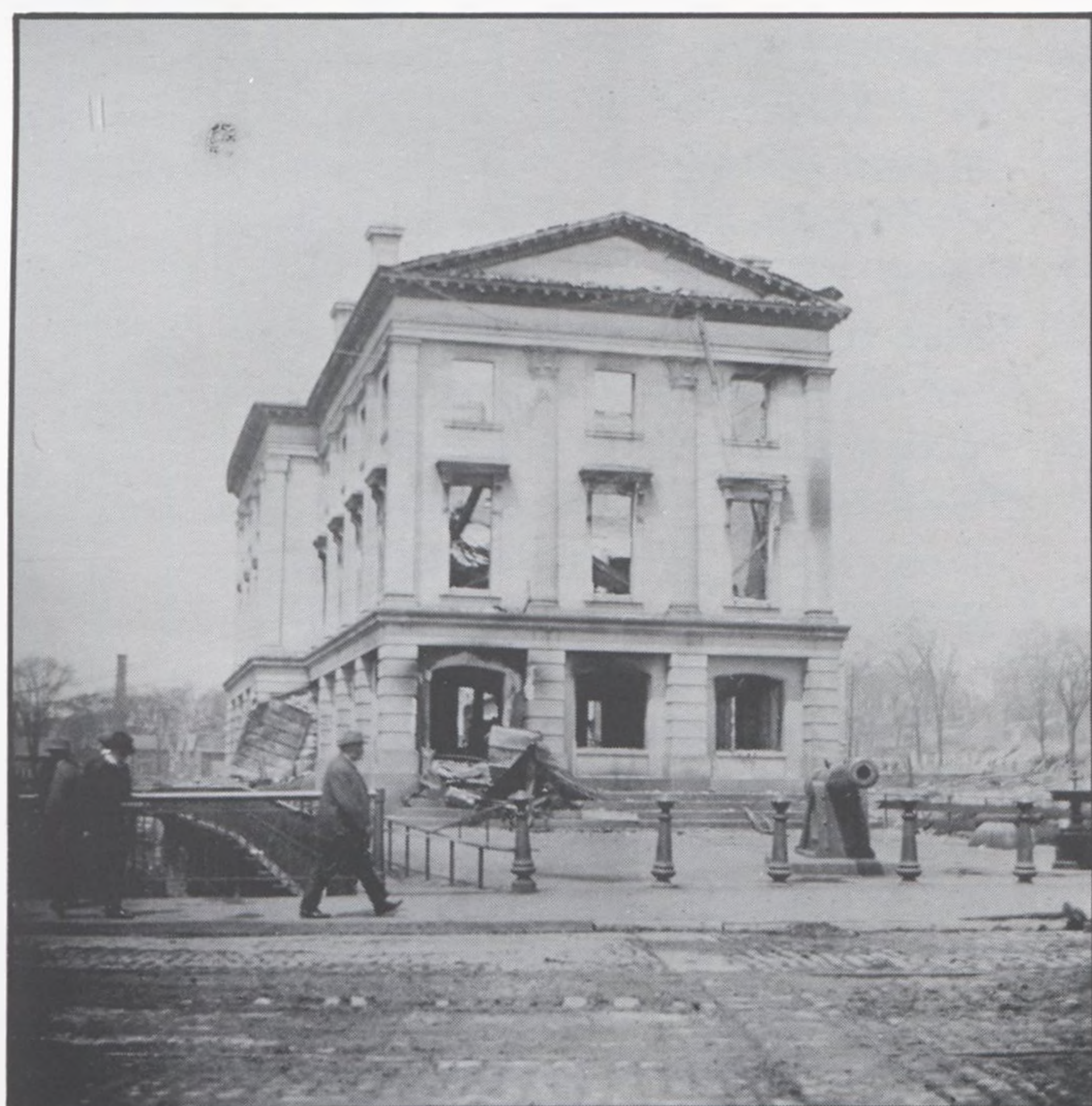
Signed: G. C. Eames  
Treasurer, First Church of Christ  
Scientist

with half a dozen sticks of dynamite in one hand and the fuses draped over his arm. In a matter of seconds there was a muffled explosion inside and the building collapsed like a house of cards. Adolph B. Friedman had entered the synagogue to assist in the salvage of the Sefer Torahs and other holy books. These men barely escaped with their lives.





Smoke rises from the ruins at the corner of Park and State streets after the Bangor fire in 1911.



The Bangor Post Office after the 1911 fire.



The First Parish Congregational Church after the 1911 fire.



# Building Of The Second Synagogue

Up to the period of the fire only \$700 had been paid on the original synagogue mortgage of \$2,500. After the fire, a meeting was held at the Talmud Torah building at 29 Carr St. and President Joseph Byer appointed a committee consisting of himself, Morris Rosen and Harry Cohen to settle with the insurance company. The settlement was made for \$4,000 and the balance of the mortgage on the original structure was liquidated. Soon afterward, the Center Street lot was sold and the present site on York Street was purchased for \$5,000, the latter street having been decided on as the most centrally located place for the Jewish people. The deal was consummated on May 11, 1911, by a special committee consisting of Israel Goldman, A. B. Friedman and Jonah Wallace.

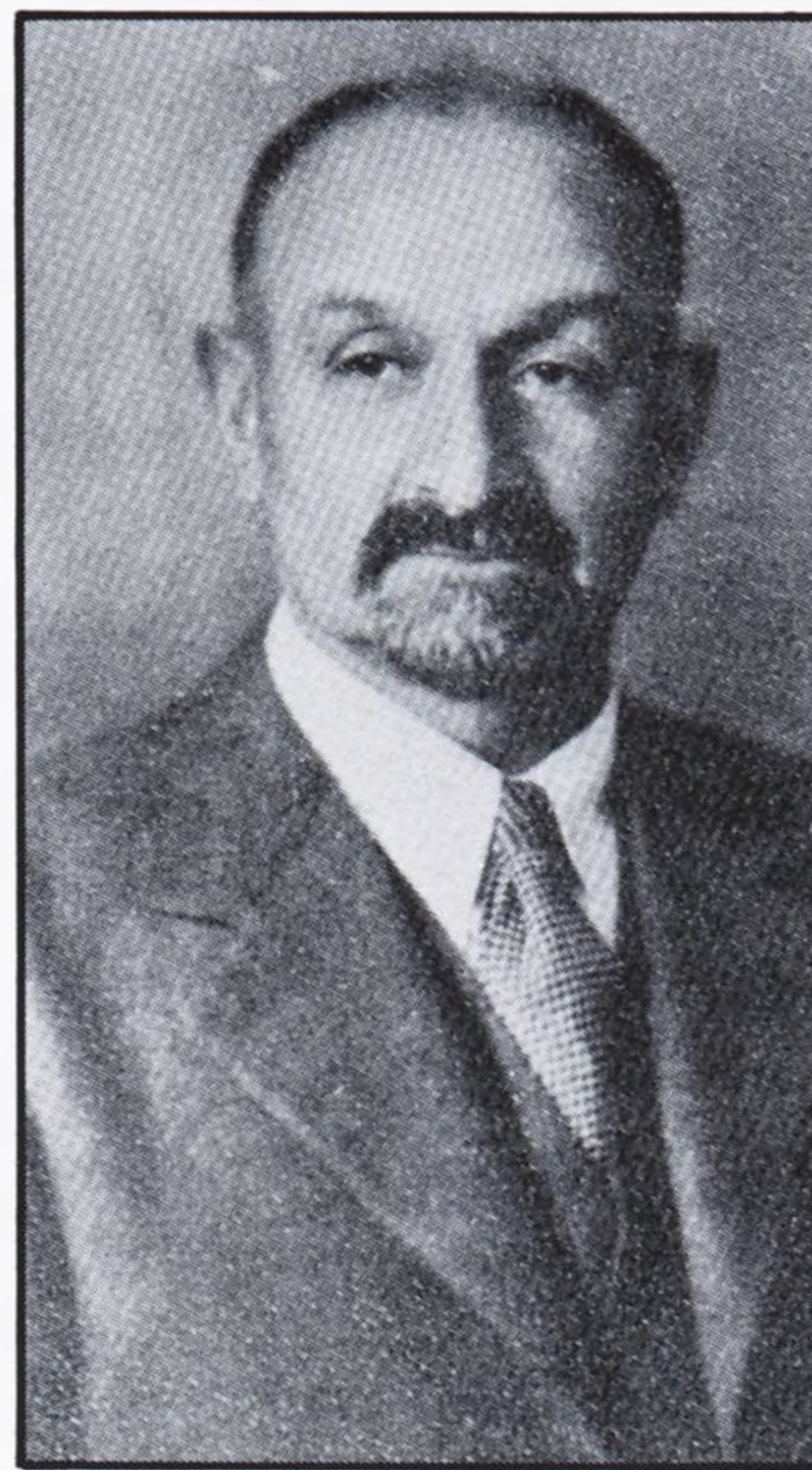
Another committee was then appointed to communicate with architects on the matter of the type of building to be erected on the newly purchased lot. Mr. Morris Rosen was chairman of this committee and it was decided to construct a cement steel-reinforced building. The contract awarded to the Exports Co. of New York City was signed on Oct. 13, 1911. The work of erecting the new synagogue commenced at once.

The insurance money on the Center Street synagogue, which amounted to about \$4,000, was used as a basis for a building fund, and money also was solicited by private subscription. A sum of \$4,000 was raised in a very short period of time. Many out-of-town Hebrews contributed to this fund, the largest single contribution, \$1,000, having been made by Jacob H. Schiff. Many local businesses also contributed to the fund as well as a number of prominent citizens including the late Gov. Frederick H. Parkhurst.

The officers of the congregation during the period of construction were:

Abraham J. Berson, president  
Max Allen, vice president  
A. B. Friedman, treasurer  
Solomon Harris, secretary  
B. Kamenkovitz, first gabbai  
J. Friedman, second gabbai

Meanwhile, services were being conducted at 29 Carr St., and for the next High Holy Days, a hall on Exchange Street was engaged. Services were conducted there through 1912. On April 28, 1912, the congregation voted that all future business of the congregation would be conducted by the board of



Barnett Kamenkovitz



Simon Kominsky

directors. A committee consisting of M. L. Rosen, J. Wallace, Simon Kominsky, A. B. Friedman and Jacob M. Ross (chairman) was appointed to draw up a new constitution and bylaws. On Aug. 12, 1912, the new constitution was adopted, and on Sept. 29, 1912, in accordance with the new bylaws, a board of directors consisting of 20 members was elected to transact the business of the congregation. The following were known as "the 20":

A. J. Berson	M. L. Rosen
Moishe Brown	Johnny Richardson
Harry Cohen	David Snyder
A. B. Friedman	Hyman Epstein
Max Ginsberg	M. A. Stern
Solomon Harris	B. Kamenkovitz
Simon Kominsky	Jonah Wallace
Wolf Lipsky	Samuel E. Rudman
Jacob Ross	Nathan Koritzky
S. Broide	James Sawyer

Lack of finances still continued to be a major problem, and the congregation was forced to borrow \$500 for running expenses, Jake Ross and Wolf Lipsky extended a loan of \$200 each, while Harry Sterns contributed \$100.

The congregation selected for its sanctuary the Byzantine-Romanesque style, warm and Mediterranean in motif. The design was meant to reflect "the cradle of the Jewish people, Asia Minor." The dome for example



resembled in shape the domes of early synagogues in the Middle East. Also, in moving from its Center Street location to York Street, the congregation reflected a general population trend in the Jewish community.

It was not until the spring of 1913 that the new building stood proudly as a completed work. The total cost of the synagogue was approximately \$38,000. After the insurance money and funds raised by the subscription had been exhausted, a loan of \$10,000 was secured from the Merrill Trust Co. and the balance raised by the sale of pews to the members of the congregation.

Meanwhile the congregation lost a lawsuit instituted by Hazan Goodman. The Hazan was awarded damages in the amount of \$345.25 for a breach of contract. Morris Rosen and the board of directors had been writing frantically to every possible source which might turn up a permanent hazan-shohet for the congregation. When Hazan Liss responded to the call of the new synagogue, the members of Beth Israel proceeded with plans for an elaborate but dignified consecration of their new building.

Invitations were sent to Ohabei Shalom and to congregations in New York to attend the dedication ceremonies. The mayor of Bangor and other dignitaries of state and church were asked to join their fellow residents on the happy, solemn occasion. The date was set for March 9, 1913.

Everything was there to make the dedication day an auspicious one. At this period in American life, few events were looked upon more favorably than the sanctification of a house of worship, and one to be consecrated by "those ancient people of the Lord" had added attraction. The people of Bangor, looking forward to a day of interest and excitement, had pride in the fact that such an event was part of their community life. Admission to the synagogue was by invitation only, and by the time the congregation finished the afternoon prayers, every one of the seats downstairs and in the gallery was filled. As part of the impressive dedication ceremony, the key to the synagogue was presented to Mayor Charles Mullen, the city's chief executive at that time.

Morris Rosen, chairman of the Building Committee, presented this speech at the dedication in 1913:

I feel that I have been greatly honored by having been given the responsibility of the chairmanship of the committee that was assigned the duty of building our new synagogue. It has been a great task, and how all the members of my committee and I have discharged our duties only the congregation can judge.

I am very grateful to the members of my committee who unselfishly gave of their time and advice in connection with this project. Many, many hours were

## DAILY COMMERCIAL, JUNE 26, 1911

### PLANS ARE ACCEPTED FOR THE NEW TEMPLE

Plans for the new temple of Beth Israel Congregation were accepted Mon. afternoon and the contract for the erection of the building signed by three members of the building committee, Morris L. Rosen, Harry Cohen, and J. A. Byer. The new edifice is to be thoroughly fireproof, of re-inforced concrete, under the Lewen system and the architecture of the art naveau style. Henry L. Lewen consulting engineer of the Lewen Company, drew the plan. The height of the building from the ground to the top of the dome will be 52 feet, the height from the ground to the ceiling being 35 feet and from the ceiling to the top of the dome 17 feet. The dome is somewhat of the minaret style with twisting columns, and according to the architect is something absolutely new in this country. The entire building is to be re-inforced concrete, including the dome, floor, stairs and balconies, so that it will be thoroughly fireproof.

The new synagogue is to be ready for occupancy by September, 1912, and it is hoped to complete the outside work before cold weather sets in this year. It is expected that the total cost will be in the neighborhood of \$25,000.00.

The front of the building will consist of a large door of the arched type and at both sides will be two Greek Corinthian columns. There will be ornamental features to be added, including artistic windows.

In the basement of the new temple a school room is to be fitted up with accommodations for from 275 to 300 pupils, where the children will learn Hebrew and the religious traditions of their fathers. In the basement there will also be toilets of the latest and most approved pattern, for both sexes.

A commodious ladies' balcony for use in worship is to be fitted out on both sides of the new synagogue and this will be reached by two stairways going up the front walls, just after one enters the main room, and on both sides.

The ground floor, which will be one large chamber, is to be 50 by 70 feet, so that there will be ample room for the members of the congregation. In the rear of the temple is to be a raised platform, elevated 18 inches from the floor proper on which will rest the ark.

The building as already announced in the Commercial, is to be erected on York Street, between Essex and Adams Street, on the site formerly occupied by Mrs. Mary A. Hayes' residence.

## BANGOR DAILY NEWS, AUG. 14, 1912

### SCHIFF MEMORIAL IN BETH ISRAEL

Jacob H. Schiff, the noted New York financier, is in Bangor to attend memorial services for his father at the Congregational Beth Israel synagogue on York Street. He was present at services in the synagogue Tuesday night and after attending services this morning will leave for his summer home in Bar Harbor. Mr. Schiff arrived here from Bar Harbor on Tuesday afternoon and was met by M. L. Rosen, chairman of the Board of Directors of the Congregation Beth Israel who accompanied Mr. Schiff in Samuel Cummings automobile, the latter driving to the Bangor House where the visitor stays during his visit in Bangor. A. B. Friedman and James Sawyer, members of the board of directors, were also at the station.

For the first time the new synagogue was used on Tuesday night. While not yet completed, temporary arrangements were made in the edifice out of courtesy to the distinguished communicant and prayer was held there at 7 o'clock. Tuesday was the anniversary of the death of Mr. Schiff's father and following his usual custom, Mr. Schiff went to the nearest synagogue to offer up prayers. This time, Mr. Schiff was staying at his summer home in Bar Harbor and consequently came to Bangor. The last time he attended memorial services in Bangor was in 1909.

After services Tuesday night, Mr. Schiff was taken in the auto back to the Bangor House by Mr. Rosen and Mr. Cummings and this morning at 7 o'clock will be present at a larger service in the synagogue. Mr. Schiff in his auto ride through the city commented upon the big fire of April, 1911 and was interested in the progress that had been made in rebuilding.



unstintingly devoted by them, often at great personal sacrifice, in order that we might secure the best results obtainable. Not only did they give of their time and personal effort, but also each contributed to the fund making the project possible. They are all truly leaders of our congregation, and I am sure that their leadership and their accomplishments will be most inspirational to future generations.



Morris L. Rosen

I am also most grateful to Mr. Lewen, the fine architect who designed our synagogue and whose mastery is expressed throughout the building. He is an outstanding leader in his chosen field of architecture, and I can well understand the heights of acclaim accorded him both the United States and Europe.

I am most grateful to the congregation for the support it has given me and my committee in this great undertaking. Were it not for its continued support and encouragement, the successful conclusion of this portion of the project would not have been possible. I say "this portion of the project" most advisedly since I have never ceased to have in mind the remainder of the project comprising the Talmud Torah. The same congregational spirit and devotion which brought us to this point will, I am sure, make the completion possible in the very near future.

Few congregations have been blessed with the opportunity of building a new synagogue. I know of no congregation of our size that has executed that opportunity with as much credit to itself as has the Congregation Beth Israel. It has been a rich experience and we have all gained from it in many ways. For not only have we built a beautiful place of worship, but what is more important, we have at the same time built up a spiritual force that will be felt in our daily lives for many years to come. This force will be felt not only within our own congregation but will radiate to all with whom we come into contact.

In this day of the dedication of our new synagogue let us not rest with the complacency of a task accomplished, but rather let us dedicate ourselves in this beautiful new edifice to an even higher peak of religious concept and attainment under the unity of God.

A. J. Berson, recording secretary of the board elected Oct. 6, 1912, had this to say about the service:

I have never witnessed a more impressive or solemn ceremony or one more calculated to elevate the mind to religious exercises. Rabbi Shohet was assisted in the service by Hazan Liss. Rabbi Shohet, a venerable, learned and pious man, gave great effect to the solemnity. The doors were opened by Morris Rosen and the blessing pronounced at the entrance — the procession entered with the rabbi and hazan followed by the gabbaim carrying the Holy Scrolls — they advanced to the bimah where the hazan chanted the appointed psalms. The board of directors in slow and solemn manner preceded the Sefer Torahs in their circuit around the area of the building between the bimah and the Ark.

Berson said, "I have no hope of conveying by description any idea of this ceremony — you should have seen the whole spectacle — the beautiful Oren Kodesh thrown wide open to receive the Holy Scrolls, with their rich crimson mantles fringed with gold — the Ner Tamid suspended in front with its little constant light like a watchman at his post — and with the humble yet dignified figure of the venerable rabbi as he conducted the procession in its seven circuits and then deposited the Torahs — after which the hazan recited with an effect amounting almost to eloquence the impressive prayers — the whole audience was most profoundly attentive and although a few were happy as to understand the language, even those who did not were enraptured by the proceedings."

If Mr. Berson was so deeply moved by what he saw that he could not hope to express his feelings, he was not alone in his sense of inadequacy. Three different accounts, all struggling to express the solemnity of the event, were featured in the newspapers. Both newspapers considered the consecration of such importance that it devoted one article to a description of the ceremony, and another to the architectural design of the synagogue. It was observed —

The chanting was of a very devotional cast, and interested us much at the time; but this interest has since been greatly increased by hearing that much of it is so very ancient that the date of its origin cannot be ascertained, while its antiquity is fully verified by the fact that it is used in almost all the synagogues throughout the world.

The chief attraction of the dedication was the Lewen-designed building. One commentator regretted that the synagogue did not stand in a better location. But the Jews preferred to have their synagogues in the immediate vicinity of their homes for the convenience of daily and Sabbath worship. However, if the reporter was sorry that the building was huddled against others in a solidly built-up section of the city, he was very impressed with the beauty of the interior.



The reporter said, "The architect, Mr. Lewen, had free scope for his taste and his judgment, and the cooperation of the congregation has enabled him to display both to the best advantage." The rich, crimson velvet curtains of the ark and covering of the reader's desk, as well as the battleship linoleum which lay on the floor, were favorably commented on. "Everything is made to correspond," was the summary, "and the entire harmonious array is very pleasing."

If aesthetically the new synagogue and its dedication service were noteworthy, equally so were the civic implications of the event. Another newspaper called it a more than gratifying spectacle and editorialized:

For those who duly estimate the happy equality of our religious rights, and the prevailing harmony among our religious sects, the scene was productive of higher emotions. Among the audience and in conspicuous stations on the floor of the building, we observed several members of the Christian clergy and many other distinguished citizens, all manifesting by their presence and demeanor, that, however we may differ upon certain points, the great truth is recognized and acted upon, that we are all children of a common and Eternal Father.

The news items about the dedication ceremony were picked up by other newspapers and periodicals throughout the country, and the account of Bangor's synagogue consecration was printed in almost every large paper up and down the Atlantic seaboard.

## A New Era

This tangible accomplishment of Beth Israel played a consequential role in strengthening the Bangor Jewish Community. Even the shamash, Moishe Rosen, affectionately called "Feter Moishe," believed that a new era had come and requested a raise in salary because of the additional duties assigned to him. This raise, in this time of expansive optimism, was granted together with the free use of a seat in the Ark area. And finally, new rules were drawn up and publically proclaimed to govern decorum during worship; a number of these rules dealt with the behavior of the growing community of children. One such read:

Parents are requested not to bring children to the synagogue unless they are of sufficient discretion to be under their control and remain quiet in their seats; their running in and out will not on any account be suffered; and the shamash is strictly enjoined to prevent their interruption of the services.

With a new synagogue, an energetic rabbi, a growing membership, and a feeling of accomplishment, Beth Israel looked forward to constructive years ahead. Just prior to the High Holy Days in the fall of 1912 the congregation elected Rabbi Moishe Shohet to

replace Rabbi Klatchko who accepted the pulpit of a large Boston congregation. With the coming of Rabbi Shohet, a new era opened for the Jews of Bangor. He emerged as one of the leading members of the Maine rabbinate. He was the effective and tireless defender of traditional Judaism against the incursions of the new spirit of change that was taking place in some of the large cities. He was a champion of Jewish rights at home and abroad. In brief, a formless, drifting, hap-



Moishe Rosen

hazardly growing Bangor Jewish community was given leadership and direction and substance by Rabbi Shohet.

Many of Rabbi Shohet's sermons dealt with kashruth and Sabbath observance. After 1920 the minutes of the congregation fail to mention matters of this sort. It is not surprising, considering the extent of violation of the Sabbath, to find that attendance at services suffered as well. Both Sabbath and weekday attendances began to decline as early as 1925, and the minutes are replete with committees and panaceas to avert the crisis. Besides the Sabbath violation and non-attendance at the services in the synagogue on Sabbath and at other times, other types of non-conformity were found among the membership. Failure to observe the dietary laws was another such transgression; it was said that some Jews kept kosher homes but ate non-kosher food outside the home. But none of these practices raised a clamor in the official family as did the valid report that a few members had departed from traditional religious practice by dropping the rite of circumcision by a mohel. Those who offended in this respect were threatened with loss of all privileges in the synagogue. Once more the records fail to provide evidence that such sanctions were instituted.

Rabbi Shohet tried to bring some order into the growing disorganization of shehita and called a meeting of the representatives of Beth Abraham, Tifereth Israel and Beth Israel and learned, to his dismay, that meat was allowed to remain for seven or eight days without washing or the removal of the kosher seals. This situation was contrary to the general agreement promulgated at a previous session. With the help of all three synagogues, Shohet attempted to persuade all of the butchers and the shohetim to accept a set of rules which he drew up. The rabbi threatened that those who





The directors in 1913 were: (front) Moishe Brown, Harry Cohen, Morris Rosen, A. J. Berson, Simon Kominsky, (middle) David Snyder, James Sawyer,

Hyman Epstein, Wolf Lipsky, M. Braidy, Max Ginsberg, (back) B. Kamenkovitz, Solomon Harris, N. Koritzky, A. B. Friedman, and Johnny Richardson.

refused to abide by the rules or to enter into agreements with the so-called Kashruth Board would have their names and actions reported to each of the three synagogues. He also threatened that those who purchased meat from disqualified butchers would be openly cited as non-kosher householders. Whether he met with any degree of success does not appear in the available information.

If the construction of the synagogue on York Street was important in the external history of the congregation, the calling of Rabbi Shohet to the spiritual leadership of the congregation was far more significant in the internal history of the congregation's religious and intellectual development. It was during Rabbi Shohet's tenure that there was a revival of the Chevra Mishnayoth and a general pursuit of learning by the laity.

The Chevra Mishnayoth of Beth Israel was a testimony to the pursuit of Jewish learning. Jews are, indeed, "The People of the Book," in accordance with the epithet Mohammed bestowed upon them as adherents of a faith based on revealed Scripture. Notwithstanding occasional lapses, they have remained "The People of the Book," faithfully guarding and

interpreting its every letter throughout the centuries and the millenia. Inevitably, however, they are also a people of scholars and students, for the very constitution of Judaism, as revealed in the Pentateuch and interpreted and elaborated by the doctors of the Talmud, makes it obligatory for every Jew to devote himself to the study of the Torah, representing the sum total of Jewish law and lore amassed by a hundred generations of scholars, thinkers, philosophers and poets.

The founding fathers of Beth Israel engaged in this intellectual pursuit, tinged with pious motives. It was their glory and their delight, their refuge and their staff in suffering — the sanctuary of the spirit where invariably they found solace for the tribulations of their tragedy-fraught pariah existence.

Excellence in scholarship is the kind of success traditional Jews worship and crave more fervently than all else, with the result that study and learning are idealized as the very meaning and purpose of the good life; the badge of nobility and honor.

In the early 1920s the membership dwindled to the point where the Chevra disbanded.



# BANGOR DAILY COMMERCIAL, MARCH 10, 1913

Jewish Synagogue  
Dedicated Sunday Afternoon  
With Civil and Religious Rites

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The handsome new synagogue of Congregation Beth Israel, built in the heart of the Hebrew colony on York Street and vicinity, to replace the one on the congregation's former property on Center Street, destroyed in the big fire, was dedicated Sunday afternoon with impressive ceremonies, civil and religious, marking a distinct forward step in the life of the Jewish residents of Bangor.

There was a big crowd, which completely filled the new edifice on this auspicious occasion and many expressions of admiration for the attractive interior of the building and its magnificent electric illumination, were heard as the people filed in and out of the building.

The exercises began at 2 o'clock when the mayor and the directors of the synagogue, led by its officers, took their positions in the building, being followed in through the big doors by the people who had gathered to witness the ceremonies. President M. L. Rosen handed the key of the building to the mayor, who unlocked the door and the congregation took their seats.

The exercises opened with the singing of a hymn by the cantor, an orchestral selection following.

Morris L. Rosen, president of the board of directors of Congregation Beth Israel gave a most interesting historical address of the career of the congregation during its 25 years of existence, speaking graphically of the obstacles which had seemed almost insurmountable in the raising of the necessary money for building the synagogue, but now in spite of these it had at last been secured and the edifice erected and furnished, its completion only being made possible by the loyalty of its members and their generosity, aided by the generosity of many outside their circle.

The mayor was introduced and spoke briefly, then turned to President Rosen and tendered him the key of the building. Following this ceremony the orchestra played another selection and an interesting address was delivered by Dr. L. M. Pastor.

One of the touching and interesting features of the civil service here occurred when Master Arthur Lipsky stepped forward and, in behalf of the boys and girls of the congregation, presented a \$10 gold piece as their special contribution toward the building. These little folks have been accumulating this sum, penny by penny until the copper coins have become gold in their thrifty little hands. Master Lipsky's speech of presentation which showed careful preparation was as follows:

Mr. Chairman and Worthy Audience: My predecessor, the worthy Vice President of our society, has already made clear to you the goal of our strivings. I, on my part, wish to tell you of the evident accomplishments of our society.

We had noticed how our parents had, with the utmost self-denial, and to the best of their ability, contributed to the erection of this holy edifice. Wishing to follow the example thus set for us, we have saved the pennies given us to spend for candy, and watched with joy their accumulation. With impatience did we await the opportunity to show our attachments to Jewish interests.

The memorable day has at last arrived.

Mr. Chairman, the pennies have changed into a ten dollar gold piece! We beg of you to accept this trivial sum, not for its intrusic worth, but because it carried with it the heartiest wishes for the welfare of the "Tiphereth Israel" of many true Jewish followers.

I Thank You

Following Master Lipsky came yet another representative of

the young life of the congregation in the person of Miss Rosie Berson who in behalf of the young Maccabeans delivered the following address of loyalty and assurance of support:

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, you will undoubtedly wonder at my audacity to appear before you this afternoon but perhaps the fact that I stand before you as a representative of an organization will answer the wonder that has arisen in your mind. I see that when I mentioned the word organization. But nevertheless a society does exist which dares to call itself "The Young Maccabeans." The aims of this society are of vital interest to you as well as to us. Its members try to enthuse themselves that noble Hebrew spirit which animated the Maccabeans. We look upon the synagogue as our fortress and the pillar of Judaism. Our purpose is to help once more uplift the Hebrew flag without wishing in any way to detract from the greatness of, or letting it in any way affect our allegiance to, the Stars and Stripes. We hope to make ourselves deservant of the greatness of our ancestors and worthy of taking our place as standard bearers for our nation. Accept, Mr. Chairman, our heartiest wishes at this dedication, which to us means so much, and rest assured that this new synagogue will find in us true supporters when we shall be called upon, in years to come to do our share.

I Thank You

The religious ceremony came next, being invested with all the solemnity of the Jewish church. It was an eloquent demonstration of the faith of people and was participated in by the members with an earnestness that attested their loyalty. Morris Goldman and Arthur Dennis, two boys, read the ten commandments, one in Hebrew, the other in English, performing their roles most creditably.

The speaker of the day, Dr. Elias Caplan of Portland made a deep impression upon his hearers. Seldom has a more eloquent sermon been heard here. His remarks added greatly to the impressiveness of the event and the significance of the occasion was vividly set forth. The service ended with the singing of America.

The decorations of the synagogue were unusually elaborate. A handsome chandelier was noticeable, and stretched about the balcony and ceiling were electric lights, the illumination shedding radiance upon the various colored curtains, etc., below. Everything was arranged in the decorative element so that the entire scheme was particularly pleasing to the eye. It was a worthy setting for the time.

Among the contributions to the furnishings of the edifice were a tablecloth just received from N. Y., the gift of Mrs. Max Ginsburg and others and a curtain the present of the little girls of the Junior League.

On Sunday night, the day of dedication was ended with a celebration, participated in by only the members of the congregation. A banquet was served and the event was equally in keeping with the afternoon's event.

Among the prominent people in attendance were: Former Mayor John F. Woodman, Col. I. K. Stetson and Col. F. H. Parkhurst.

The erection of the synagogue was commenced in Nov., 1912 and has a capacity of 620, the balcony seating 220. The total capacity of 620 being sufficient to meet the demands of the congregation.

The officers of Congregation Beth Israel are:

M. L. Rosen, President; Wolf Lipsky, Vice President; Harry Cohen, Treasurer; A. J. Berson, Recording Secretary, these forming the officers of the board of directors.



## CHAPTER 8

# In War And Peace

The first quarter of a century of Beth Israel's history was enacted against a background of world-shaking events. The 20th century, which started so serenely and auspiciously, suffered a rude shock when World War I ushered in an era of chaos and upheaval. Unprecedented material progress and scientific advance had held forth the promise of a better life; at the same time, spiritual anarchy and social revolution kept the world poised at the brink of disaster.

With America's entrance into the conflict, several of Beth Israel's young men rushed to enlist. The congregation honored its fighting men at a special service on March 29, 1918, and service flags bearing their names were dedicated. Men, women and young people of all age groups were involved in one form of patriotic work or another. Tragedy struck the community with the announcement of the deaths of Hyman Hillson and Henry Lait. Both were killed in action. Citations for bravery were awarded these men only weeks before.

The war and its aftermath saw many critical changes for the Jewish people. On Nov. 2, 1917, Lord Balfour, with President Wilson's endorsement, proclaimed the right of the Jewish people to a homeland. A Jewish Legion helped General Allenby to win Palestine from the Turks — it was this same military unit that received a tumultuous welcome from the Bangor Zionists as it passed through Bangor to Canada on its way to a point of embarkation.

World War I made an indelible impression upon the Jewish community of Bangor. The problem of war relief became a communal responsibility but the organizational and administrative problems were assumed by Beth Israel. A committee composed of Abe Segal, Morris Rosen, Joseph Byer and Simon Kominsky assumed the task of canvassing the city for the initial drive. Throughout the hostilities funds were collected and distributed to the Central Relief Committee. When the task assumed proportions too weighty for a single congregation a citywide committee was appointed with Louis Kirstein as director.

There was hardly a person who was not related to some war-stricken family in war-torn Europe, for the vast majority of Jews here were the immigrants of the period of 1880-1914 and their children. The cry of the starving, the homeless and the refugees touched the hearts of every Jew who wanted to help. The incomplete records tell a greater story of philanthropy and human



Henry Lait



Hyman Hillson

kindness than do these inadequate accounts.

Armistice Day was wildly celebrated in Bangor on Nov. 11, 1918. In Philadelphia Jews met in the first American Jewish Congress with a sprinkling of Maine Jewry represented. At Versailles in 1919, Jewish delegates secured acknowledgement of Jewish claims to a homeland in Palestine and of equal rights in Eastern Europe. In Detroit Henry Ford's anti-Semitic Dearbon Independent began publishing in 1920 the forged protocols of the Elders of Zion. Arab riots in Palestine could not halt the efforts to colonize the land which was to come under the British mandate. The League of Nations was founded without the United States. America went dry for 13 years, but speak-easies thrived. Women finally got the vote. The Munich Beer Hall Putsch led by Hitler was put down in November 1923. The cruel immigration laws were signed by President Coolidge, excluding many who might later have been saved from Hitler.

## The Mortgage Is Burned

The year 1923 was notable for the removal of a great burden from the financial structure of the congregation. The York Street synagogue had served the congregation well, but it had encumbered the treasury of the congregation with a \$10,000 mortgage. Under the dynamic co-chairmanship of Morris Rosen and Adolph B. Friedman a campaign was undertaken to liquidate the mortgage. That campaign was brought





The Sons and Daughters of Zion in Bangor, June 9, 1920.

Photo courtesy of the Bangor Historical Society

to a successful culmination at a memorable dinner held Dec. 9, 1923. On the stirring occasion the co-chairmen, who led a group of devoted workers to victory, presented the canceled mortgage to Adolph B. Friedman, president of the congregation. He then proceeded to burn the mortgage in an impressive ceremony. The Beth Israel Synagogue at last belonged to the people of Beth Israel.

## A Common Interest

With the arrival of Rabbi Levine in 1925, representatives from Beth Israel and Beth Abraham met to discuss matters of common interest and made a startling attempt at unity by engaging the rabbi to serve both institutions. Each synagogue, however, still conducted its own affairs independently and each was still considered a separate unit. The community was a federation rather than an organic union; for example Levine's salary was not paid out of a common treasury, but each of the affiliated congregations assumed one-half of the obligation. Levine's installation was held in the grand manner befitting an occasion in which two congregations collaborated.

Rabbi Levine's duties were fixed; he was to preach at each of the synagogues in turn, to supervise the Talmud Torah, to deliver religious opinions, and to perform marriages. The records reveal the inner workings of the rabbinate and the many problems of various types which were faced. The minutes show the federated character of the community clearly, for they indicate that the joint board was ultimately obliged to turn to the members of the individual synagogues for sanction on any important matter, such as kashruth

## DAILY COMMERCIAL, NOV. 26, 1917

### Bangor Hebrews' Aid Fund For Brethren

Wedding Ring and Other Jewelry  
Given at Mass Meeting in Synagogue  
Sunday Night About \$3,000 Raised

New York Attorney Makes Stirring  
Appeal for Jewish War Sufferers  
In Stricken Europe

Bangor Hebrews contributed approximately \$3,000 at the Congregation Beth Israel on York Street Sunday night in aid of their war-stricken brethren in Europe. This will be added to the \$1,030 already pledged here and sent to swell the relief fund which is being raised all over the United States. Members of the local committee will continue to solicit subscriptions and it is expected that the sum given in this city will reach a considerably higher aggregate.

Practically every Jewish family in the city was represented at the mass meeting which was called to order at 7 o'clock by Simon Cohen, the chairman. Charles Zunker, a well-known Jewish lawyer of New York City, made a stirring appeal in behalf of the stricken old world Jews who, he said, lacked even the barest necessities of life. He said it was impossible for the Jewish War Relief committee to even furnish the barley water which alone has kept the breath of life in many of them. It was proposed, he said, to raise \$10,000,000 in this country to help them and a leading Hebrew had promised to add a \$1,000,000 to that sum. Bangor's share is \$10,000. Non-Hebrews will not be asked to contribute, although gifts from them will be thankfully received.

An incident was related of an impoverished rabbi in New York who, although he had no money, gave a gold watch to be auctioned off for the relief fund. It brought \$4,000. Mr. Kirstein asked those present to give their treasures in the same spirit of sacrifice. The scene which followed was an unusual one.

One woman offered her wedding ring, and it quickly brought \$100. Rings, watches and various articles of jewelry were offered by the wholesale and the bidding for them became spirited. The articles were all sold at good prices, the bidding continuing uninterruptedly for several hours. When the receipts were checked up, it was found that approximately \$3,000 had been added to the fund.



## JEWS TO BURN A MORTGAGE SUNDAY

### Beth Israel Synagogue Indebtedness Now Paid

An unusual event will take place at the synagogue of the Congregation Beth Israel on York Street, Sunday afternoon, when the members and friends will gather to witness the burning of the mortgage which has just been paid after 10 years of hard work and careful economy in the handling of the church affairs. There will be a service with a long and interesting program, which will be followed by a banquet. Many of the former rabbis, who have been connected with the church, will be present.

Everyone will be welcome at the ceremony which will be Sunday afternoon at 4 o'clock sharp. Maurice L. Rosen, chairman of the committee, announced Friday. Every effort will be made to take care of all who desire to attend and the committee desires to extend an invitation to the public in general to join with the members of the synagogue in the day of jubilee.

The program for the synagogue ceremony is elaborate and will consist of music by a choir and orchestra, addresses by distinguished speakers and other interesting parts, while for the banquet to follow, which will be served by a committee of ladies, there will be another fine program of music and brief speeches. Among the distinguished visitors, who have already sent in their acceptances, are: Rabbi L. Seltzer of Bridgeport, Conn. first rabbi of the Congregation; Rabbi M. Shohet of Portland, another of Beth Israel's former leaders; and Rabbi Magdison of Congregation Beth Abraham, a sister synagogue to Beth Israel.

The announcement of the day has been sent out by the committee, composed of J. L. Rosen, chairman; Simon Kominsky, Harry Cohen, A. J. Berson and Max Ginsberg, as follows:

On Dec. 9, next, Bangor Jewry will indeed have occasion, the jubilation, for on that occasion, one that is certain to live long in the memory of every attendant, the mortgage on our synagogue will be put to the torch. Those of you who have resided in Bangor for a great many years can fully realize the meaning of this momentous occasion. A forty thousand dollar structure, dedicated to God and consecrated to the best ideals of man, is free of every incumbrance. The joyousness of such an occasion should be heralded to the high heavens and to the four corners of the earth.

As a member of the Congregation Beth Israel, you are wanted and urged to share in the joy of this happening. You and lady are extended an open hearted invitation to be present at the synagogue on Sunday, December 9, 1923, at 4 p.m. sharp. There will be a program of speaking of noted Jewish orators. An excellent musical and vocal program has been secured for this occasion, which will be followed by the ceremony of the burning of the mortgage. Following the ceremony, a banquet in charge of an able lady committee, who are sparing no labor or money to make this the most splendid affair ever held in this city, will take place.

It is very important, however, that each member respond to this invitation, as only as many plates will be set at the banquet as is indicated by the replies. Please state in replying whether you will come alone or with lady.

Please remember that this matter of response is important, as only those who reply will be taken care of at the banquet.

The committee also advises that there will be no charge whatsoever for any part of the afternoon or evening entertainment. There will be no collections of any kind. The occasion will be one of unalloyed joy.

Come. Come with your lady. Come and make the occasion a glorious one.

## BANGOR DAILY NEWS, DEC. 10, 1923

### DAY OF REJOICING FOR BETH ISRAEL

#### Hebrews Celebrate With Ceremony and Banquet Freeing of Synagogue from Debt

Sunday was a day of unusual significance for the members of the Congregation Beth Israel, as on that day was celebrated the freeing of their place of worship from all indebtedness, the mortgage being burned in the presence of a large assemblage including many prominent Hebrews from Bangor and elsewhere, amid great rejoicing. The program included musical numbers, a history of the Congregation of Beth Israel since 1885, given by M. L. Rosen, chairman of the committee in charge of the celebration, and a banquet for which 300 invitations had been issued. The synagogue was filled with members of the congregation and friends, and the ceremonies were most impressive.

Among the prominent Jewish leaders in attendance were Rabbi L. Seltzer of Bridgeport, Conn., the first head of the congregation. Rabbi M. Shohet of Portland who was also at one time rabbi of Beth Israel; Rabbi Magdison and Cantor Engel.

The synagogue was erected in 1912 following the Bangor fire which destroyed the synagogue on Center Street, and cost approximately \$40,000. The money necessary for the building, with the exception of \$10,000, was raised by the members of the congregation, and the new building, which was ready for occupancy in September 1912, was dedicated with appropriate ceremonies. But

the existence of the mortgage was distasteful to the congregation and recent efforts to lift it brought ready response from all, and on Sunday they had the satisfaction of seeing the evidence of debt go up in smoke, and they rejoiced in the knowledge that their place of worship was free and unencumbered. Many out of town Hebrews aided the congregation by substantial contributions which were gratefully appreciated, the list of donors being read during the meeting which was held at 4 o'clock Sunday afternoon, the banquet following at 6:00 as M. L. Rosen, chairman of the committee which undertook the task of raising funds to wipe out the indebtedness on the synagogue presided at the banquet, and proposed at this gathering that a sinking fund be established for use in time of need. The sum of \$1,000 is to be placed in this fund each year.

Beth Israel congregation has a membership of 140, and is noted for its many works of charity, having contributed to many worthy causes including contribution of \$1,000 to the Bangor Hebrew School. The present head of the congregation is Cantor Engel, who came to Bangor about a year ago and who has made many friends among all classes.

The board of directors of the Congregation Beth Israel is composed as follows: Simon Kominsky, president; Louis Richardson, vice president; S. Harris, financial secretary; I. Stone, recording secretary; A. J. Berson, treasurer; M. L. Rosen, Abram Brown, James Striar, Max S. Kaminsky, L. Rapaport, B. Kamenkovitz, H. Epstein, Max Ginsberg, Max Epstein, R. M. Cooper, S. E. Rudman, W. Lipsky, J. L. Richardson, L. Rolnick, A. Emple and A. Segal.



problems. Charges and counter charges were the order of the day and it was not long before Rabbi Levine was forced to relinquish his post and return to New York.

## Tensions Loom On The Horizon

The years ahead looked promising for peace with the adoption of the Dawes Plan and the Locarno agreement. Throughout the United States Americans were both dismayed and amused by the debate between Bryan and Darrow on whether man had come from a monkey. Jews were coming into Palestine where the Hebrew University was dedicated in 1925. World Court membership was approved by the United States but with reservations unacceptable to the Court. In 1927 Lindbergh made his solo flight across the Atlantic. Non-Zionists and Zionists began discussions for joint participation in the Jewish Agency for Palestine, and in 1929 it became a fact largely through the efforts of Louis Marshall. In 1928 the first talking movie presented Al Jolson in the "Jazz Singer." The Kellogg Pact to outlaw war was signed. These had been the roaring '20s — the years of flaming youth.

The stock market crash came in October 1929. "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime," would soon be not just a name of a song but the cry of hungry millions. The same year saw Arab riots in Palestine and Britain further restricting immigration. Japan seized Mukden in 1931 and the fires of World War II were being kindled in the Far East. In Washington, bonus marchers were driven off. Bonuses like "two chickens in the pot" were not the order of the day.

The long lines of unemployed were stretching. More drastic remedies were necessary. Franklin Delano Roosevelt would provide them. 1933 was the year of the Blue Eagle and the end of prohibition. "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself," President Roosevelt proclaimed. Louis Brann, a Democrat, became governor of Maine.

With the coming of the Depression, bad times seriously affected the congregation. A. B. Friedman, who had been elected president in 1927 in succession to Simon Kominsky, sought to meet the problems that the crisis had wrought. Friedman believed that the problems of the Depression as they began to affect the security of the congregation could only be met by collective action on the part of all three synagogues with respect to maintaining a shohet-mohel. The president urged a union of all congregations toward that end. It was reported at the annual meeting on Nov. 27, 1933, that Beth Israel's financial condition was the worst in 25 years. The membership had fallen, no payment on principal or interest could be met on the indebtedness of the congregation. It was only due to

the rigid austerity program of Mr. Rapaport that Beth Israel weathered the storm.

In 1933, Morris L. Rosen succeeded Louis Rapaport as president. Mr. Rosen strove earnestly to meet the oppressive financial burden and continued the program of his predecessor.

Hitler was now chancellor of Germany. Jewish books were burned in Germany; Jewish shops boycotted. Henrietta Szold started Youth Aliyah to save Jewish children. Jews protested against Hitlerism, but not all Jews. "Power would tame Hitler," they said. Before 1933 ended, the United States and Russia had resumed diplomatic relations on the latter's promise not to propagate Communism here. In 1934 Roosevelt was using the whole alphabet to save the nation, and people began to show their optimism by singing "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?"

1935 saw Mussolini priming for war and Hitler declassing German Jews. In 1936 a World Jewish Congress met in Switzerland to seek ways to save world Jewry. But some still doubted Hitler's intent to annihilate all Jews. The fire was lit in Ethiopia by the Italians and in China by the Japanese. The United States proclaimed neutrality. The AFL and the CIO were at war, but labor profited from the passage of the Wagner and Social Security acts. In 1937, Spain was a battleground for another dictator. The Kremlin purged itself of so-called traitors. Ghetto benches were ordered for Jewish students in Poland. In Palestine, Arab violence broke out again under Nazi influence. And the Haganah trained by Charles Orde Wingate saved the Jewish settlements.

## A New Rabbi In Bangor

At its meeting on June 30, 1937, the board received the recommendation to call Rabbi Bernard L. Berzon of New York. The board unanimously adopted the recommendation and proclaimed its determination to go forward under his ministry. President Morris L. Rosen then called upon the members of the board to subscribe to a special fund to help guarantee the functioning of the congregation for two years. Although the clamor for an English speaking rabbi was beginning to break down the resistance of the "old guard," the young yeshiva graduate did not appease the younger element. The change from a Yiddish sermon to the English did not fulfill the growing need for change that the tide of time could not stem. Realizing that the innovations demanded would compromise his philosophy of Judaism, Rabbi Berzon tendered his resignation after a tenure of two years.

Nazi oppression of Jews increased. Our members signed affidavits to help many come here. Jews were



harassed in Poland, Rumania and Hungary. Mussolini declassified Italian Jews. In November 1938 the synagogues in Germany were burned; and as if in defiance Beth Israel marked the 25th anniversary of the present edifice with the dedication of a Sefer Torah donated by Mrs. Max Epstein in memory of her late husband. The local press had this to say about the ceremony:

A Torah, which is the written law of Judaism, was formally accepted and inscribed by Congregation Beth Israel yesterday in a ceremony at once impressive and unusual.

The Torah was presented by Mrs. Max B. Epstein in memory of her late husband. Members of the Epstein family, their relatives and friends, were present in large numbers from many communities; and there was a great outpouring of Bangor Jewry. Presentation of a Torah occurs very seldom in any congregation, and the occasion always is memorable.

Members of Congregation Beth Israel, with others of the faith, first marched from the residence of Rev. Charles N. Goldberg to the synagogue on York Street. This was in the traditional manner, the sacred book being borne beneath a canopy while various members of the congregation took turns carrying it — a high honor. There was singing as the procession moved through the streets. At a point opposite the synagogue, older members of the congregation came forward with copies of the Torah already in existence there — this also being in accordance with ancient rite.

Then the procession entered the synagogue, where there were addresses by Rabbi Adams of New York, Goodman Gaffin and Edward Stern, president of the congregation. Following this, the Rev. Goldberg officiated at the inscribing of the Torah — an impressive ceremony itself.

Each copy of the Torah is written on parchment with a quill pen, this taking from two to three years. The work is by experts — those who spend their lives doing nothing else.

The strong man of the Beth Israel old guard, Morris Rosen, bowed to the demands of the younger members and did not stand for re-election. Goodman Gaffin a newcomer in the ranks of shul politics took the reins of leadership.

A new era in Jewish community life was inaugurated with the opening of the Community Center. By now, Beth Israel had ceased to be the single center of Jewish community life in Bangor. Other congregations had grown up. Organized philanthropic work was now carried on by the federation. Social activities flourished in various lodges, while cultural life was varied and fruitful. So the Beth Israel Synagogue which had once provided the sole institutional stability for Bangor Jewry was joined, though not superseded, by other congregations. As the Jewish community grew in numbers and as its formal structure left primitive stages, many co-workers joined Beth Israel in cultivating the fields of Jewish endeavor.



Mr. and Mrs. Max B. Epstein

Within this period Beth Israel, still a dominant force within the community, also underwent a fundamental change. The first indication was the election of Edward Stern, at the age of 30, as the first American-born president. With a Jewish education which was completely native, the younger generation managed to acquire a working knowledge of the fundamental elements of religious forms, services and rituals, without any real training in Jewish lore or law. Considering how limited their Jewish learning was by the European standards of their fathers and grandfathers, their devotion to Jewish life was all the more remarkable. The older generation with a European background was slowly giving way to the demands of the “young Turks.” The congregation was to be led by the first generation of Jews born in a democracy.

## Our World In Turmoil

The British White Paper in 1939 dimmed the hopes of Europe's Jews for refuge in Palestine. There was no refuge in most places of our world. Many American Jews were at the Zionist Congress at Geneva when Russia and Germany made their pact. War came on Sept. 1, 1939, before they reached home. Upon their return, they warned of war's threat to America and urged the rescuing of European Jews. Six million would be lost before the war was over. Poland fell quickly, but Jews withstood the terror in the Warsaw Ghetto for four more years. In June 1940, the Germans entered Paris unresisted. In America, we arose at every gathering to sing “The Star Spangled Banner.” “God Bless America” was not only a song but a prayer. By the time bombs fell on London in 1941 and our ships were menaced on the seas, we had become the arsenal of democracy. It was suggested by President Roosevelt the “War of Survival” should be the name of the conflict America was fighting against Nazi Germany and Imperialist Japan.



# Dedication To The Nation's Cause

The congregational meeting in 1941 was transformed into an occasion for dedication to the tasks called for by the National Emergency. The program had been planned to enlist the efforts of the membership to engage a rabbi for the congregation. It became instead an occasion to urge the purchase of government bonds and participation in those activities that would strengthen the nation at home and the democratic forces abroad. The election of officers was held and Harold R. Epstein was elected to succeed Edward Stern as president.

The year 1941 was significant in the annals of the congregation, and drew from its past the inspiration to minister to a community, which for the second time in a single generation had blundered into the horror of world war. As always had been the case when the safety of the country was at stake, the families of Beth Israel gave generously of their sons and substance to the nation's defense. Nearly 100 men of Beth Israel served in the armed forces of the United States.

Despite the efforts of the advancers, the synagogue fell back in some fields. It was warned by Henry Segal, chairman of the Religious Committee, that "Beth Israel will have to look to its laurels if it would continue to maintain its long prestige of being the leading congregation in Bangor. Names on the membership rolls is not enough. We earnestly hope that it will not lose its title as the leader in northern New England Judaism. It will have to wake up and lead, or it will someday find itself shorn of its glory by the younger congregations. At times there is a bare minyan."

On Feb. 1, 1943, death came to Solomon Harris. The community mourned his loss. At the funeral service it was said of him: "Faith characterized his life, faith in God, faith in man, faith in his co-religionists. Nothing Jewish was alien to his soul."

Through the years Congregation Beth Israel has had the unique distinction of being the training ground for a number of distinguished rabbis who have gone on to fill pulpits in large cities and serve on the faculties of great centers of Jewish learning.

The war had a religious consciousness that manifested itself in a movement for spiritual leadership. Consequently Rabbi Moishe Zucker, a refugee newly arrived in America and rabbi of the Jewish Community Center in Brooklyn, N.Y., accepted an invitation issued by James Striar to serve both Beth Abraham and Beth Israel congregations. The rabbi's oratory

both in Yiddish and English won for him a warm place in the hearts of the congregants. The installation ceremony paid tribute to the scholastic fame achieved by this young rabbi.

Franklin D. Roosevelt died April 12, 1945, having brought the United States within sight of victory in Europe. It was only a month later when that victory was realized and the end of the war in the Pacific followed in a few months. Beth Israel desired to honor this great war president. At first, it was thought that a memorial plaque should be dedicated but it was finally decided to hold a memorial service. The synagogue was filled; Rabbi Zucker delivered the memorial address.

In the United States the years following the war were marked by wrangling of Republicans with Democrats. But far worse were the quarrels between Russia and the Western powers, shaking the foundations of the United Nations. The non-fiction best seller was Joshua Liebman's "Peace of Mind" — but there was no peace. Jews were being freed from the concentration camps and thousands were coming into Palestine despite the White Paper and the British fleet which drove refugees into the sea or dumped them on the island of Cyprus.

On Nov. 29, 1947, the U.N. General Assembly voted 33-13 to partition Palestine, making possible an independent Jewish homeland. Following the passage of the partition plan, Zionists in New York City gathered and were addressed by Chaim Weizmann, while Jews in Tel Aviv danced in the streets. The next day the Arabs showed their dissatisfaction with the U.N. vote and attacked U.S., Soviet and French legations in Damascus.

Talmudical tradition has it that a triviality led to the ultimate destruction of the Second Commonwealth; similarly, it was a minor issue which led to the resignation of Rabbi Zucker and the disruption of the entire edifice so well planned and dreamed of by its architect, Gimpel (James) Striar. The proposal to unite the three congregations originated with Striar, and he interested Harold Epstein, president of Beth Israel, as well as the leaders of the two Sephardic congregations. The argument in favor of fusion maintained that there was neither point nor need for three separate congregations in the Jewish community of Bangor. The protagonists envisaged a large place of worship with one spiritual leader.

Had such a fusion taken place, the rabbi engaged



would undoubtedly have been Rabbi Zucker. No mention is made in the records of the intentions of the leaders with respect to the position of rabbi. Needless to say, the negotiations were instituted and carried on behind the scenes; whatever the lay leaders had in mind, Rabbi Zucker was probably completely ignorant of it. Striar, Epstein and other leaders of the movement called together the trustees of Beth Abraham, Toldoth Yitzchak, and Beth Israel and placed the proposition before them. Beth Abraham and Toldoth Yitzchak showed little interest in the plan and soon withdrew from all discussion. The first difficulty, the refusal of Beth Abraham to give up its synagogue building even for a limited period, sounded the death knell for further negotiation.

In 1947 Rabbi Zucker asked the congregation to permit him to retire from his rabbinical duties in order to accept a teaching post at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Beth Israel struggled in its attempts to find a spiritual guide with the wisdom to weld the factions already appearing on the horizon.

The ministry of Rabbi Zucker extended over a period which included dark days and trying years for the congregation, the Jewish people, the nation and the world. But it also included many noble victories as well. It was a goodly heritage which he transmitted to his successor, Rabbi Avraham Freedman, who assumed the leadership of the congregation in 1949.

Meanwhile, Jews in Palestine moved forward to fulfill the fond dream of a Jewish state. It was not to be realized until much Jewish blood had been shed. Here at home Jews gave, as they never had given before, to make that state possible and to build it as a secure home for the thousands who were coming into Israel. On May 14, 1948, the state of Israel was proclaimed and Jews rejoiced everywhere. In a measure it was almost a personal triumph for Beth Israel's Zionist pioneer Myer Minsky.

The years between 1912 and 1949 were years of creative adjustment to the tumultuous changes — many of them tragic, many of them hopeful — which had been wrought in the life of the world and of the Jewish people. Beth Israel like every sensitive instrument of the spirit in modern times, had been marked by the consequences of the wars which had shaken the world, by the tragedy which overwhelmed the Jewish people in Europe and by the various cynical philosophies which encouraged indifference and even hostility to organized religion.

These ups and downs of world history, these peaks of hopes and nadirs of despair, are reflected on microscopic scale in the ups and downs of the congregation's history — the prosperous first decade of the 20th century and the raising of the mortgage on the



Cantor Zelig David stands with members of the Beth Israel Choir about 1930. The members were: (left to right) Irving Emple, Sidney Chason, Bernard Weisberg, David Rapaport, Harold Chason, Murray Raben, Edward Weisberg and Teddy Goldberg.

synagogue; the trials and turmoil of World War I; the renewed prosperity of the '20s; the plunge into the Great Depression; the recovery and the new hopes shattered by the second World War; the period of the postwar progress against an ominous background of an uneasy peace and a Cold War . . . thus history traveled a rugged and uneven course.

But Beth Israel also has been uplifted by and has played its part in the great creative enterprises through which the Jewish spirit made its response to the challenge of our time. There has been no major venture in Jewish life which has failed to evoke warm response from the faithful membership of the congregation, and much of the dynamic personal leadership which these movements required was recruited from among the Beth Israel membership. The great charitable ventures following each of the world wars, the Zionist dream, now in the first stages of fulfillment in the state of Israel, the great galaxy of service agencies linked together in the Jewish Community Council, the movement to establish genuine good will and mutual brotherliness between the various denominational groups of the community — all of these and a host of other redemptive activities found that Congregation Beth Israel had prepared the hearts and minds of its members to be generous, imaginative and enthusiastic in their response.