

Beth Abraham Synagogue



Fiftieth Anniversary
Commemorative Journal

Beth Abraham Synagogue

York Street
Bangor, Maine



Fiftieth Anniversary Commemorative Journal

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Journal Committee wishes to express its deepest appreciation to those who helped in the research for this history. Without their memories and written data, when available, this effort would not have come to fruition. We gratefully thank Rabbi Henry Isaacs, Jacob Striar, Philip Striar, Louis Cooper, Louis Rolnick, Diane Cutler, Bessie Wald, and the Reference Department of the Bangor Public Library.



Photo by Yehuda Inbar

FOREWORD

In a changing world, Beth Abraham has never changed. Physically, perhaps, but not spiritually. For there is more to this synagogue than cement and mortar and wood. External embellishments over the past fifty years have attracted the eye, but the underlying spirit has attracted the heart.

"Beth Abraham" literally means "House of Abraham." Among our first Patriarch's greatest attributes was his love for his fellow man - Abraham the Humanitarian. In his home all were welcome, from the weariest traveler to the wealthiest merchant prince. They were made to feel a part of Abraham's household - they were made to feel welcome - and they were told that they could always return and find a safe refuge in Abraham's house.

So, too, with this "Bais Avraham." Over the years newcomers to Bangor found a haven here - an orthodox oasis where one was never expected, and even those whose religious roots were not observant, found a place where they and their children could feel comfortable. The children have made Beth Abraham special. Whether it was the love of Torah or the lure of the "Candy Man," they have enhanced the service and made this synagogue unique. What seems so surprising to the visitor - the effortless ease with which the youngsters chant the age-old prayers, is really an ingrained part of their lives.

To be sure though, the original founders of Beth Abraham might be somewhat startled at the physical changes - they would be no less amazed at the role the women of the congregation have played in bringing beauty and order into a chaotic void.

Perhaps the Beth Abraham Synagogue can best be described in one word, *home*. Many people, members and non-members alike, have always found a "safe harbor" here, a place to worship in their own way - in peace.

The members of Beth Abraham, who belong to no special social strata, combine hard work and a love for their "shul" to keep it alive. And though the passing years are taking their toll of active members, the spark still remains. From one generation to another it has kindled a lifelong sense of Judaism. We hope and pray that the spark, and its flame, will burn eternally.

Norma Weiner Berg, Editor
Fiftieth Anniversary Journal
October 9, 1983



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

June 21, 1983

Rabbi Henry J. Isaacs
c/o Beth Abraham Synagogue
York Street
Bangor, Maine 04401

To the Members and Friends of Beth Abraham Synagogue:

I have many very fond memories of the York Street area. While the neighborhood itself has changed dramatically over the years, the Beth Abraham Synagogue has been a integral part of that neighborhood for as long as I can remember.

Congratulations to Congregation Beth Abraham for your fifty years of dedication and service to the community.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill", written over the word "Sincerely,".

William S. Cohen
United States Senator

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

July 5, 1983

Beth Abraham Synagogue
York Street
Bangor, Maine 04401

Dear Friends:

I wish you on this 50th anniversary many more years of happiness and peace for all members of the Beth Abraham Congregation.

Your spirit of concern for the quality of life for your friends and loved ones has always been extended to others. May this tradition continue to enrich your own lives as well as the lives of all others in our local, state and national communities.

With best regards.

Sincerely,

George J. Mitchell
George J. Mitchell
United States Senator

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

Beth Abraham Synagogue
York Street
Bangor, Maine 04401

Congregation members:

Shalom Alechiem!

Congratulations and best wishes on the Fiftieth Anniversary of Beth Abraham Synagogue.

The Synagogue has served its members as a gathering place for both education and spiritual comfort. At the same time its doors have always been open to the community.

From its beginning the members of the Synagogue have been active in the social and economic growth of the community.

It seems only appropriate that its members should pause at this important juncture in its history to document for further generations its beginnings and the many contributions it has made to the life of the community.

Warmest regards,

Olympia J. Snowe
OLYMPIA J. SNOWE
Member of Congress
2nd District, Maine



STATE OF MAINE
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
AUGUSTA, MAINE
04388

JOSEPH E. BRENNAN
GOVERNOR

June 9, 1983

To the members, supporters and friends
of the Beth Abraham Synagogue:

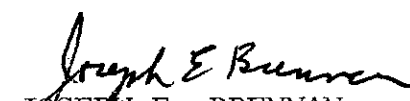
It is fitting to make a formal observance of
historically significant dates in the lives of people
and institutions.

On this, the celebration of the 50th anniversary
of the Beth Abraham Synagogue, please accept my
congratulations and the best wishes for now and for the
next 50 years.

As important as it is to mark such occasions,
it is also important to take time to reflect on all that
has been accomplished during the time leading up to now,
and to think about all that remains to be done in the time
to come.

May your thoughts be happy and your accomplishments
many.

Sincerely,


JOSEPH E. BRENNAN
Governor



City of Bangor, Maine
CITY COUNCIL

May 27, 1983

GREETINGS TO THE CONGREGATION BETH ABRAHAM

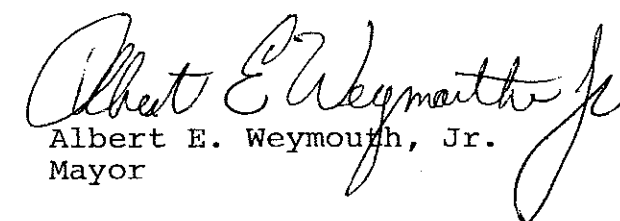
On the occasion of your Fiftieth Anniversary, October 9, 1983, and
on behalf of the citizens of Bangor, the Bangor City Council and
the City Administration, I offer you sincere congratulations.

We in Bangor greatly appreciate the many contributions that members
of Beth Abraham Synagogue have made to our City over the past fifty
years, and we recognize your dedicated service to the Beth Abraham
Synagogue and to the City of Bangor as reflecting the pride that you
have in both.

May your celebration be memorable, and your published Journal be a
significant document of your first fifty years, as well as a guide
to the next fifty and more.

Congratulations!

Yours sincerely,


Albert E. Weymouth, Jr.
Mayor



JEWISH COMMUNITY COUNCIL

28 SOMERSET STREET - BANGOR, MAINE 04401-5285 - TELEPHONE 945-5631

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SANFRED G. PASTERNAK
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

June 6, 1983

**Congregation Beth Abraham
York Street
Bangor, Maine**

On behalf of the Jewish Community Council and the Jewish Federation of Bangor, I would like to extend congratulations and best wishes to the members of Congregation Beth Abraham on the occasion of the Synagogue's 50th Anniversary.

Louis H. Kornreich
President
Jewish Community Council and
Federation of Bangor



NATIONAL JEWISH WELFARE BOARD

Member

UNITED WAY OF PENOBSCOT VALLEY, INC.



Be it known to all that
We, the Members of the Senate and
House of Representatives
join in recognizing

the 50th anniversary of the Beth Abraham
Synagogue in Bangor;

And be it ordered that this official expression
of sentiment be sent forthwith on behalf of the
Legislature and the people of the State of Maine

Given this 10th day of June 1983

at the State Capitol
Augusta, Maine

President of the Senate

Secretary

Speaker of the House

Clerk

Introduced by
Rep. Robert E. Murray, Jr.
COSPONSORED BY: Rep. John N. Diamond
Rep. Patricia Stevens
Rep. Edward C. Kelleher
Rep. Katherine K. Liebowitz

FROM: Bangor
FROM: Bangor
FROM: Bangor
FROM: Bangor
FROM: Bangor

Known for their determination, their spirit and their unwillingness to be defeated the congregants of Beth Abraham immediately began planning a new site for a new shul. They located a building on York Street which was the former home of the Tifereth Israel Synagogue which was no longer in use. A few men undertook the great task of enlarging and repairing the existing structure.

The building committee (Sam Smith, Shel

David Striar, Harry Viner, Hyman Striar and Barney Striar) was able to obtain lumber and other supplies from Mr. A. Shute, owner of a lumberyard in Holden, Maine. Even though they had no money with which to buy these supplies, an agreement was made with the very generous Mr. Shute. On February 19, 1933, less than a year after fire destroyed the Carr Street Synagogue, the new shul on York Street was dedicated. The final cost was about \$15,000, which was paid in full by 1948.

Bangor Daily Commercial

Feb. 20, 1933

BEAUTIFUL NEW SYNAGOGUE OF CONGREGATION BETH ABRAHAM WAS DEDICATED ON SUNDAY

**Seven Hundred Heard Eloquent Speakers at Outstanding
Event For Bangor Jewry; Silver Crown, Saved Through
Act of Great Heroism, Exhibited**

The outstanding event on the calendar of Bangor Jewry took place Sunday night, when the beautiful new Congregation Beth Abraham Synagogue was dedicated in elaborate and impressive ceremonies before a gathering of nearly 700, which included many prominent members of the local Jewry. Rabbi Louis Levine, chief rabbi of the congregation, was the conductor at the services. The edifice, one of the most beautiful in Maine, embraces all modern improvements and is elaborately equipped. It was constructed to replace the old synagogue on Carr Street, which was destroyed by fire.

Harry Rabin, president of the congregation, opened the dedication services, after which the chair was turned over to Michael Pilot, Bangor attorney, who presided, introducing the several speakers. Other officers in the corporation are: Vice president, Sam Smith, Harry Viner, treasurer, and executive officers, David Striar, Hyman Striar and Barney Cooper. These officers who have worked tirelessly toward the erection of the new church, were at the services.

Rabbi Levine was the first speaker, telling the meaning of the synagogue to the congregation. He talked interestingly on the new edifice and impressed his listeners with its true meaning and value.

A. B. Friedman followed, tracing 30 years of Jewish life in Bangor and touching upon its highlights and accomplishments. The address was intensely interesting

to those present. The next speaker was Morris Rosen, president of Hebrew Institute, who spoke on the bond of relationship between his institution and the synagogue. He urged parents to send their children to the Institute and prepare them for the higher church. The Hebrew Institute gives primary teaching, the speaker stated, and makes ready the Jew for the synagogue; and such schooling will prove in later years of inestimable value.

Myer Segal, in an interesting address, spoke of the necessity of the older generation to liberalize their worship, conforming to the modern and reform way in order to obtain the younger groups' attention.

The concluding address was an informative talk by Principal Gillen of Hebrew Institute, who traced 2000 years of Jewish history.

One of the features of the evening was the exhibiting of a silver crown, more than 150 years old, which was brought to Bangor by the early Jewish settlers from Russia. The crown was in the old synagogue when it burned. Many members of the congregation had feared it lost, and were agreeably surprised to learn it was safe. It was shown and the story of its presence told. David Striar, the oldest member of the congregation, at the risk of his life, the story disclosed, entered the burning building on Carr Street, groped through flame and smoke to the place where he knew the crown to be and returned to the waiting throngs.

Over seven hundred people were gathered at the dedication ceremony in February 1933. Rabbi Louis Levine, chief rabbi of the congregation, conducted the first service in the new shul. Among the first officers of the synagogue were:

Harry Rabin	President
Sam Smith	Vice President
Harry Viner	Treasurer
Shel David Striar	Executive Officer
Hyman Striar	Executive Officer
Barney Cooper	Executive Officer

The synagogue on York Street was the first to be built with a modern interior arrangement. The bema was in the center of the shul, as is traditional, but the altar was placed against the wall so that the Rabbi and the Cantor could face each other during services.

By 1938, Rabbi Levine had moved to another congregation and Rabbi Charles Nathan Goldberg was installed as the new leader of Beth Abraham. He remained until 1957, when Rabbi Philip M. Weinberger was elected as the new leader. It has been said that Rabbi Weinberger was probably the first Yeshiva trained Rabbi ever hired by Beth Abraham.

Beth Abraham's presidents were known not only for their efficiency, but for their longevity in office!

Harry Rabin guided the congregation until 1938. William Viner assumed the reins from 1938-1941. Harry Cohen was then elected, and served until 1948.

From 1948 until 1969, Louis Rolnick was president. His tenure saw a rebirth of interest in the synagogue with many young families participating in the weekly and holiday services. He was also instrumental in the hiring of Rabbi Henry Isaacs in 1960.

After Louis Rolnick's decision that twenty-one years in office was enough, Dr. Irwin Pasternak was installed. His interest and leadership prevailed until 1979. In that year Samuel Nyer assumed the presidency and is still in office.



Past presidents Louis Rolnick and Dr. Irwin Pasternak watch as President Sam Nyer presents a meritorious scroll to Past President and former Chief Gabbi, Harry Cohen (far left) September, 1979. Absent: Past President William Viner.

In 1960 Rabbi Henry Isaacs was installed as the new Rabbi of Beth Abraham, and for over twenty years, has been its spiritual leader. He has seen the synagogue change from a house of worship where chickens were heard squawking during services; where the men would often leave him "davening" alone because it was time for Kiddush; where brass spittoons sat next to every "shtenda" ... to a place of warmth and beauty unimagined when first he came to Bangor from Loring Air Force Base in Limestone, Maine.

With his arrival in the community Beth Abraham Synagogue took on a new spirit. Women, along with small children, began to appear at Saturday morning services. The sermons, now given in English, were the only moments when one could find some quiet. At that point, the Rebbitzin took all the little ones down to the vestry while the Rabbi addressed the congregation on the portion of the week. "Candy men" appeared out of nowhere, feeding the children sweets, and as a result, Shabbos morning attendance increased. Davening took on different melodies, and even the children were invited to lead the congregation in the closing prayers.

In 1969, after Dr. Irwin Pasternak became president, some of the men decided to establish a men's club whose function was to raise money for the shul. Annual raffles were started, as well as other fund raisers, and shortly afterward, they took over the management of the Shabbos kiddish. In 1964-65, headed by Roz Isaacs, a committee of the Sisterhood met to raise funds to refurbish and redecorate the Sanctuary. After much work, many meetings and lots of labor, the Sisterhood celebrated its 25th Jubilee Anniversary in the newly appointed sanctuary in the spring of 1965.

As a result of youthful leadership and a growth in young membership, the Beth Abraham Players was formed in the fall of 1972. Consisting of Beth Abraham members and friends of Beth Abraham, "Shalom, Shalom," an original musical written by Norma Berg, opened at the JCC in November of 1971. This production was such an outstanding success, it was followed by many other productions, originals as well as legitimate theatre.

THE BETH ABRAHAM SISTERHOOD

Presents

The Beth Abraham Players

in

SHALOM - SHALOM!

by

Norma Berg

A Musical Comedy in Three Acts

November 22nd and 23rd, 1971

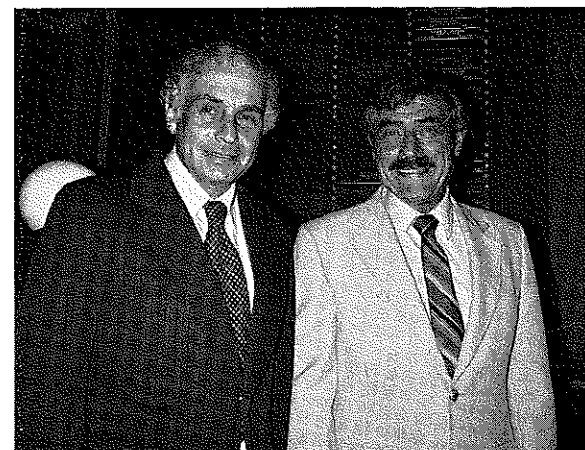
JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER
BANGOR, MAINE

In 1975, the Shul was bustling. Membership had grown, the sanctuary had been redone, the membership was involved in theater, and the Shul needed a project. It was decided to concentrate on the vestry, and as a result, the basement was gutted, enlarged, redecorated, and rededicated in the Spring of 1976.

In 1979, it was thought that it would be economically and aesthetically wise to insulate and side the building. It was because of this decision that the physical plant changed appearance drastically. White vinyl siding and black shutters were applied, a small garden gracing the entry was planted, in memory of Pat Viner and suddenly Beth Abraham Synagogue stood tall and proud. The following year, the City of Bangor redesigned the neighborhood, and we acquired the land from our building to Essex Street. At this same time, the Sisterhood contracted to put in a new kitchen. Thus for the first time in 50 years, Beth Abraham Synagogue was the proud owner of truly modern conveniences including a dishwasher! History, however, does not stop with new additions. It is a continuing process.

Although our founders are gone, their commitment remains. Today, Beth Abraham, more than ever before, has instilled in the members a deep feeling of love and pride in Judaism, it has fostered feelings of strength and tradition, especially at a time when many Jews have assimilated and lost their identities. It has made us proud of our heritage. We look forward to the next fifty years with hope and faith that our congregation will continue to flourish.

Louise Shindler
Barbara Podolsky



Gabbi Sheni Dr. Irwin Pasternak,
Gabbi Rishon Martin Schneider
Leaders of the Sabbath Services.

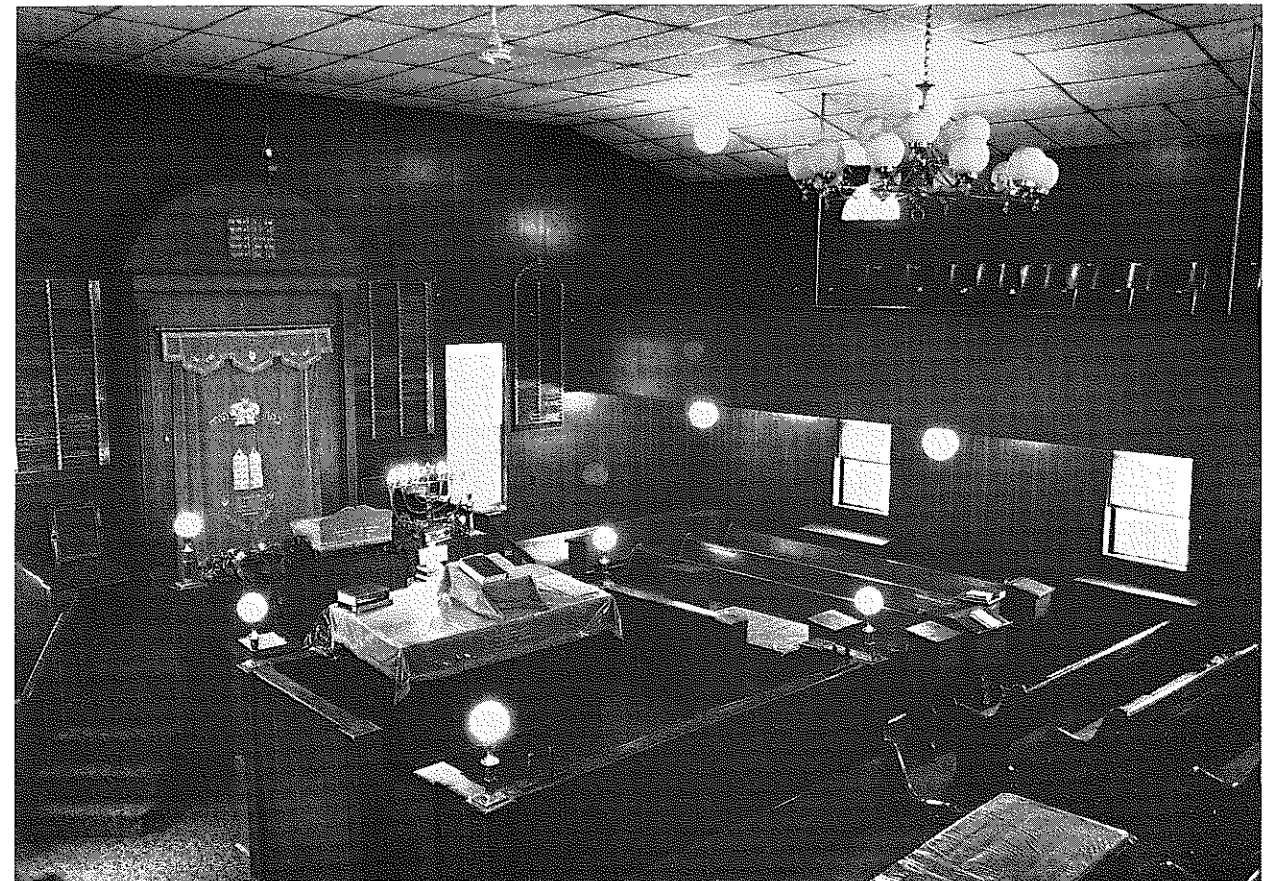


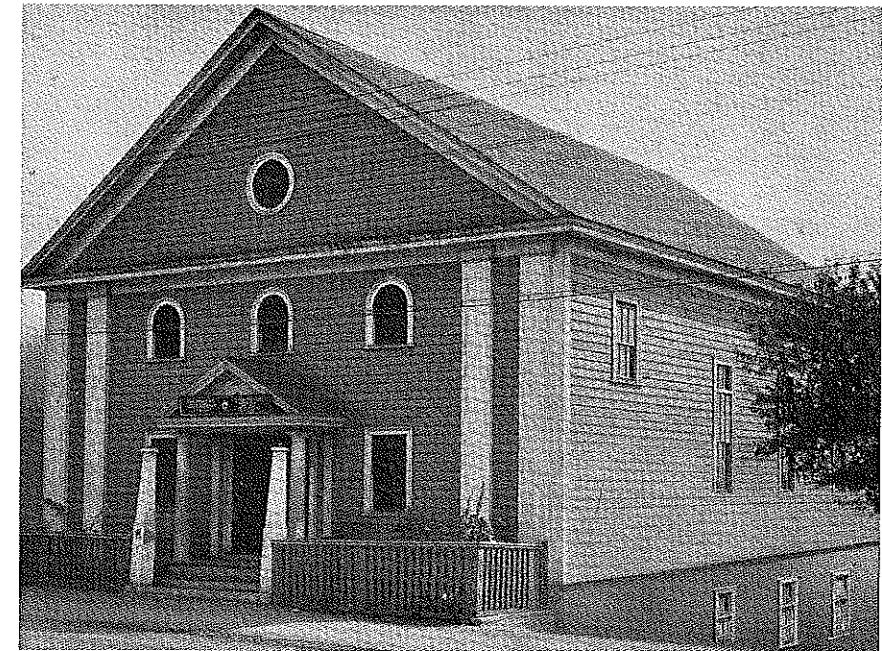
Photo by Yehuda Inbar

*WELCOME
TO THE WORLD OF BETH ABRAHAM.*

History, (his' tor y) n. A chronological record of events, as the life or development of a people or institution.

A simple definition for a very complex subject. What we commemorate here in this Journal are the fifty years since the dedication of the Beth Abraham Synagogue on York Street. But the history goes back well beyond that time. It begins with a sense of need on the part of the original seven founders for a place to worship in the orthodox manner to which they were accustomed in Russia. Even though accommodations were discussed for separate services at Beth Israel Synagogue (which had been established in 1888) these men deigned accommodation. They wanted their own house of worship. It was as simple as that. These men of humble origin were looking for a "shul." Thus the story of Beth Abraham begins ... welcome to our world.

THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS ON YORK STREET



1933



1983

Photo by Yehuda Inbar

HISTORY

The earliest known Jewish settlers arrived in Bangor in the early 1840's. They were a handful of Sephardic Jews who appeared to have been scattered throughout the area. In 1849, with the influx of several Jewish families from Germany, Bangor had its first Jewish Congregation, AHAWAS ACHIM, and its first burial ground. Because of their influence and activities, Bangor was thought to be the first town in Maine to have an organized Jewish group. However, by 1856, most of these families had moved away or had become assimilated with their non-Jewish neighbors.

During the 1880's, Bangor became home to many Jews who escaped the pogroms of Russia and Eastern Europe. Although they were few in number, these new immigrants were determined to preserve their Judaism and their religious and spiritual heritage. Even though they were displaced people, they wanted to maintain their strong passion for the Jewish life filled with rich tradition, ceremony, and ritual. In 1888, only a few years after their arrival, a group of young men formally created the Beth Israel Society, and by 1897, they were laying the cornerstone of the first synagogue in Maine. During the next ten years, Beth Israel witnessed and survived many new changes and events. One of the period's greatest changes centered around a new influx of immigrants from Russia who were determined to maintain their own orthodox way of life and to worship according to their own customs



Chaim Berg and Family ... A schochet and teacher for the community.

and traditions. Thus, Congregation Beth Abraham Anshe Sphard was born.

In 1902, Eli Striar, David Pinchos Striar, Hyman Striar, Shel David Striar, Sam Taines, Sam Gass, Sam Bell, Harry Viner and Gimpel Morris were among ten men who felt it was time to start a new synagogue which would be more analogous to their way of life. With nothing more than their beliefs, they rented several upstairs rooms in a house on Pine Street. There they would assemble on the holy days to pray, according to their Orthodox traditions. The Beth Abraham founders continued to congregate in this manner until 1904 when Bangor witnessed its largest immigration of Russian Jews. This time, mass migration was not due to persecution of the Jews as in the 1880's, but due to the Russo-Japanese war and the Jews' refusal to serve in the Czar's Army. By 1905, the house on Pine Street could no longer accommodate the increasing numbers of congregants and in 1907, the first "Russische" shul was established at 37 Carr Street.

The new home of Beth Abraham was a small building which had been built a few years earlier. Because the original founders wanted their new shul to exemplify their love and commitment for Jewish tradition and ritual, they actually had the building turned around, so it faced the East while they prayed. Also, they added another floor, making it a large three-story building, so the synagogue could meet the demands of a growing congregation.

It is interesting to note that inherent among these Orthodox Jews was the fact that wherever they settled, they were not only responsible for building a synagogue, but were also responsible for establishing a Jewish cemetery and providing burial rites. During this early era (1904-1907) the same men who started Beth Abraham also purchased a small parcel of land off Mt. Hope Avenue in Bangor. They paid the city one dollar for the site which would become the cemetery for the synagogue. Coinciding with this purchase, was the formation of the first Chevra Kadisha of Beth Abraham. Charged with preparing bodies for burial, the Chevra Kadisha has long been a society comprised of righteous and honorable people who held positions of high esteem in the shul. Among the first members of the Beth Abraham Chevra Kadisha were:

Barney Striar
Shel David Striar

Mrs. Sarah Striar
Mrs. Zelda Siegel

Sam Lavoott
Sam Smith
Barney Cooper
Joseph Cooper
Harry Viner
Louis Weinstein

Mrs. Barney Striar
Mrs. Harry Viner
Mrs. Pearl Chesner
Mrs. Celia Nissenbaum
Mrs. Ann Lavoott

During this time, little is known about the spiritual leaders of Beth Abraham. Most of them were not ordained Rabbis, but Hazans, Shohets, Mohels or a combination thereof. Names such as Kaprow, Portnoy, Avirim, Magnidson and Rubenovitz surface as the first spiritual leaders.

It was also during this early period that the shul experienced its first philosophical schism among its congregants. A dispute apparently arose as to the laws of Kashruth; discussions and arguments ensued and, finally in 1920, a group of men left Beth Abraham and established Toldoth Yitzchak on the corner of Essex Street and York Street.

A glimpse at a ledger sheet from 1924 . . .

[illegible]

On March 20, 1932, the three-story wooden shul was destroyed by fire. According to a Bangor Daily News article, Barney Cooper, president of Beth Abraham at that time, stated that the building cost \$20,000 and the contents were valued at nearly \$10,000. Among the valuable articles in the interior which were totally destroyed were several priceless volumes of the Five Books of Moses.

While the fire was raging, Shel David Striar, the oldest member of the congregation, entered the burning building and made his way to the place where a 150 year old silver crown from Russia was stored. He emerged from the blaze with many severe burns but holding the valuable crown in his hands. This silver crown was later exhibited at the dedication of the new home of Beth Abraham.



BETH ABRAHAM SYNAGOGUE

Aftermath of the disastrous fire on Carr Street, March 30, 1932.

Beth Abraham Synagogue Is Destroyed \$25,000 BLAZE RAZES JEWISH TEMPLE AND ENDANGERS HOMES

Several Dwellings Catch in Thickly Settled Carr
And Hancock Street District As Building Is
Reduced to Total Ruins — All Apparatus of
City Called Out to Fight Flames.

With the Beth Abraham Congregation's Synagogue on Carr Street a raging furnace when Box 18 was pulled in about 11:25 the Hancock Street section of the city got its biggest fire scare in recent years last night. Several dwellings, a monster wooden building used as a storehouse and stores and frame structures between which the distance is measured in feet were threatened and the huge wooden Synagogue was totally destroyed. A second alarm was sounded within a few minutes after the arrival of the fire department chiefs and soon the streets were lined with cars and several thousand people attracted by the spectacular blaze which was visible from all sections of the city.

When the firemen from the Hose 5 station on State Street arrived at the scene of the fire, the first apparatus to reach the fire, the flames were shooting skyward, giving the appearance that all of Carr Street was afire. Within a few minutes of that time 15 lines of hose were playing water on the Synagogue and surrounding buildings to keep the fire from spreading. From the outset it was seen that the building itself was doomed.

The recent heavy snow storm dampened the buildings nearby and contributed much to preventing what would have probably wiped out many of the frame dwellings on Carr, Hancock and Patrick streets.

COST \$20,000 WHEN BUILT

According to Barney Cooper, president of the board of directors for the Congregation Beth Abraham, the building cost \$20,000 to build and the contents were valued at nearly \$10,000. Among the valuable articles in the interior which were totally destroyed were several volumes of priceless parchment (known as the five books of Moses). The basement floor of the building was recently decorated and a large sum of money spent to make it attractive. The building was a three story frame structure, just off Hancock Street. Rabbi Leizor Lewin was the officiating clergyman.

FIRE DISCOVERED by WOMAN

Mrs. Jennie Robertson, who lives on Pine Street, looked over onto the next street and saw the flames coming through the upper story of the building and rushed to pull in the fire alarm. Within a few minutes

neighbors were awakened and there was a mad scramble to get onto the street and away from what had all the appearance of a conflagration.

Within a few feet of the fire on the Hancock Street side were several families living in a two and a half story frame apartment house. Mr. and Mrs. Hiram Morgan were awakened by their dog, Teddy, barking and looked out of their window to see the building next door a mass of flames.

NEARBY HOUSES CATCH ON ROOFS

Frequently while the firemen were fighting the Synagogue blaze the roofs of nearby houses would catch, and four different dwellings were burning a little at some time during the fire. The roof on a vacant house across the street, now being offered for sale, was among those lighted by flying embers.

Mrs. Melissa Dyer's house at 6 Carr caught at one time but the blaze was quickly extinguished by the firemen who were working on the roof.

FIREMEN IN DANGER AT TIMES

Twice during the fire as the walls were caving in firemen were obliged to leave the alleys from which they were fighting hard to keep the blaze from spreading in the thickly settled area. While replacing sections of hose that had split, in front of the building, several men had narrow escapes as huge pieces of burning wood fell from the roofs.

CROWDS ATTRACTED TO THE FIRE

From vantage points on all the streets nearby several thousand people attracted to the fire by the blaze and the sounding of the second alarm watched what at a time was a threatening fire.

In the rear of the mass of small dwellings and within a few hundred yards of the Synagogue itself is a monster building, facing on Patrick Street, used by A. Brown as a storehouse for tons and tons of copper, wool, etc.

Chief of Police Crowley and practically all members of the day force responded to the second alarm, augmenting the regular night men already there in charge of Capt. Ambrose Phillips.

Keeping the fire in the one building, the shell of which remained standing, was a difficult job but despite this the all out signal was sounded at 12:15 o'clock.



Photo by Yehuda Inbar



RABBI ISAACS REMEMBERS ...

During the 23 years as Rabbi in Bangor, I have heard the Synagogue at 145 York Street referred to as the "small shul, russisheh shul, cattle dealers shul, orthodox synagogue and Beth Abraham Synagogue." Though all these nomenclatures may be correct, they fail to describe a most important component and that is the awareness of the Beth Abraham Synagogue.

Upon entering the Synagogue, one immediately senses the hominess. One sees children, teenagers, men and women of all ages with a friendly atmosphere permeating the entire synagogue like one large family.

Over the past twenty years the Beth Abraham Synagogue has not only been a "BEIS HAKNESSESS", a "house of prayer", but also a "BEIS HAMEDRASH", a "house of learning". On Saturdays and holidays for example, one can enter the synagogue and participate in Torah learning.

However, the greatest and most important aspect of the Beth Abraham Synagogue, is that of a spiritual catalyst. Over the years, the Beth Abraham Synagogue together with the Hebrew Academy have re-oriented the Jewish behavior and weltanshaung of a number of individuals and families.

The Beth Abraham Synagogue may be small in its physical structure, but it stands tall in stature.

Serving as Rabbi of the Beth Abraham Synagogue for the past 23 years has not only been a challenge, but a privilege.

On behalf of my dear wife Roz and my entire family I extend a hearty Mazel Tov to the past and present officers and entire membership of the Beth Abraham Synagogue on this golden anniversary celebration.

Rabbi Henry J. Isaacs



A MESSAGE FROM THE SYNAGOGUE PRESIDENT

For fifty years the Beth Abraham Synagogue has stood as a testament of faith, love and devotion by its congregants to the Almighty. They have adorned the Synagogue with all the worldly fineries both inside and out.

The Synagogue is filled with the prayers of its congregants on a daily basis. For surely within the walls of Beth Abraham, orthodox Jewry in the state of Maine has found a strong and safe haven.

We pray that future generations will continue on and that our Synagogue, Beth Abraham, may enjoy eternal life.

Sam Nyer, President
Beth Abraham Synagogue

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE HEBREW ACADEMY OF BANGOR

With the strong feeling of Judaism and community obligation inspired and endowed by James Gimpel Striar and Sarah Striar, parents of Louis, Bernard, Sylvia, Mildred, and Max, with the assistance of leadership of Rabbi Henry Isaacs, the necessity of a Day School was considered.

Inspired by the desire and need that the children of the community receive a Jewish education in depth and a secular education on a par and better than our public schools, immediate action was taken. The Hebrew Academy of Bangor was founded in the Spring of 1963 by a handful of people with the dream to add to our glorious Jewish heritage passed down to us by our forefathers through the ages.

Rabbi Isaacs was chosen as supervisor of the Hebrew Academy and given the Herculean and arduous feat of having everything in preparedness for the fall academic year, less than six months away. This involved many days and nights of hard work. With the L-rd's help, the door to the Academy classrooms opened smoothly and on schedule and has been in operation for twenty years.

Though small in quantity, but large in quality, these children have been inspired with love and understanding of our Torah and traditional Jewish and secular life. They are being provided with a more intensive program of instruction so as to make them the intelligent self-respecting Jewish leaders and American citizens of tomorrow.

This training given to the students has kept the Beth Abraham Synagogue functioning as a house of prayer should be. They have helped to conduct the services on weekdays and on the Sabbaths, volunteered for the minyans both in the early morning and evening prayers. Essentially, they have brought into this institution of worship a strong spiritual feeling of real, true traditional Judaism.

Max Striar

DEDICATION

The Journal Committee could think of no more fitting tribute than to dedicate this book, this history, to our original founders. These men who finally realized their dream in the formation of the Beth Abraham Synagogue, would settle for nothing less than the fulfillment of their commitment to establish an Orthodox synagogue in Bangor, Maine. We salute their courage and convictions.



Photo by Yehuda Inbar

Eli Striar

Eli Striar was born in Russia in 1827. Eli was married six times and had five children. After he came to Bangor, he was a cattle dealer. He died in 1935.



David Pinchas Striar

David Pinchas Striar was one of Eli Striar's sons. He was born in Russia in 1871 and came to Bangor in the early 1900's. David Pinchas and his wife, Annie, had five children. He founded a barrel business and was very active in the group who left Beth Israel to start Beth Abraham. He died in 1917.

Hyman Striar

Another son of Eli Striar, Hyman was born in Russia in 1875. He came to Bangor in 1902. Hyman and his wife, Bessie, had seven children. He was in business and sold burlap bags. Hyman died in 1946.

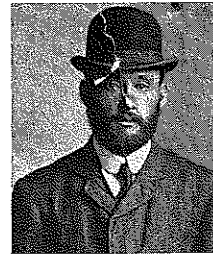


Barney Striar

Barney was also a son of Eli Striar. He was born in Russia in 1890 and came to Bangor in 1902. He and his wife, Shifra, had six children, and Baruch was in the cattle business. He also served as Gabbi Rishon of the congregation for many years. He died in 1981 at the age of 91.

Sam Smith

Sam was born in Russia in 1886. He arrived in Bangor in 1908 and became a cattle dealer. Sam and his wife, Gussie, had six children. He died at the age of 87 in 1973.



Shel David Striar

Shel David Striar was born in Kovna, Russia in 1858. He came to Bangor in the early 1900's where he was a cattle dealer. Shel David and his wife, Sarah, had nine children. He died in 1936.



Harry Viner

Harry Viner was born in Russia in 1878. He arrived in Bangor in 1898. Harry and his wife, Gitel, had ten children. After starting his career with a small shoe repair shop, he later founded the Viner Shoe Company a nationally known shoe manufacturer. He died in 1934.

Joseph Cooper

Joseph Cooper was born in Poland in 1880 and came to Bangor in 1911. He and his wife, Sarah, had one son. Joseph founded the Penobscot Beef and Provision Company. He died in 1945.



Harry Cohen

Harry Cohen was born in Russia in 1898. He came to Bangor from New York in 1924. Harry and his wife, Rebecca, had two daughters. He worked in the retail and wholesale meat business. Harry died at the age of 85 in 1983.



Harry Rabin

Harry Rabin was born in Russia in 1890. He arrived in Bangor in the early 1900's. Harry and his wife, Jenny, had two sons. They owned a meat market on Hancock Street. Harry died in 1973.



Barney Cooper

Barney Cooper, Joseph's brother, was born in Poland in 1893. He came to Bangor in 1911. He and his wife, Martha, had one son. Barney founded the United Beef Company and established the first kosher meat market in Bangor. He died in 1973.

First couple married in Beth Abraham

*Betty Smith Rolnick and Louis Rolnick
February 4, 1934*



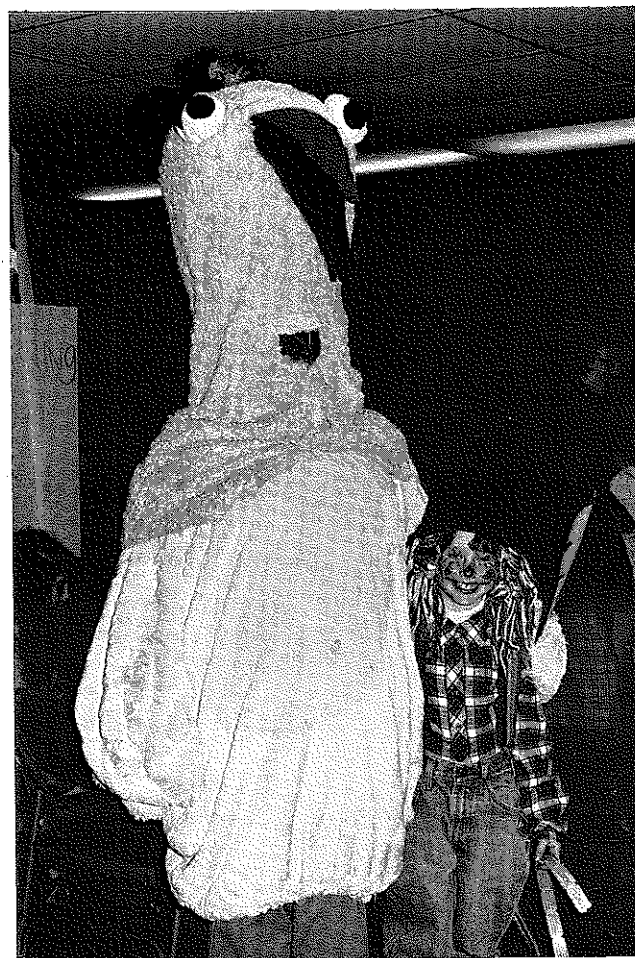
*Abe and Minnie Lieberman
A very active couple who worked diligently for the synagogue.*



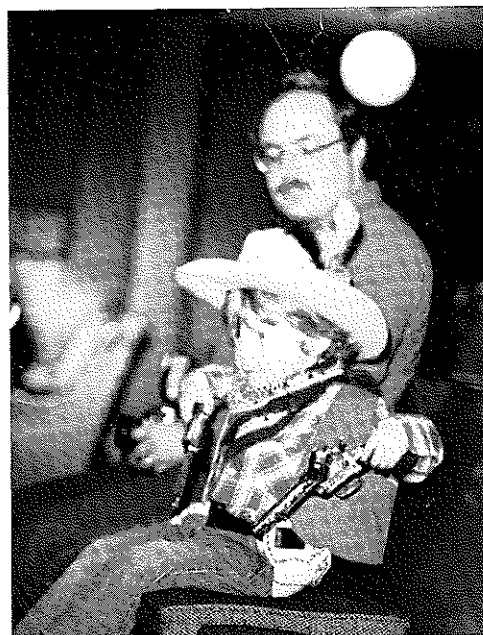
*Abe Motuick . . .
" . . . his glorious tenor filled the sanctuary with harmonic
melodies, and his supple fingers polished the silver
crowns and breastplates until they shone like mirrors."*

Purim

A celebration for young and old
to delight the eye and ear.



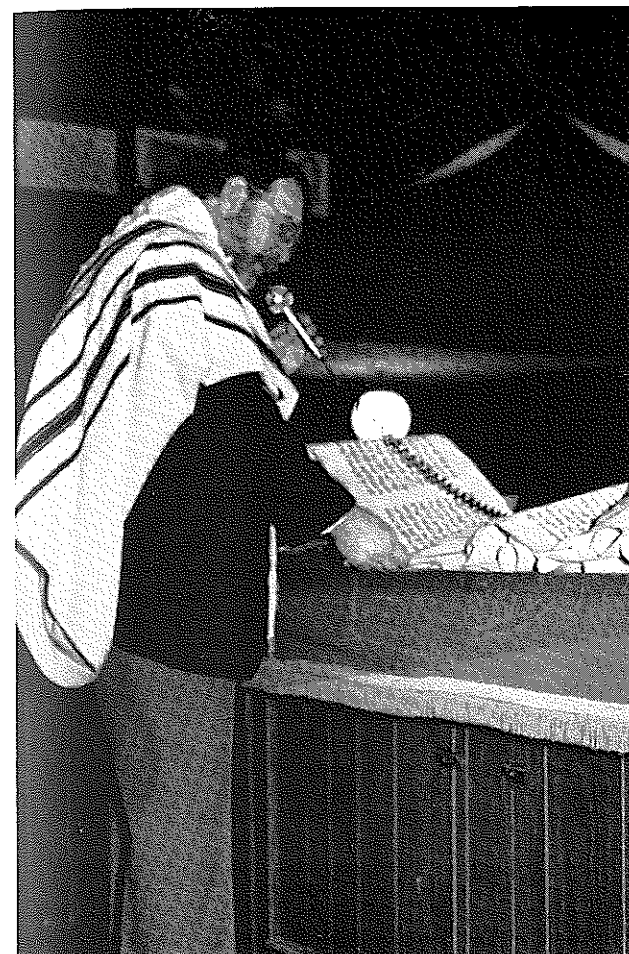
Rabbi David Tropper as "Big Bird"
and Stacey Cooper



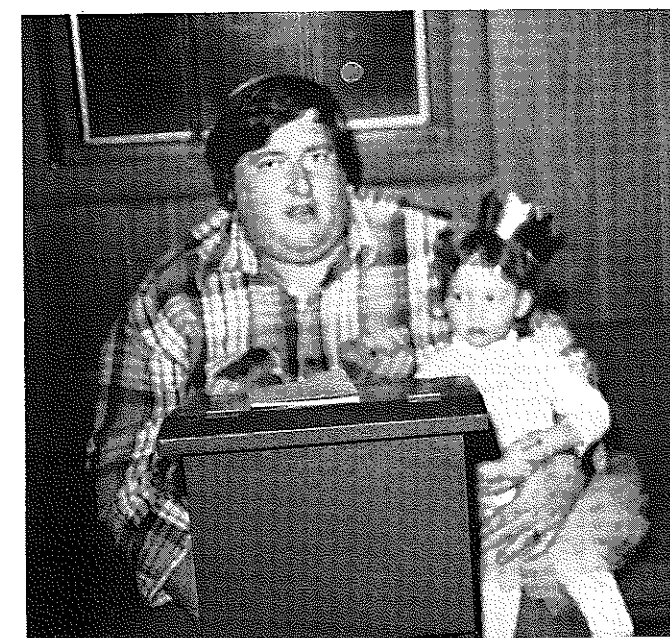
Stephen and Aaron Lavooott Emery



Big Bird reads Magillah



Rabbi Henry Isaacs



Steven Striar and Jenny Kirstein



L to R: unidentified, Robbie Hartstone, Abe Striar
In background: Samuel Trotzsky, Jerry Williams

OFFICERS OF BETH ABRAHAM SISTERHOOD



(left to right) Rhoda Bernstein, Financial Secretary; Louise Rolnick, President; Jo-Ann Kirstein, Recording Secretary; Louise Shindler, 2nd Vice President; Priscilla Williams, Treasurer.
Absent: Linda Hartstone, 1st Vice President; Janet Price, Corresponding Secretary.

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(left to right) Barbara Podolsky, Norma Berg, Miriam Viner, Ruth Striar, Judith Cooper.
Absent were Lillian Salzman, Ida Gopan, and Janice Cohen.

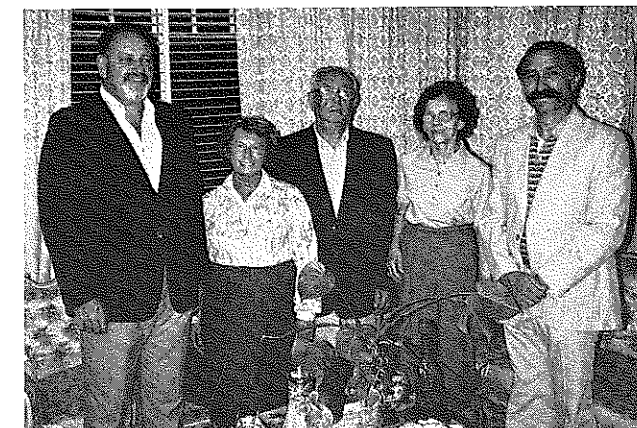
CHEVRA KADISHA

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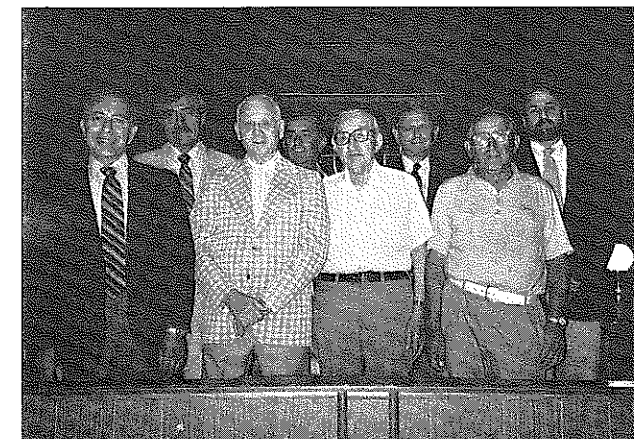
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Today in many cities the CHEVRA KADISHA has become somewhat commercialized. Here in Bangor, however, those women and men who are members of the CHEVRA still perform their most holy duty with "chesed shel-emes", "a kindness of truth."



Active Synagogue Members ...
Left to right: Michael Rolnick, Ida Gopan, Sam Less, Ida Less, David Price.



The Men's Chevra Kadisha
Front row, left to right: Dr. Howard Berg, Abe Striar, Philip Striar, Phil Nissenbaum.
Back row: Martin Schneider, Ben Viner, Darrell Cooper, Jerome Kirstein.



The Women's Chevra Kadisha
Celia Segal, Shirley Schneider, Louise Rolnick
Absent: Bessie Wald, Nancy Offenberger, Lillian Salzman

A MESSAGE FROM THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEE AND JOURNAL STAFF ...



The Journal Committee
(Left to right) Jo-Ann Kirstein, Louise Shindler, Sam Nyer, Roz Isaacs, Associate Editor Judy Cooper, Louise Rolnick, Barbara Podolsky, Editor Norma Berg.

Since the beginning, mankind has marked the passage of time in various ways. Marks on stone, rays of the sun, notches on sticks — all have measured the millenia. Our efforts here are certainly a miniscule moment, but we felt the occasion deserved the merit of mention. Fifty years in the life of a structure may not seem long when compared to buildings that have stood for more than a thousand years. But to the members of the Beth Abraham Congregation, it is fitting to now pay tribute to this house of worship. The changes that have been wrought on the building and those of its congregants are recounted elsewhere in this book. We who have planned this anniversary and its documentation have been privileged to serve. We will not belabor the frustration of gathering data, the countless meetings, and the constant urgings of our chairmen to complete the work on time. It has truly been a labor of love. We want to sincerely thank all who helped make this Journal a reality. A special thanks, also, to those who contributed to the financial success of this project.

We wish the Beth Abraham Synagogue a continued life of service to Jews in Bangor for many, many more years to come.

The Committee and Journal Staff

Howard Berg
Judy Cooper
Jo-Ann Kirstein
Barbara Podolsky
Louise Shindler
Steven Striar, Staff Photographer

Norma Berg
Roz Isaacs
Samuel Nyer
Louise Rolnick
Max Striar
Jerry Williams



BETH ABRAHAM BROTHERHOOD

The Beth Abraham Brotherhood was formed in February, 1959. It disbanded in March 1966. Its chief function was the maintenance of a tallis and tephilin club of boys and girls between the ages of 13 and 18. They met every Sunday for morning services, a talk from Rabbi Isaacs, a discussion, and a big breakfast put together by our Chef Lazer Shapiro.

Though the Brotherhood had only one function, it was a very important one. It helped to instill and implant our Jewish tradition in the minds of our young at a time when it was tempting to stray, and, it served the brotherhood as well because we all needed the constant and continual reminders of our tradition so that we could better practice our religion and its morality.

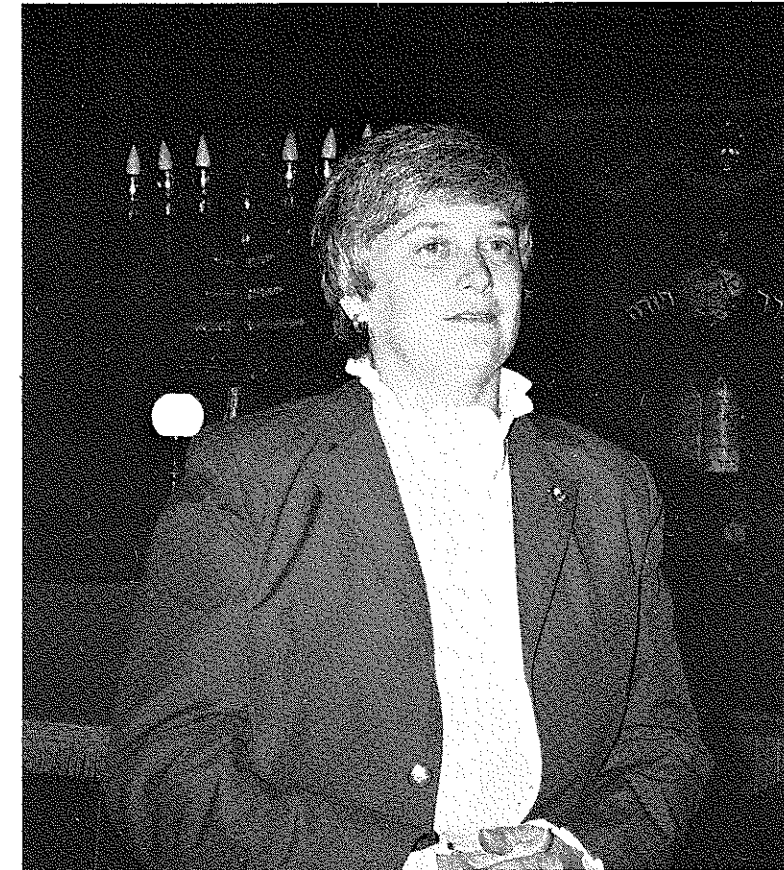
Al Bernstein
Past President
Beth Abraham Brotherhood

OFFICERS OF BETH ABRAHAM SYNAGOGUE



Front: Jerry Williams, Vice President

Back, left to right: Dr. Howard Berg, Financial Secretary; Sam Nyer, President; Stephen Emery, Recording Secretary; Sanford Podolsky, Treasurer.



A MESSAGE FROM OUR SISTERHOOD PRESIDENT

For the past 43 years, the Sisterhood has worked with enthusiasm and devotion towards the enrichment and improvement of the Synagogue. With the help of funds raised through a variety of projects; a yearly Luncheon Fashion Show, a variety of plays, (both original and Broadway), rummage sales, and a "Tree of Life" just to name a few, we have updated the sanctuary, the vestry, the kitchen, the building itself, and are now working on our latest project, landscaping.

On behalf of the Beth Abraham Sisterhood officers and membership, I would like to extend our congratulations to the Synagogue on its first 50 years and hope that we may all work and worship together to make the next 50 years as successful.

Louise Rolnick
President, Beth Abraham Sisterhood

HISTORY OF THE SISTERHOOD

The constitution of the sisterhood of Beth Abraham Synagogue states "the objectives of this organization shall be to foster and further the highest ideals of Judaism; to promote closer fellowship among its members; and in cooperation with the Congregation, to strive for religious, social, and educational activities." Beginning in 1940, it has strived to live up to these very fine goals.

With Miriam Viner as its first president, the sisterhood was constantly seeking new ways to help meet financial obligations to the Synagogue. Card parties, food sales and rummage sales held regularly in various local stores were always a good source of income. At many of the monthly meetings, a donation of some gift was usually made to be raffled. These raffles or door prizes were always very special. Some of them included a candelabra donated by Mr. Lazar Shapero, the Synagogue sexton, candles made by Ruth Emple, a ceramic platter donated by Bessie Wald, and a set of terrycloth towels given by Lillian Salzman.

The annual Chanukah and Purim parties were always looked forward to and planned with great zeal. Whether held in the vestry of the shul or at the Jewish Community Center, these affairs could always be counted on as being enjoyed by all who attended them. Our sisterhood women were there baking the best hamantashen for Purim, the greatest latkes for Chanukah, or providing juicy, red apples and chocolate candy for Simchas Torah. Rhoda Bernstein, Celia Segal, Jean Striar, Marian Flash, Bessie Katz, Ida Less, Ida Bytenski and Barbara Podolsky were just a few of those diligent workers who gave of themselves for these purposes.

1960 marked the year Rabbi Henry Isaacs and his lovely wife Roz joined our community. In so doing, they both played an active role in the sisterhood. The Rabbi, on many occasions, was enlisted to entertain at the monthly meetings. His musical abilities were a highlight and he was even invited to speak on various topics. One scintillating talk was on the subject "Why men do not sit with the women in the Synagogue and why women do not sit with the men in the Synagogue." This topic provided the meeting with a lively, but pleasant discussion. Roz Isaacs never seemed to say "no" and volunteered her time and energies to serve in areas where most others refused. She was instrumental in raising vast sums of money for the good of the organization.

Over the years there were a variety of funds set up to fulfill special needs of the shul. The Remembrance Fund, kept by Dena Slep for many years, was a means of memorializing those who have passed on. The Happy Day Fund was an area where contributions could be made for happy occasions. Ruth Striar is now chairman of this fund.

The Life Membership Fund, instituted by Mim Viner with encouragement from Sarah Striar and her family, was originally set up for the betterment of the kitchen facility. With the first bronze plaque donated by Mim herself in honor of the sisterhood, the funds raised to date reach well over \$6,000. At the present time, this fund is used for emergency purposes only.

To honor its 25th anniversary and the rededication of the Sisterhood in 1965, plans were set in motion to remodel the building. The tin walls were replaced with wood paneling, the spittoons were removed, the Jewish star on the ceiling was covered with a dropped ceiling and new lighting was added. Carpeting, new lavatories, an enlarged bema and a new ark were all included in the job. But, it

wasn't until 1979 that the vestry was remodeled and 1981 that the kitchen, under the superb guidance of Priscilla Williams and her committee, was completely redone with all new appliances, dishes, cookware, etc. purchased. At this time also, the sisterhood took responsibility for the beautification of the grounds, and a garden in memory of Pat Viner was donated by her family.

A Tree of Life, constructed by former member Tom Kirwan, enables people to donate a silver or gold leaf honoring or memorializing an occasion. The first leaf placed on the tree honors the Fifteenth Anniversary of Rabbi and Mrs. Isaacs.

It was with the suggestion of Nettie Shapero in the year 1971 that the sisterhood embarked upon the first of many successful fashion shows and luncheons. Rose King, Nancy's, Cortell-Segal's, Ward's, Porteous, and Doncaster Sport have been the contributors of the fashions these past 12 years.

The Beth Abraham Players also had their debut in 1971 with the production of "Shalom, Shalom". Written by Norma Berg, with a cast of Beth Abraham members and friends, it was open to the general public. Because of the play's huge financial and social success, other productions periodically have been staged. "Come Blow Your Horn," "The Odd Couple," "Fat Can Be Funny," "Catskill Capers," were all performed.

Over the years the sisterhood has worked in cooperation with the local NCSY and Jr. NCSY groups, helping to make their existence in this community possible. The sisterhood has also provided all the refreshments at the Selichos time and meals for residents at the local hospitals during the holidays. Finally, it has always been instrumental in organizing the means and finding the people to purchase and donate any needed items for the Synagogue.

Rabbi Isaacs has often remarked that without the Beth Abraham Sisterhood, the synagogue would be an empty place. "You have brought life to this building, you have added your own special touch in beautifying it, in bringing warmth and tradition where it belongs."



The Sisterhood celebrates its Twenty-fifth Anniversary.
Al Bernstein, Louis Rolnick, Rabbi Isaacs, Bea Gottlieb, Ruth Striar, Roz Isaacs

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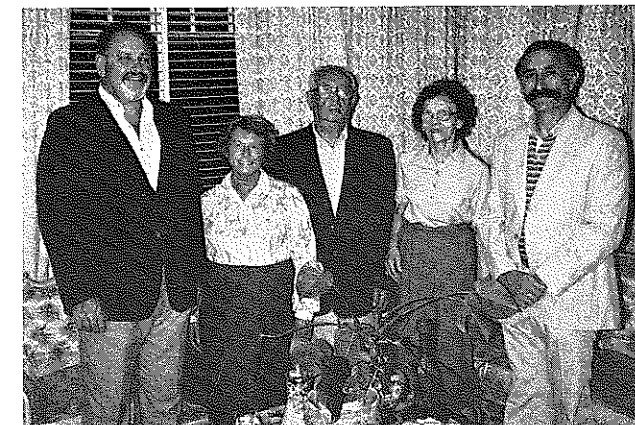
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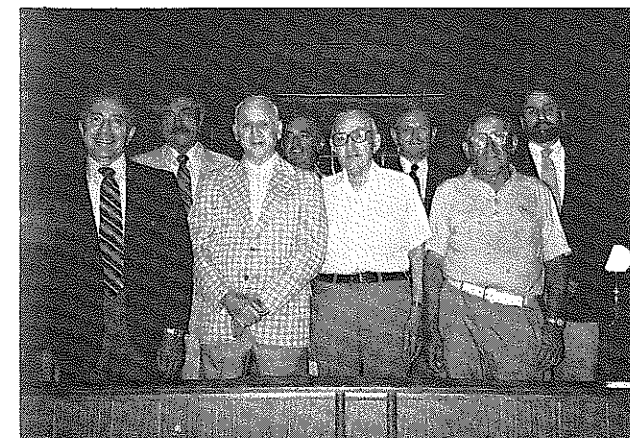
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A TRIBUTE TO RABBI ISAACS



The story of Beth Abraham Synagogue would surely be incomplete if the years of inspired leadership by Rabbi Henry J. Isaacs were not emphasized.

He came to our Synagogue from Loring Air Force Base some 23 years ago with his wife, Roz and baby daughter Esther. He came to a disorganized congregation with bickering and dissension rampant - with factions and feuding - a congregation looking to be spiritually led - a Synagogue without beauty or hope: surely the many rabbis before had lasted too briefly to make an impact. To a young rabbi, even of Rabbi Isaacs' stature, the situation looked hopeless. The story from then until now speaks for itself.

For now stands a beautiful Synagogue - a Hebrew Day School that through the years has graduated countless numbers of young orthodox Jews - who are taking their places in the professional and business world, and many community members who have been touched by his life.

And what of his congregants? We love him, for Rabbi Isaacs is not only our teacher and spiritual leader - but he is also our friend!

A TRIBUTE TO ROZ ISAACS



The life of a "Rebbitzin" is not easy. Always under public scrutiny, she must lead an exemplary life. Rosa Leah Hirsch Isaacs is such a person. Roz, as she is affectionately known, is not only an outstanding helpmate to her husband, Rabbi Henry Isaacs, but, as the mother of five children, has always put her family's needs before her own. And what makes her even more unique, is her concern for Beth Abraham, her synagogue for the past twenty-three years. Her commitment to the shul and to the Sisterhood has been incomparable. When a helping hand is needed - from sorting rummage to grating potatoes for Chanukah latkes, Roz is always there.

She has, almost single handedly, over the past twenty years, raised thousands of dollars for Beth Abraham. But it is for more than the money Roz has raised that we extend this tribute. The generosity of her heart far outweighs any material gains. No one is ever turned away from her door. Strangers from all over the world, who somehow find their way to Bangor, find a warm welcome from Roz. Her warm smile and innate sense of goodness, have endeared her to all who know her. Not only is her family fortunate to have her as their guiding light, Beth Abraham shares in their good fortune as well. Roz Isaacs is a true Jewish woman of merit. May she continue to be a part of our lives for many years.

A TRIBUTE TO OUR PHILANTHROPISTS

Over the years most synagogues could boast of individuals who gave generously of their time and means. Beth Abraham, though small in membership compared to many other congregations, too, has had members whose philanthropic efforts have touched and affected countless lives. We proudly profile on these pages two outstanding examples of "Tzedakim" - righteous people upon whom the almighty shone his favor.

JAMES GIMPEL STRIAR
(1891 - 1959)



James Striar arrived in the United States from Stobichva, Russia, in 1902 at the age of 11. He married Sarah Schoenbaum in 1910. During his lifetime he was an outstanding and dedicated benefactor to countless persons, religious and secular educational institutions, the state of Israel and countless varied charities of all faiths.

He was a positive, proud, but humble, loyal and devout Jew. He loved his people and its Torah. He was zealous, open-hearted and open-handed to all mankind and to the land of his forefathers. He brought genuine happiness and a sense of self-fulfillment to many, for he had a genius for involving those who had some share of material substance on behalf of those who had too little. Anyone who turned to him for a helping hand found an ally and a friend. He truly believed, as he many times stated, "My wealth is the Lord's. I am only the trustee".

James Gimpel Striar was a great man and known all over America because his life was animated by a profound idea ... the perpetuation of Torah-true Judaism which he loved with his whole heart and his whole being. He therefore placed his genius for leadership and business enterprise at the service of Jewish learning, to provide the wherewithal that would enable scholars to pursue their studies, at least in minimal security.

He was a man with many sterling qualities which made him one of the most unforgettable of human beings. He had courage of body and courage of mind. His word was sacred, both in matters of business and philanthropy. Although he had gained international fame, he always remained a devout man of deep humility.

He fought and argued for numerous causes against many, never for his own personal gain or prestige, but for the benefit of others in the local or world community ... good education, kashrus, philanthropies, upholding of Halacha and the State of Israel, to mention a few.

Many, including the State of Israel, received his bounty and American democracy had his consecrated loyalty. Judaism and Americanism were happily blended in his remarkable personality.

His memory will long be in the minds of those who knew him and the fruits of his deeds will long remain with many generations.

BESSIE MOTIUK

1887 - 1977

**"MOTHER OF WIDOWS, ORPHANS & WOUNDED
SOLDIERS OF ISRAEL"**



As far back as I can remember my Aunt Bessie always had a cause. As a small child I vaguely recall my family talking about a person in Canada working to get relatives out of Europe during World War II. This person was Bessie Motiuk. She and her husband, Abe, came to live with my grandparents when I was five or six years old. Bessie was different from her sisters and other women of her generation.

She did not cook, nor was she interested in other domestic duties. Her cause at that time was to obtain a patent for an ointment she and her husband made. In spite of ridicule and criticism from her female peers she would not give up her fight for a patent. She was a liberated woman long before it became fashionable.

When Israel became a nation, Bessie's cause and almost sole purpose in life was to raise funds for the young country through the sale of Israel Bonds. Bessie would tie up the telephone for hours soliciting numerous individuals to buy bonds, much to the dismay of my grandmother. She referred to these people as her customers. She would open her conversation with a friendly greeting to her prospect asking about his health or his family, and without catching her breath, she would immediately convince this defenseless individual to buy another Israel Bond. No one had enough Israel Bonds according to Bessie. She had her list of customers whom she called again and again. Most of her customers resigned themselves to the fact that they could not say no to Bessie after the sale was made. She ended by saying, "And may you live to be 120."

Her greatest cause began after the first Arab-Israeli War when she established the "Widows, Orphans and Wounded Soldiers of Israel Fund." To her there was no greater cause than to raise funds for these unfortunate victims, and there was no one in the Jewish community of Bangor who would not be contacted by Bessie to contribute. It never ceased to amaze me how the \$5 and \$10 donations over the years totaled thousands of dollars. I regret that a record was never kept to determine the final sum which she raised.

One day she informed me that I was to be honored along with Norman Minsky. The two of us were to be her assistants. At first I was terrified. I imagined myself having to make phone calls soliciting funds. This would have been far from my favorite pastime! I was relieved to learn that Norman and I were to assist her in depositing the funds since she could not get to the bank. Also, I was to have the additional Mitzvah of being her secretary. As I said earlier, you couldn't say no to Bessie.

I now fondly recall the many afternoons when I would sit down at the kitchen table with my aunt to write letters to the President of Israel. It was the kind of task that one does not really appreciate until one no longer has the honor of doing it. The procedure was always the same. First she would instruct her husband, Abe, that she was not to be disturbed. Then there would be several minutes of silence while she collected her thoughts and I would sit ready with pen in hand. To take down every word as I knew I would have to repeat the letter to her several times so she could be sure nothing was left out. She always began her letters with the same greeting, "My dear President of Israel and for all Israel." Then she would mention how the community of Bangor had raised the enclosed funds. She never took credit for herself. She said that if it were not for the people of Bangor there would never have been a fund. She felt she honored people by mentioning them by name in these letters to the President.

It has been six years since I wrote Bessie's last letter to the President of Israel. I miss that honor which she bestowed upon me. During the last two years of her life, even though she was confined to a nursing home, the best medicine she had was the telephone from which she would constantly call her customers and would say "Hello sweetheart" ... "And may you live to be 120."

Darrell Cooper