

# Beth Israel's Centennial Celebration

The year 1988 certainly was a time for celebrations. Beth Israel was officially organized 100 years ago, the shul on York Street was built 75 years ago, the Jewish Community Center was established 50 years ago and the state of Israel was declared 40 years ago. Jews across the globe had reason to celebrate, especially in Bangor.

Planning for the centennial celebration was under way and it was to be a social as well as religious experience. Beth Israel formed a Centennial Steering Committee to plan the year's events. The committee was made up of David Adelman, Paula Adelman, Annette Chason, Pamela B. Cohen, William Cohen, Fran D'Errico, Arnold Garson, Susan Garson, Adele Miller, Norman Minsky, Arlene Rosen, Robert Rosen, Nathaniel Rosenblatt, Susan Schonberger, Donna Stern, Richard I. Stone and Patti A. Tableman.

The first event was the rededication of the synagogue May 16. About 275 people came to the synagogue that Sunday evening to hear Rabbi Harold S. Kushner of Temple Israel of Natick, Mass., deliver the keynote address. He told the audience that the plague of the 20th century was loneliness and that the cure for that condition was a sense of community. A sense of community could be found in the synagogue and in God, said Kushner, author of the best-selling books *"When Bad Things Happen to Good People"* and *"When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough."*

Schonberger, who spoke before Kushner, also discussed the theme of activities and involvement. He told the congregants and guests to rededicate their hearts as well as Beth Israel and to show a strong



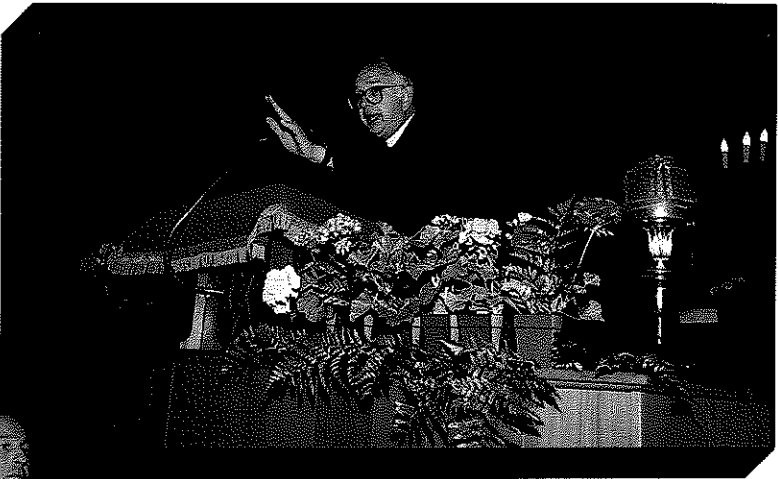
Members of the Centennial Steering Committee include (front, left to right) Pam Cohen, Fran D'Errico, Patti Tableman, Norman Minsky, Paula Adelman, Annette Chason, (back, left to right) Susan Schonberger, Arlene Rosen, Robert Rosen, Donna Stern, Arnold Garson, David Adelman, Nathaniel Rosenblatt and Adele Miller. (Brian Higgins Photo)

commitment by attending services regularly. He said the members could teach future generations more through example than through words.

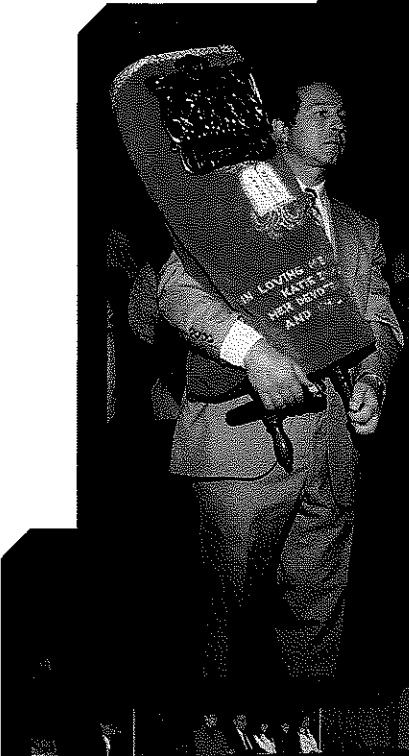
After the program, the sisterhood sponsored a reception in the vestry where members and guests could mingle and eat thousands of pastries made by the women of Beth Israel. President Minsky praised the work of Chairwomen Adele Miller and Annette Chason and the other members of the synagogue who made the evening possible. In addition to the support from the sisterhood, the Jewish Community Endowment Associates gave the shul a \$5,000 grant to help pay for guest speakers throughout the centennial celebration.

Bruce Kaley wrote in the shul newsletter that he left the event "with the feeling of having visited a friend's home, sharing a cup of coffee over stimulating conversation."

## Beth Israel's rededication in pictures



Rabbi Harold S. Kushner (top photo) stresses a point during his keynote address at Beth Israel's rededication May 16, 1988. David Adelman (left photo) holds a Torah during the Torah procession, which also included Samuel Rolsky, Abraham Shapiro, Robert Fogelman, Marshall Stern, Miles Theeman and David Simonds. About 275 people attended the program (bottom photo), which was the first of many events the congregation scheduled to celebrate its centennial. (Brian Higgins Photos)



The May 16 rededication program read as follows:

Sounding of the shofar - Scott Rapaport  
 Flower presentation - Beth Israel Religious  
 School K-2 pupils  
 "Ma Tov" - Scott Rapaport  
 Prayer - Rabbi Schonberger  
 Opening of the Ark - Norman Minsky  
 Torah procession - Samuel Rolsky, Abraham Shapiro,  
 Robert Fogelman, Marshall Stern, Miles Theeman,  
 David Simonds and David Adelman  
 "Eitz Chaim" - Scott Rapaport  
 Prayer - Rabbi Schonberger  
 Closing of the Ark - Norman Minsky  
 "Hallel," and "Shema: And You Shall Teach Them To  
 Your Children" - Beth Israel's Children's Choir  
 Welcome - Norman Minsky  
 Rabbi's Greetings - Rabbi Schonberger  
 Keynote Address - Rabbi Harold S. Kushner  
 Concluding Remarks - Adele Miller  
 "Yerushalayim shel Zahav" - Scott Rapaport

Beth Israel had successfully completed its first of many events to celebrate the centennial.

The shul's next event was Sunday, Sept. 18. Author David S. Wyman, who wrote *"The Abandonment of the Jews,"* spoke to more than 150 people at the Jewish Community Center as the first speaker in the Sylvia Friedman Memorial Lecture Series. Nathaniel Rosenblatt was chairman of the event.

The following month, more than 250 people came to the shul to hear Rabbi Chaim Potok deliver the keynote address at the 100th anniversary Convocation Sunday, Oct. 16. People came from across the state, and Rabbi Alan Kalinsky, who now lives in Los Angeles, came up for the occasion from an event he was attending in Boston.

Before Potok delivered his speech, President Minsky read an article from the Oct. 7, 1897, Bangor Daily Commercial about the opening of the Beth Israel Synagogue on Center Street. To a round of laughter, Minsky read the closing paragraph of the story: "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."

Minsky also unrolled a scroll from the All Souls Congregational Church congratulating Beth Israel on its 100th anniversary. Among the signatures on the scroll was that of G. Clifton Eames, who is the grandson of George C. Eames, former treasurer of the First Church of Christ Scientist. After the 1911 Bangor fire, George C. Eames forwarded money that his church had collected to local church groups which lost their buildings in the fire. George C. Eames sent a

check for \$22.42 to Beth Israel Treasurer Max Cohen on May 22, 1911.

Potok, who is an internationally acclaimed author and educator, told the audience how reading opened his eyes to a new world. He said that from reading books he learned language could be fused to create worlds out of words.

Creating those other worlds led into his main topic of how people reacted to ideas. "We see things differently today than we did. Two hundred years ago, people lived in a small and particular world, where they learned their values. They met no strangers and were exposed to no new ideas," Potok said.

"Today," he said, "we are all inundated with new ideas, new values. They stream into our small and particular world." Potok then described how people dealt with these new ideas and values. He said that people who had deep values were unlikely to be swayed by other competing ideas. But, he added, the weaker our values, the more likely the peripheral ideas bombarding our value system would have an impact. "A person becomes a battleground of ideas," he said.

Potok's books explore these battles of ideas. Among the books he has written are *"The Chosen," "The Promise," "In the Beginning," "Wanderings," "The Book of Lights"* and *"Davita's Harp."*

William and Pamela Cohen organized the Convocation.

The celebration then moved from scholarly pursuits to comedy. The synagogue sponsored an evening with comedian Robert Klein at the Maine Center for the Arts on Nov. 5. Donna Stern was the event chairwoman.

Also in November, the congregation again participated in the interfaith Thanksgiving service sponsored by the Bangor Area Clergy Fellowship. This time, the service was held at the First Unitarian Church.

Rabbi Schonberger spoke about the courage and strength of the Pilgrims, and praised the six women who did all the work for the three-day celebration for 91 Indians and 56 settlers.

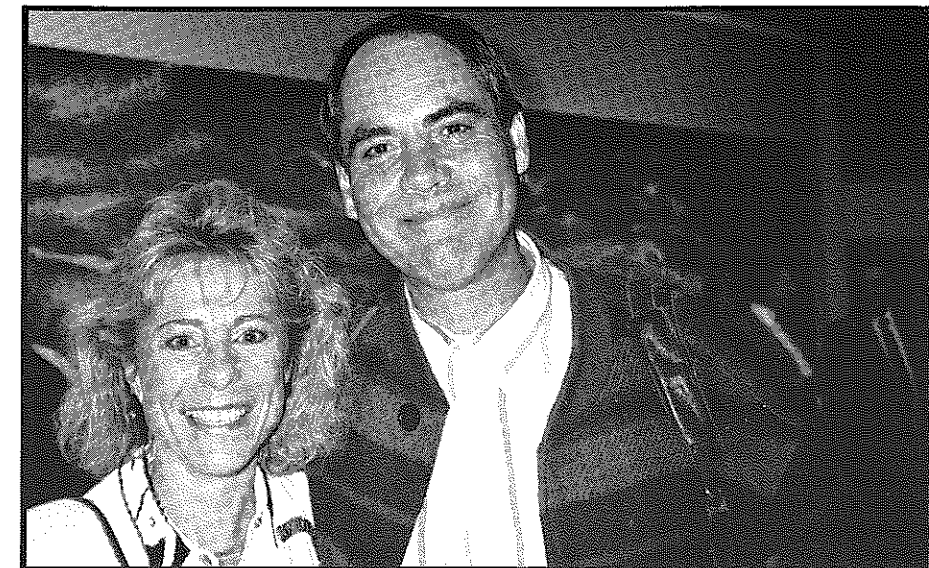
He also talked about Sarah Josepha Hale, the journalist who began crusading for a day of thanksgiving in 1821. He called it "a day to extend our arms to one another."

Jewish participation in the services was strengthened when another rabbi joined the event in 1988. Shoshana Perry, the student rabbi who serves Beth El Congregation, told those gathered the Hebrew story of the town divided by the wall. The two groups living on either side of the wall knew nothing of the other's existence.

One day, both groups happened to leave their houses at the same time to walk to their shuls. As each



Rabbi Chaim Potok looks out at the congregation after delivering his speech at the Oct. 16, 1988, Convocation. (Deena Weinstein Photo)



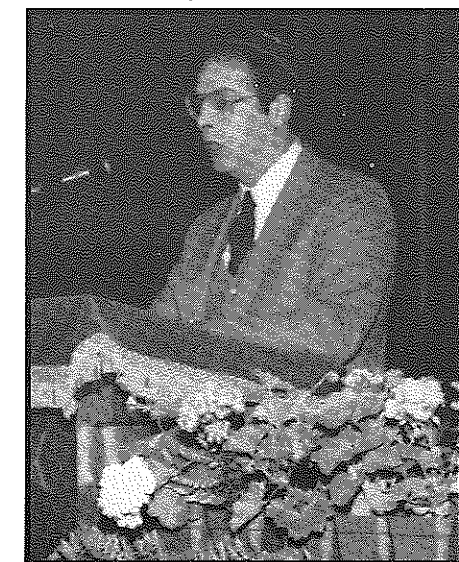
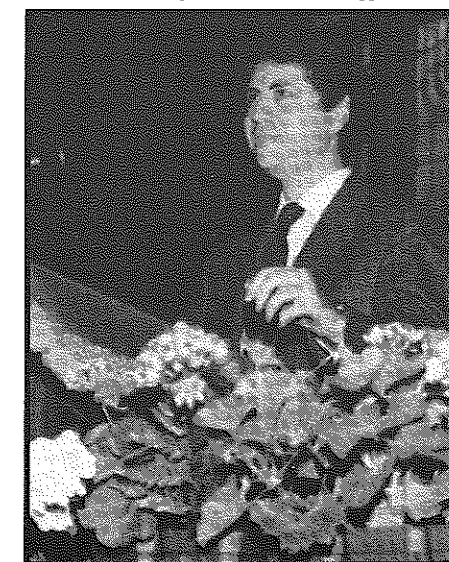
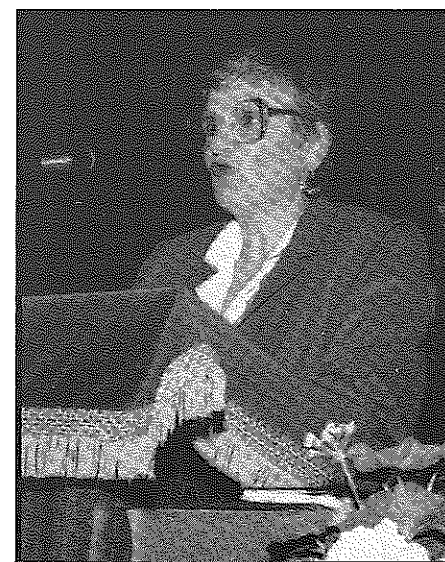
Robert Klein chats with Donna Stern after his Nov. 5, 1988, performance at the Maine Center for the Arts.



Sam Rolsky, Marshall Stern, Norman Minsky, David Simonds and Abraham Shapiro stand on the bimah during Beth Israel's rededication May 16, 1988. (Brian Higgins Photo)



David S. Wyman spoke to more than 150 people Sept. 18, 1988, at the Jewish Community Center.



Adele Miller, Rabbi Joseph P. Schonberger and Scott Rapaport were among the many people who participated in the May 16 rededication.

Brian Higgins Photos



group sang, the two songs rose above the wall and met at the top, where they joined and the wall of rock collapsed.

Perry said she was thankful for a "community that breaks walls down and joins together to praise God for Thanksgiving."

Truly the Jewish participation has added something special to the interfaith services and the community of Bangor.

Other events planned for the centennial celebration were a March 12, 1989, showing of "*Memories of Me*"; and a May 9, 1989, lecture jointly sponsored with the Bangor Theological Seminary to celebrate the seminary's 175th anniversary.

The March 12 showing of the movie was special to Beth Israel members and other residents of Bangor. "*Memories of Me*," featuring Alan King and Billy Crystal, was directed by Henry Winkler and Robert Rolsky of Bangor. Through Rolsky's efforts Winkler donated the film, and Hoyt's Cinema donated its facilities on Stillwater Avenue in honor of Beth Israel's centennial.

The May 9 lecture at the seminary's Wellman Commons featured Rabbi Neil Gillman, associate professor of Jewish philosophy at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Gillman, the dean of the seminary's rabbinical school from 1972 to 1981, also teaches in the adult education program at the Park Avenue Synagogue in New York City. His lecture in Bangor, which was attended by more than 100 people, was titled "*How Jews Do Theology: Metaphors for God in Biblical and Post-Biblical Texts*."

Also at the event, Beth Israel presented to the seminary's library a set of five books titled "*Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary*" in honor of Stephen Szikszai, the George A. Gordon professor of Old Testament, Language and Literature at the Bangor school. Szikszai joined the Bangor Theological Seminary in 1955 and retired in 1987.

To preserve the past, the synagogue also published a journal tracing the history of Congregation Beth Israel. Many people dedicated their time to produce the journal, which expanded on the book published by the shul in 1963.

The editorial side was headed by James A. Emple. Emple, a copy editor at the Bangor Daily News and instructor of journalism at the University of Maine, was assisted in his research by John Ripley, a reporter at the Bangor Daily News. The other contributors were Roxanne Moore Saucier, Riva Berman, Ruth-Ellen Cohen and Rick Levasseur.

The advertising portion of the book was divided into two parts. Paula and David Adelman and Susan and Arnold Garson chaired the Advertising Com-

mittee. Members of the committee were: Marilyn Braveman, Norman Braveman, Lester Cohen, Fran D'Errico, Sidney Epstein, Alan Glazier, Marjorie Goodman, Stanley Israel, Bruce Kaley, Constance Kelsey, Bernard Miller, Freda Miller, Sanford Miller, Jules Mogul, A. David Rapaport, Samuel Rolsky, Irwin Singer, Donna Stern, Patti Tableman and Miles Theeman.

Arlene and Robert Rosen headed the Memorial Committee. Members were: Marcia Braveman, Carla Cohen, Hazel Goldsmith, Adele Miller and Henrietta Rolnick.

## Preparing For The Future

With the celebration in full swing, the board of directors looked toward ways of preserving the institution as it prepared for its second century. The synagogue took steps to create an endowment fund to see that the synagogue would be financially secure in the future.

President Minsky said the days when the shul relied on single contributions to erase operating deficits were over. Relying on day-to-day financing was not the way to ensure financial stability.

Richard Stone was made chairman of the Second Century Fund, which has a goal of \$250,000. By the summer of 1988, more than \$150,000 in pledges had been made.

The synagogue established six levels of recognition for people who contributed to the fund: Level 1, \$1 to \$999; Level 2, \$1,000 to \$2,499; Level 3, \$2,500 to \$4,999; Level 4, \$5,000 to \$7,499; Level 5, \$7,500 to \$9,999; Level 6, \$10,000 and above.

All contributions will be inscribed on an honor roll that will be displayed in the congregation's library. Gifts of \$1,000 and above will be recognized on a separate plaque.

Minsky said the congregation needed a secretary and a youth worker, adding that the Second Century Fund could provide for those positions. The synagogue has been able to get by without those positions because Susan Schonberger does an enormous amount of work, Minsky said. He added that the congregation should not place so many responsibilities on the shoulders of one person.

As of May 25, 1989, the following people had contributed to the Second Century Fund:

Mr. and Mrs. David Adelman, Elizabeth Bass, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Chason, Dr. and Mrs. Sidney Chason, Allan Cohen, Mr. and Mrs. Lester Cohen, Mr. and Mrs. William M. Cohen, Mr. and Mrs. David Cutler, Bertha Dennis, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Dennis, Sylvia Dennis, Mr. and Mrs. David Dorsky,

Irving Emple, Mollie Emple, Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Epstein, the Schiro family, the Kagan Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Marshall Frankel, Lena Friedman, Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Garson, Mr. and Mrs. Alan Glazier, Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Glazier, the heirs of David and Bessie Goldberg.

Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Goldsmith, Jerome Goldsmith, Sam Goldsmith, Hilda Goodman, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Goodman, Riva Berman Gotlib, Mr. and Mrs. Ed Gross, Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Israel, Nathan Kamen, Mr. and Mrs. Ed Keith, the estate of Jack Koritzky, Mr. and Mrs. James Koritzky.

Mr. and Mrs. Bernie Kubetz, Israel Laeger, Mr. and Mrs. David Leen, Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Macoby, Adele Miller, Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Miller, Mr. and Mrs. Sanford Miller, Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Minsky, Norman Minsky, Mr. and Mrs. Jules Mogul and Dr. and Mrs. Irving Paul.

Mr. and Mrs. David Rapaport, Mr. and Mrs. Sam Rolsky, Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Rosenblatt, the family of Abraham Rudman, Mrs. Samuel Rudman, Mr. and Mrs. Mark Schnur, Peter Schwartz, Mr. and Mrs. Louis Segal, Dr. and Mrs. Ben Shapero, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Shur, Violet Shur, Dr. and Mrs. Hans Shurman.

Mr. and Mrs. David Simons, Mr. and Mrs. Irwin Singer, Mr. and Mrs. Marshall Stern, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Stone, Mr. and Mrs. Miles Theeman, Mr. and Mrs. Herb Trager, Nathan Weinstein, Mr. and Mrs. Alan White-Rogers.

Although many names of contributors to the Second Century Fund appear in this book for the first time, it should not be inferred that their contributions are limited to this one goal. Many people have contributed their time and money to improve Jewish life in Bangor in various ways. Whether it's serving on committees or providing funding for major projects, it takes participation from everybody to keep our Jewish community moving ahead.

In years past, philanthropists such as Joseph Emple and Max Kagan frequently contributed time and money to help our Jewish community grow. Although the contributions from past philanthropists remain, it takes additional work and funding to continue the progress already made. Many people have been mentioned throughout the book and others, whose names do not appear with great frequency, nonetheless should be remembered and thanked for their efforts and good will toward the community and shul.

The board of directors of Congregation Beth Israel has recognized six shul members over the years for their contributions to the synagogue. The last person the directors honored certainly deserves praise and thanks for his labors to help his fellow congregants. In the citation awarded to Samuel Rolsky in

1986, Henry Segal wrote: "As we approach our centennial year we shall pay homage to our founders and builders of Congregation Beth Israel. You, too, will be accorded the recognition of a builder in the generic sense by future generations."

Rolsky, who is a past president, treasurer and baal tefillah, is the current Gabbai Rishon. His service to the synagogue for more than 40 years is a glowing example of the type of hard work that has made Beth Israel what it is today. "The name of Samuel Rolsky is synonymous with philanthropic and educational endeavors. ... He is truly a defender of the faith," Segal wrote in 1986. The other five members honored by the board of directors are: Abraham O. Emple, Harry Epstein, Rabbi Avraham Freedman, Myer Minsky and Abraham Stern.

## Expansion Plans

Building for the future meant more to Beth Israel than the establishment of the Second Century Fund. Beth Israel began taking steps for a 4,000-square-foot addition to the shul on the Adams Street side. The addition, a gift of Sidney and Helen Epstein of Bangor, will be used as a function room, while the existing vestry will be renovated to include a chapel, an all-purpose room and new office space. The single-story addition will be stylish and complement the existing building, Sidney Epstein said. Terrien Architects of Portland was selected to design the addition. Epstein predicted that construction would begin in the spring of 1989.

This gift from the Epsteins is of great importance to the growth of our synagogue. While this is a major project, it should be pointed out that over the years the Epsteins have been involved in many projects that have benefited the Jewish community. Although he remains private about his contributions to the community, Sidney Epstein has been associated with many Jewish organizations, served as president of the Jewish Community Council and played an instrumental part in the 1980 synagogue renovation project.

From its small beginnings 100 years ago, Congregation Beth Israel now takes pride preparing for its second century. With much celebration and hard work, shul members can look toward the next 100 years knowing that what is being planned now will provide the congregation with the means for a successful future.

The history of Congregation Beth Israel was written by Henry H. Segal and the Jubilee Editorial Committee in 1963. It has been updated for the centennial celebration by James Adam Emple.