

It would be of great interest to write about each of the founders. Unfortunately, the facts are not available. Some of the founders no longer have any descendants among the present congregation. Others probably left Bangor and all that is known of the rest are dates of their birth and death from the cemetery records.

Of some, however, we do have accurate information and from the brief character sketches which follow, a pattern emerges which enables us to see the founders of the congregation as living human beings, rather than faded names on a dusty record.

Marks Goldman, the first gabbai, was born in Lithuania in 1862. He came to this country with Ezra Sarhazy and Yechiel Cooperstach and the three became friends and companions.

He was known as a strict disciplinarian, but had his moments of relaxation, particularly at weddings, at which the trio of Goldman, Cooperstach and Sarhazy consumed record amounts of liquid refreshment.

Grandchildren of Cooperstach relate that their grandfather ran a "private distilling business" and kept his boon companions well supplied with his product — which must have been one of merit, for Goldman lived to 89 and Sarhazy to 87.

Goldman served as gabbai from 1888 until 1897 and then moved to the Midwest. He was married twice and had eight children; three daughters by his first wife and three sons and two daughters by his second.

Ezriel Lemel Allen, affectionately known as "Lemke," was born in 1858 in a small town on the outskirts of Grodno. He arrived in the United States in 1882 and soon made his way to Bangor. Steamship records indicate that Mr. Allen booked passage to Bangor on the steamer Penobscot along with a "suitable stock of wares of all descriptions." All the pioneers had much in common. Most of them were all young

men, under 30. All but three were unmarried and all began their careers by peddling from town to town within a radius of 100 miles. In less than three years Lemke Allen was able to open a clothing store on Exchange Street. He had brought his wife, Julia, to the new land and here his first son was born. Arthur was the first offspring of the Beth Israel founders to be born in Bangor. He followed in the footsteps of his father and became a director when he was 21. He also served on the Building Committee in 1912. Lemke and Julia had four more children: Minnie, Sarah, Henry and Harry. Harry was a member of the Chevra Kadisha and was active in synagogue affairs.

Grandson Edward, son of Minnie, carried on the Lemke Allen tradition by serving on several committees and the board of directors. Edward also was active in civic and fraternal affairs.

Edward and Florence Allen had three children: Merrill, Max and Richard. Richard Allen still lives in Bangor, Merrill lives in Cape Elizabeth, and Max moved out of state. Florence, who is still a member of Congregation Beth Israel, has 11 grandchildren.

Israel Goldman was still in his teens when he came to America and helped organize the congregation. He was born in Grodno and was orphaned at a very early age. He engaged in a profitable peddling venture and later became associated with Hyman Lait in the "Yankee Clipper" door to door enterprise. He was a successful retail clothier and was known for his sharp wit. The story is told that when he bought a place of business in Washington County from a local financier, the former owner complained that he was selling only to get away from Jews who had begun to infiltrate into the area, and he didn't know where to move to be sure there wouldn't be any Jews around him. "That's easy," Goldman was supposed to have replied, "move to prison — you won't find any Jews there!"

## CHAPTER 3

### Building Of The First Synagogue

Hazan Goldenkopf, when he arrived in Bangor in 1895, brought with him an additional Sefer Torah on loan from Temple Ohabei Shalom in Boston. He noted that the rented synagogue quarters in the Granite Block on Park Street were quite small, but it was the energetic laymen who actually stimulated the reorganization of the Beth Israel Society and the construction of the first synagogue on the lot at 114 Center St. Indirectly, too, the arrival in New York of a compatriot, the renowned preacher and Talmudic scholar Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Vilna, spurred religious life by inspiring the communal leaders to organize themselves in a more definite manner. The outcome, a new synagogue and a congregation with formal rules and regulations, was of a national character rather than a purely local accomplishment. In 1897 the necessity for a new building became apparent. The minutes of the congregation record a memorandum signed by Max Cohen, Joseph Byer, Israel Goldman, Lemke Allen, Joe Bernstein, Harry Cohen, David Snyder and Simon Kominsky, as the board of directors, stating that they thereby formed themselves into a "congregation to be known and distinguished by the name of Congregation Beth Israel in the city of Bangor." Marks Goldman who had served as gabbai of the informal group known as the Beth Israel Society is no longer mentioned in the minutes. We must assume that he moved away as several itinerant peddlers already had done. Max Cohen, Harry Cohen and Simon Kominsky were immediately authorized to negotiate the purchase of the lot "not to exceed \$200."

These founders, drawing upon their experience with synagogal matters, recognized that at this juncture a formal organization had to be created. With Harry Cohen as acting presiding officer, a meeting was held at the home of Lemke Allen, to receive the report of the committee appointed to secure the site. Before that pressing business was presented, Cohen observed that, although it had been decided to buy a piece of ground, the congregation had no legal powers and their determinations were not binding on the members. To correct this situation he offered a resolution that those present should agree "that in order to promote our Holy Religion, and establish a proper congregation in this city," they form themselves into a legally constituted congregation, and bind themselves "one to the other that we will assist if required, to form a constitution, and strictly abide by same." The president was

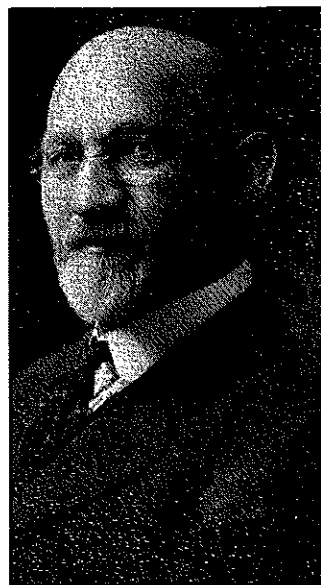
instructed to consult with "lawyer Cook." Harry Cohen thereupon suggested that new officers be properly elected, and he forthwith divested himself of his own office. The other members of the committee followed suit. The people at the meeting proceeded to elect Max Cohen, president; Joe Byer, vice president; Morris N. Golden, secretary; and Harry Cohen, treasurer. At the same time two gabbaim were added to the officers: Simon Kominsky and Joe Bernstein, first and second gabbaim in the order named.

However, all did not proceed smoothly after the brave beginning. The Jews then in Bangor were far from affluent. The funds did not pour in overabundantly, although the membership subscribed nearly \$1,500. This sum reflected their ability and a genuine spiritual interest in the project, which as a start seemed to promise success. Almost as soon as the project had gotten under way, notice came from the owners of the Park Street building where the congregation was occupying a rented second-floor room, giving them notice to vacate immediately. The short notice compelled Max Cohen to apply for an extension, which in view of the positive building program, was granted.

The congregation was called together and informed that further funds were required before the Veazie National Bank would grant a mortgage loan. Max Cohen spurred efforts to raise \$1,000 within a few days. It was decided that, in order to secure the funds, the four cornerstones and the two doorposts would be sold to the highest bidder in return for synagogal honors, following the old Jewish custom. Simon Kominsky bought the first cornerstone for \$150, Harry Cohen the second for \$100, Max Cohen the third for \$85, and Morris Rosen the fourth for \$75. Israel Goldman bought the right-hand doorpost for \$50, and Joe Byer the left-hand doorpost for \$50. A total of \$510 was thus subscribed and the balance was raised by the general membership as part payment on seats.

At last the work on the building could proceed. On the west side of Center Street, about midway in the block from Cumberland Street to Garland Street, adjacent to the lot now occupied by the United Jewish Chapel, the first synagogue building in Maine began to rise. On Aug. 22, 1897, the cornerstones were laid with blessings asked for the generous men in whose names they were dedicated.

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.

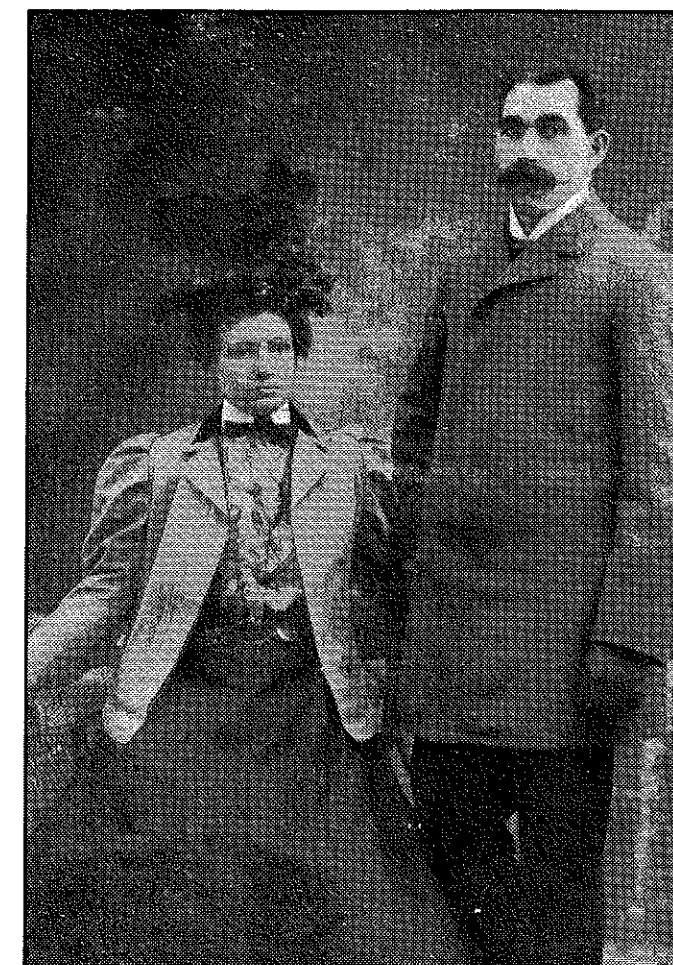
This anti-Semitism spurred Theodor Herzl to organize the movement for a Jewish state. In 1897, the very same year the first Beth Israel synagogue was dedicated, Herzl convened the first Zionist Congress in Basel.

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.

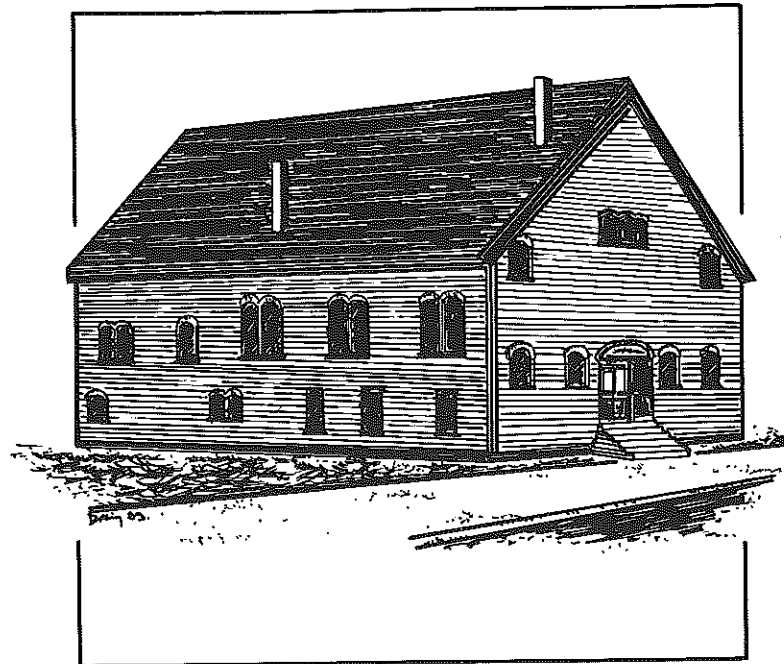
The room is ventilated adequately and is lighted by numerous windows. At night it will be illuminated by electricity. More than 50 incandescents are now being put in for that purpose. The four altar posts, commonly lit with candles, will be fitted, in this modern tabernacle, with crowns, where they will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

## CHAPTER 4

### The Formative Years

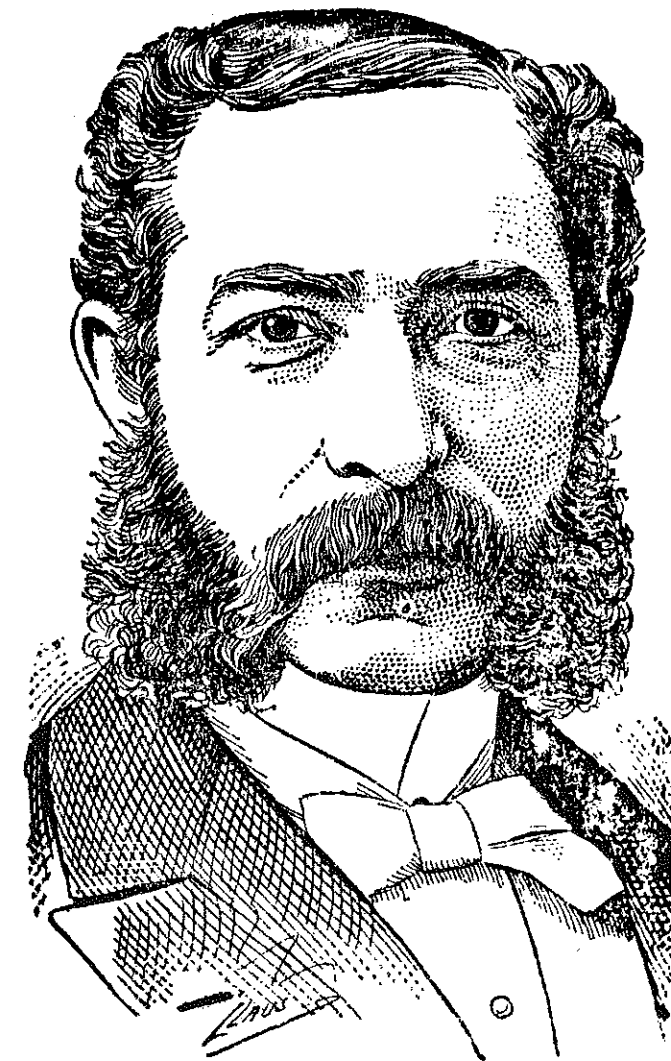
Whether or not Rabbi Lasker directly aided in the formation of Beth Israel, there is no question about the fact that he was often called upon as a "friend in need" in the early days. It was he who dedicated the synagogue on Center Street. It was he to whom the congregation turned for advice and it was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