

"Bangor Fire" Destroys Synagogue

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

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

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

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

In 1909, Max Cohen was called back to the presidency for a second time, and his leadership and enthusiasm inspired the Congregation to commit itself officially to a

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

To insure the success of the campaign for funds for the new synagogue, letters were addressed to other congregations as well as to a few individual Jews of world-famed wealth. Even before all these generous gifts were received, the building committee had been instructed to sell the original building and commence building a new one in the "Jewish Settlement." The cost of such an undertaking "should not be more than \$25,000."

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

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



HYMAN EPSTEIN



ARTHUR ALLEN

SCIENTIST CHURCH IS AIDING THE CHURCHES THAT PLAN TO REBUILD

JEWISH CONGREGATION GETS \$22.42

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



G. C. EAMES

The letter accompanying the check follows:

Mr. Max Cohen, Treas.
Bangor, Maine

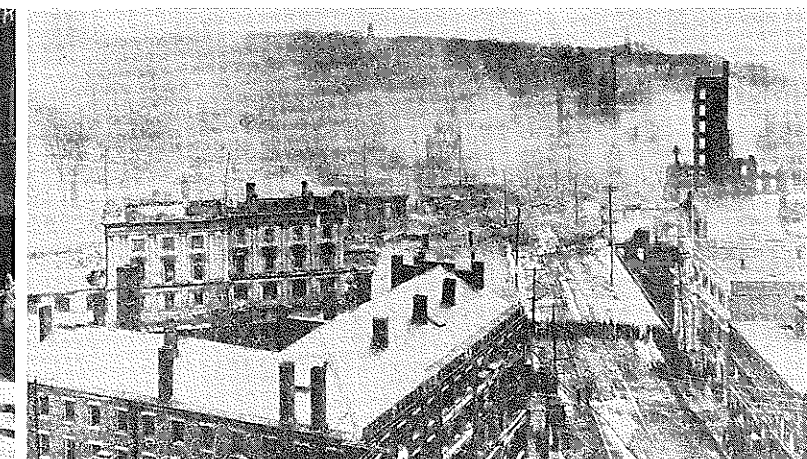
Bangor, Maine
May 22, 1911

Dear Sir:

By vote of our Executive Board, our contribution of Sunday, May 21st, is to be given to the building funds of the several churches and organizations, who are to rebuild or to refinish church homes. I am, therefore, enclosing check for one eighth of the amount collected.

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

As the letter explains, the church is distributing this aid to all churches destroyed.



STORY OF THE CATASTROPHE

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

It was the most destructive fire ever visited upon a Maine city, save for the Portland conflagration of 1866. Two were killed and many received injuries. The property loss was estimated at between \$2,500,00. and \$3,000,000. There was approximately \$1,500,000 insurance on the burned buildings. The fire burned over an area of 55 acres and it was not until 5 o'clock Monday morning that it was under control. Business blocks, some of them the finest in the city, were burned to the number of 100. Some 285 dwellings were laid in ashes and between 50 and 75 families, made up of nearly 300 persons, many of them women and children, lost everything.

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

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

The residential portion of the city also suffered a most terrible loss. Many of the beautiful residences on the east side of Broadway between State Street and South Park, went up in flames. Between the same limits on French Street nearly every resi-

dence was burned, while starting from Harlow Street the flames cut an almost clean swath clear to the east side of Broadway between State and South Park, burning hundreds of dwellings on Harlow, Spring, Penobscot, Prospect, Cumberland, Center, Somerset, Garland and Park Streets. Partial or total losses were sustained by Beth Israel members, L. Rudman, Wolf Lipsky, Israel Frank, and Lena Rosen.

In addition six of the churches of the city were totally destroyed by the raging flames. Those destroyed were the First Congregational on Broadway, the Central Congregational and St. John's Episcopal on French Street, the Universalist, First Baptist, the Christian Advent on Center Street and our own Beth Israel Synagogue on Center Street.

Tom Gibbons, a lineman, had just gone into the synagogue to dynamite it as a barricade to the advancing flames when a huge beam fell across the door, holding it shut. The building was already on fire. For two or three minutes onlookers watched helplessly. Then Gibbons, slow and deliberate, hauled himself through a cellar window with half a dozen sticks of dynamite in one hand and the fuses draped over his arm. In a matter of seconds there was a muffled explosion inside and the building collapsed like a house of cards. This episode was graphically described to your editor by Adolph B. Friedman who had entered the synagogue to assist in the salvage of the Sefer Torahs and other holy books. These men barely escaped with their lives.



ADOLPH B. FRIEDMAN

Norumbega Hall where Edwin Booth once played Hamlet was razed to the ground. Among the first structures to go was the Central Fire Station. The Bangor Daily News carried on through the fire. In the path of the flames, its staff worked by candlelight through the night, setting type by hand and operating hand presses, so that the Monday morning edition reached the streets at the usual time, small in size but informative in content. The fire was stopped short of the News' plant.

It is safe to say that no man, woman or child in the city of 25,000 slept during that grim night as the National Guard patrolled the streets and weary fire-fighters struggled to keep the flames from spreading, using dynamite to destroy buildings in its path. The water supply was exhausted early. When dawn came that Monday morning of May 1, 1911, a once beautiful city lay under a pall of smoke and embers.

Bangor News, Dec. 1, 1911

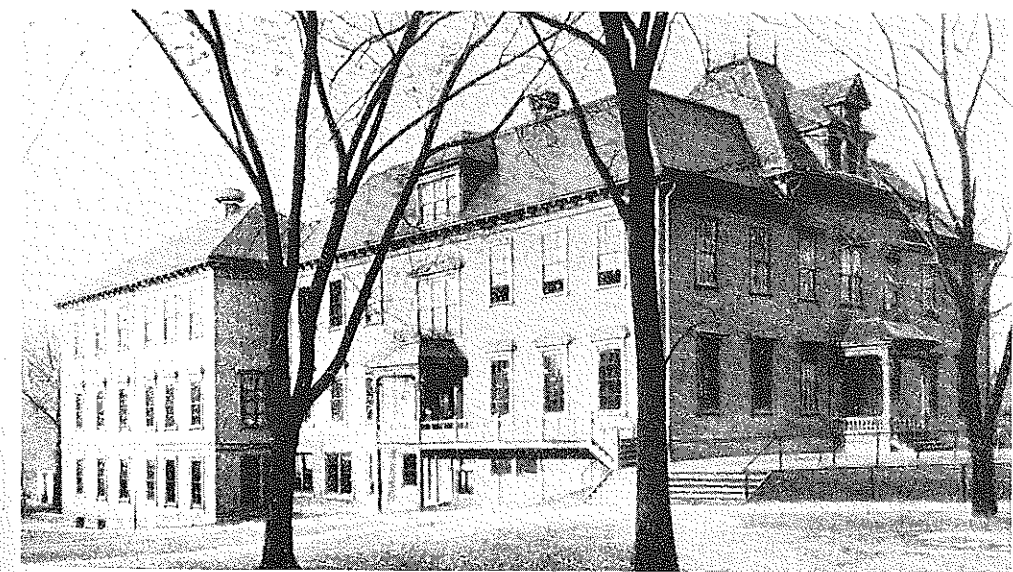
MORE MONEY FOR SYNAGOGUE FUND

Concert and Ball Given by Ladies of Congregation Beth Israel Last Night

Success shone brightly upon the concert and dance given Thanksgiving night in City Hall by the Ladies' Auxiliary of Congregation Beth Israel for the benefit of the Synagogue Building Fund, and not only was a very gratifying sum of money realized but the social aspect of the vicinity went far towards promising many people of Bangor and its vicinity a pleasant memory of the 1911 Thanksgiving season.

Selections by Pullen's orchestra opened the program of concert numbers, and immediately afterwards Miss J. Bessie Bernstein rendered artistically the beautiful O Dry Those Tears, by Teresa Del Riezn, and I L Bacio Lereve by L. Ardit. Miss Bernstein's soprano was a surprise to those who had never heard her. She sang more than well. Miss Lena Golden followed Miss Bernstein's solos with an interpretation of Crosez's Prisoner and the Swallow on the piano. Her work was also much enjoyed. Violin solos by Ellery F. Tuck and vocal solos by Bertha K. Bogrett pleased the audience, as the work of their well known local artists always does. Master Tuck gave the Meditation from Thais, and the Adevation, by Borowski. Here Bogrett sang the sweet Briggie song, Because of You, and held her hearers enrapt with her rendition of The Beautiful Lady, from the Pink Lady.

After the concert the orchestra played for dancing until a late hour. Myer Epstein was floor manager, and he managed well. His aids were L. L. Byer, S. N. Cohen, M. L. Friedman, H. J. Golden, and S. Marcus.



Bangor High School Destroyed by the Fire