

Will Dedicate New Synagogue



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WILL DEDICATE NEW SYNAGOGUE

The dedication of the new synagogue of the Beth Israel congregation will take place Sunday afternoon at 2 o'clock. Dr. Elias Caplan of Portland will be the main speaker on the occasion, and there will be several of the local prominent members of the congregation as speakers. There will also be singing by the cantor of Portland, and Dr. Caplan, who will arrive in this city on the noon train Sunday, has an elaborate program of ceremonies, of which he will take full charge. This will be the first opportunity the public has been given to inspect this new and handsome edifice, and large numbers of invitations have been distributed to the business, professional and other prominent residents of the city, and a special invitation has been extended to the members of the city government to be present. Following the impressive service of the dedication, committees will show those attending

about the new church, which was completed this week, and all will be warmly received.

In the evening the members of the congregation will privately observe the occasion of the dedication of the synagogue with a grand celebration. This observance will be open to no one but the members and will be an event of the highest Hebrew celebration. A feast will be served and there will be elaborate ceremonies. The evening religious meeting will be called at 6 o'clock and will continue until a late hour.

The synagogue, which is now complete, is all that could be desired, and is one of the many attractive places of worship in the city. Every detail has been given the proper consideration and the members of the Beth Israel congregation have an edifice of which they can well boast. The interior decoration of the main auditorium is after the style of all Hebrew synagogues, the interior architectural styles having undergone but very few changes from the early days. The auditorium is finished in white, with mahogany pews and furnishings. A marble floor has been laid and the general appearance is one of lustre and splendor.

The center of the floor is occupied by an elevated platform, surrounded by a rail and surmounted with candelabras. On this platform, called the Almamar, is located the desk from which the scripture is read. Directly facing the entrance is the Ark, in which the scrolls of the law or Pentateuch are kept, and before which a heavily and gorgeously embroidered curtain is hung. The perpetual light hangs over the Ark. The pulpit is also at this end of the auditorium. A spacious gallery surrounds three walls of the auditorium, to be reserved for the women and children, the pews on the floor being occupied by the men only.

The vestry of the church is fitted up for the purpose of the daily prayer services and smaller services. In the basement is also two large and well lighted school rooms for the use of the Free Hebrew school students. The whole church is well illuminated with electricity, and every convenience has been arranged for.

It is hoped by the members of the congregation that all those to whom invitations have been given will accept the same, as it is desirous that there be a large attendance on this occasion.

A. J. Berson, recording secretary of the board elected on Oct. 6, 1912, in a delightful conversation with the editor, has left the only description of the service as seen through Jewish eyes:

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

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

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

The chanting was of a very devotional cast, and interested us much at the

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

The chief attraction of the dedication was the Lewan-designed building. One commentator regretted that the synagogue did not stand in a better location. But the Jews preferred to have their synagogues in the immediate vicinity of their homes for the convenience of daily and Sabbath worship. However, if the reporter was sorry that the building was huddled against others in a solidly built-up section of the city, he was very impressed with the beauty of the interior, in which, he remarked, "the architect, Mr. Lewan, had free scope for his taste and his judgment, and the cooperation of the congregation has enabled him to display both to the best advantage." The rich, crimson velvet curtains of the ark and covering of the reader's desk, as well as the battle ship linoleum which lay on the floor, were favorably commented on. "Everything is made to correspond," was the summary, "and the entire harmonious array is very pleasing."

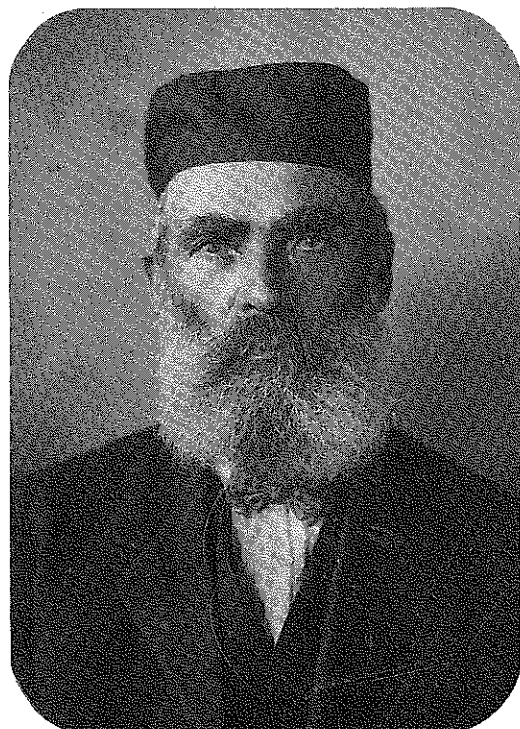
If aesthetically the new synagogue and its dedication service were note-worthy, equally so were the civic implications of the event. Another newspaper called it a more than gratifying spectacle and editorialized:

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

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

A NEW ERA

This tangible accomplishment of Beth Israel played a consequential role in strengthening the Bangor Jewish Community. Even the shamash, Moishe Rosen, affectionately called "Feter Moishe", felt that a new era had come and requested a raise in salary because of the additional duties assigned to him. This raise, in this time of expansive optimism, was granted together



"FETER" MOISHE ROSEN

with the free use of a seat in the ark area. And finally, new rules were drawn up and publically proclaimed to govern decorum during worship; a number of these rules dealt with the behavior of the growing community of children. One such read:

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

With a new synagogue, an energetic rabbi, a growing membership, and a feeling of accomplishment, Beth Israel looked forward to constructive years ahead. Just prior to the High Holy Days in the fall of 1912 the Congregation elected Rabbi Moishe Shohet to replace Rabbi Klatchko who accepted the pulpit of a large Boston congregation. With the coming of Rabbi Shohet, a new era opened for the Jews of Bangor. He emerged as one of the leading members of the Maine rabbinate. He was the effective and tireless defender of traditional Judaism against the incursions of the new spirit of change that was taking place in some of the large cities. He was a champion of Jewish rights at home and abroad. In brief, a formless, drifting, haphazardly growing Bangor Jewish community was given leadership and direction and substance by Rabbi Shohet.

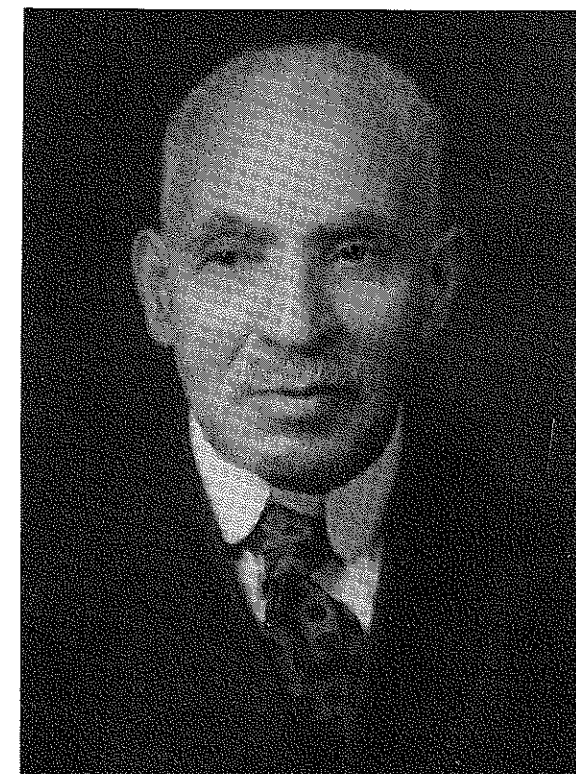
The musar sermons of Rabbi Shohet with respect to kashruth and Sabbath observance still ring in our ears. After, 1920, the minutes of the congregation fail to mention matters of this sort. It is not surprising, considering the extent of violation of the Sabbath, to find that attendance at services suffered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

CONTROL OF KOSHER MEAT

Rabbi Shohet tried to bring some order into the growing disorganization of shehita and called a meeting of the representatives of Beth Abraham, Tifereth Israel and Beth Israel and learned, to his dismay, that meat was allowed to remain for seven or eight days without washing or the removal of the kosher seals. This situation was contrary to the general agreement promulgated at a previous session. With the help of all three synagogues, Shohet attempted to persuade all of the butchers and the shohetim to accept a set of rules which he drew up. The Rabbi threatened that those who refused to abide by the rules or to enter into agreements with the so-called Kashruth Board would be declared passul by public announcement in each of the three synagogues. He also threatened that those who

purchased meat from disqualified butchers would be openly cited as non-Kosher householders. Whether he met with any degree of success does not appear in the information we have. A half century later the very same conditions would vex the local rabbinate.

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



MAX GINSBERG
Chairman, Vaadha-Kashruth Committee