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A HISTORY OF THE JEWS IN BANGOR

(Continued from last month. Excerpts from sources submitted by Diane Cutler and Henry Segal)

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In 1874, eighteen years after the obvious dissolution of the Congregation AHAWAS ACHIM, another reference is found concerning Bangor Jewry. In a letter received from Congregation CHABEI SHALOM, in Boston, addressed to J. Waterman, Esquire, Bangor, Maine stated that the Boston congregation had been instructed to return the following property which had been sent to Boston by Mr. Heinemann who was instructed to deliver them. These were: a Seifer Tora, Silver Yad, Silver Cup, a Shofer and the Old REcord of the Congregation AHAWAS ACHIM.

This response to apparent inquiry into the remnants of the original Bangor Synagogue brings us into the beginning of the second Jewish settlement in Bangor.

The original minute book was re-established in Bangor and through these later added entries, civil records, city directories, family descendents and word of mouth knowledge, we can establish that about five Jewish families who originated from eastern Germany made permanent settlements in Bangor.

These people drew upon certain limited aspects of Judaism. They joined together to re-establish the dissolved AHAWAS ACHIM Congregation, restoring to Bangor, the articles left in safe keeping in Boston. They had a fervant drive to re-assume the original Webster Avenue Cemetary as their responsibility. Their recorded meetings seem to be concerned with tracking down any relatives of those few already buried there to assist in subscribing funds for the cleaning up, repairing, restoring and re-establishing the burial grounds. The minutes of this group are recorded in English. They reveal no attempt for providing an organized Synagogue but rather appear to be a "society". The High Holy Days obviously were a religious concern, but appear to be the only one. A number of references over a span of years, record the holding of Day of Atonement services in the A.O.H. Hall and some financial reports show the cost of a hired Cantor for these occasions.

Minutes of May 1889 record the election of officers: Louis Kirstein was elected president; J. Waterman, Vice-President and Treasurer; and M. Levy, Secretary. In addition, the following members were recorded present by proxy: L. Friend, David Friend, M. Gallert, and A. H. Waterman. At this same meeting, it was decided that any member overdue 30 days in making payment of dues were to be expelled and the remaining members were to be re-assessed proportionately to cover their costs. Here, too, the President was empowered to spend a sum not to exceed \$100. to improve the burial grounds and a sum up to \$5.00 to test the legality of accepting or rejecting members.

The entires of 1890, 1895, 1896, 1897, and 1899, reveals the group continued to be concerned only with these same matters. Other names to show up in the records are: M. Franklin, B. Kirstein, J. Kramer, Max Abrams. In one case, the name William Engle, who later served as Mayor of Bangor, is mentioned as becoming a Trustee of the Congregation of Brotherly Love as AHAWAS ACHIM came to be referred to by its English translation.

Remnants of this era are revealed in correspondence and bills which had been preserved. Again, these papers are concerned with repairs, maintenance, and sale of cemetary lots and the serious effort of Bangor Jews of this date up through the first ten or twelve years of the new century, to locate living relatives of individuals known to have been buried at the Webster Avenue cemetary in its first days.

Although the AHAWAS ACHIM Congregation has long stopped functioning as a

Congregation, a corporation was created in that name, and trustees named for the continuance and functioning of the original cemetery. The Kirstein office handles the business connected with it.

The contribution of this group is more to the history of Bangor than it is to the Jews in Bangor, as there seem to be no attempts to perpetuate Judaism. In many cases, they gained identification as solid cornerstones of Bangor business, civic and social history.

Concurrent with the ebbing of Jewish strength among this group, was the beginnings of development of the third and most strongly established Jewish immigration. The continuance of our people in Bangor and the lives we live here today, as Jews, stems from the roots of this third group.

So many here in Bangor today are the children and grandchildren of these settlers. These families were the Eastern European Jews, steeped in the practises and customs of their Orthodox fathers and grandfathers. These people looked to transplant their lives from European Jews to American Jews. These were the Jews who followed the creed that a congregation must create and support not just a Synagogue, not just a burying ground, but these and a Chedar.

The sizeable numbers of Eastern European Jews immigrating into the State of Maine by the early 1880's appears apparent by the fact that in 1884, the State liberalized its Sunday observance law to allow the Jew who refrained from his business on Saturday, to work at his trade on Sunday. By the turn of the century, Maine's total Jewish population exceeded 1,000 people.

In Bangor, the largest and most permanent settlement of Jews began seeping in around the 1880's. The peak of Jewish immigration here was reached between 1890 and 1910. These people, although as "family" conscious as Jewish immigration statistics reveal, were forced for the most part, to have a member of the family precede the total family by a few years. Once the original member was able to settle himself here and provide some substance of security with friends in a dwelling place, the rest of his family was sent for. It was the custom for the original migrator to seek board with an already established Jewish family who would offer him hospitality and could provide him with an atmosphere for the survival of his Jewish practises.

In 1889, forty-one separate Jewish households were listed here and nine of these listed "landsmen" as boarders. These people were hardly trained to earn a living in a city whose primary claim was the lumber industry. Here, contrary to other cities, there were no mills and factories to absorb labor, but a city that had developed as the chief trading market for the entire northern lumber region. Peddling, therefore, absorbed the greatest number of these immigrants since the trading area was vast enough for many to find some market, and because the capital investment was small in contrast to establishing one's own business. Out of 66 recognizable names in the City Directory of 1899, the following statistics can be compiled on the occupations of the Jews in Bangor at that date: 32 Peddlers; 15 in retail trade (clothing and dry goods stores, junk shops, service trades, and grocery stores); 9 Tailors, 2 Clerks, 2 Rabbis, 4 Manufacturers (clothing and soda water); 2 skilled laborers. One might well assume that some part of the 15 retailers may have begun as peddlers and as their capital increased, stationery stores became within reach as in later dates developed with many of those who are recorded as peddlers.

These people continued the religious practises which were so vital a need in their lives. In the beginning, one of the members of this group would lend his home for meetings and Synagogue practises. When the High Holy Days came around, it was not unusual for the members of the Jewish community to travel to Boston or New York to join larger, better established congregations.

To be continued

Hebrew Priest. Mr. Hinemann was hired for \$175 per month, not as a Rabbi. He was to act as Cantor, ritual slaughterer for members of the congregation at no fee, circumciser, and lay leader...later, as landlord of the Congregations's meeting place.

Only after three members no longer endured, could the congregation be dissolved. Possessions and records were to be given in trust for safe keeping to the nearest Synagogue in the City. There were three committees formed: cultural, school and financial. The performance of the financial committee is substantiated in the minutes. There were money concerns. Dues, fees, sale of seats, and a descriptive list of fines. Among them are: unexcused absences from meetings, services and minyans, disorderly conduct and refusal to accept elected office. There was a thirty-cent fine for bringing a child under six into services.

Certain requirements for membership reveal both the indoctrination of generations of Judaism plus the acquisition of the rules of this new land. A member had to be not only of the Jewish faith, but could not have married out of the faith and had to give proof of having been married according to Jewish ritual. One could not ever have been declared guilty in a criminal investigation or proven of immoral character. A member had to reach the age of legal maturity, 21 years, not 13, the age of Bar Mitzvah.

In essence, this group displayed the Orthodox adherence of their fathers. They tried in vain to establish a religious school for their children but was unable to procure a proper teacher. The lay Rabbi served in some part to instruct children to the best of his ability. The group raised and expended \$20 to send the "lay leader" for testing and screening before the authority in New York.

Between 1856 and 1874, there is no existing records of any Jewish community in Bangor, Maine. There is a singular reference covering this span in the book, "American Jewery in the Civil War". It concerns a petition sent to Washington during the Civil War requesting the placement of Jewish chaplains among the servicemen. Although there were only three Jewish residents in Bangor, Maine, Leopold Kind obtained 200 endorsements for the petition which he passed around the town.

Maine in the early 1880's was quite different from the rest of the United States. Almost entirely concerned with the lumber trade and farming with barely a hint of industrialization, our state was a generation behind the other sections of the country in its mode of life. It was a quiet, unhurried life undisturbed by the noise of factory motors, unaffected by booms and depressions, isolated from America by an economy and a harsh winter climate that made for the retention of old Yankee customs and habits which other places were even then beginning to discard.

Into such a setting there had come a group of Jews from the small villages of the provinces of Kovno, Grodno, and Vilna. They were the ordinary humble Jews, poor and some of them not very learned in things Jewish, but all of them wanting to preserve Jewish life and those Jewish values they had cherished in the Old World. The few Jewish families in the city were like one family.