

RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL NOTES

VOLUME 6

NOVEMBER, 1972

NUMBER 2

**FRONT COVER: Jewish Community Center, Benefit Street Building after
Remodeling circa 1949.**

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RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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Printed in the U. S. A.

by the Oxford Press, Inc., Providence, Rhode Island

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THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER OF RHODE ISLAND

BY ELEANOR F. HORVITZ

The new building of the Jewish Community Center of Rhode Island was dedicated on June 13, 1971. A handsome modern structure with spacious lounges, numerous classrooms, olympic-sized swimming pool, and facilities for many and varied activities, it was the culmination of years of dreams and of devoted hard work by the Jewish men and women of the state.

I. THE EARLY YEARS

The Jewish Community Center of Rhode Island, officially incorporated in December 1925 as the "Jewish Community Center," had its origin, as did so many other Jewish Community Centers throughout the United States, in the YMHA and YWHA movement. We learn that, "The Center had its antecedents in the YM and YWHA's which were organized and reorganized a number of times to meet the then current needs of Jewish young men and women. The first mention of an active Providence YMHA appears in minutes of a meeting of 'Y's' in Philadelphia in 1880. The next reference to a 'Y' was in 1889. Official state charters were granted to the YMHA by Rhode Island in March 1912 and to the YWHA in March 1914. Both were later incorporated into the HEI (Hebrew Educational Institute) and the present Center."¹

In an original charter presented to the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association by Mr. and Mrs. Bertram M. Brown, Charles P. Bennett, then Secretary of State of Rhode Island, certified that Leonora Gribinsky, Lillian Bearman, Jennie Bearman, Nettie Kaminsky, Bella Josephson, Rebecca Brown, and Sarah Pearlman had filed for and been granted leave to form a corporation under the name of "The Young Women's Hebrew Association," in order "To work for and bestow the proceeds of such work among poor and needy persons and to do other charitable work." This document bore the date March 13, 1900.

Two years earlier on New Year's Day of 1898 the Young Men's Hebrew Association had been chartered for "Social, beneficial and literary work and endeavor."²

Both organizations (whether their existence was in fact continuous is not now clear) received new charters some years later under slightly different designations. "The Providence Young Men's Hebrew Association" received a state charter on March 19, 1912 in order "To engage

in work of an educational, athletic, social and philanthropic nature", and "The Providence Young Women's Hebrew Association" which was chartered on March 31, 1914 "To promote the moral, physical and social welfare of young women".

The role of the early Providence YMHA is cited in a Jewish Welfare Board Study conducted in 1934.³ According to this account: "The YMHA traces its history back to 1896 [it was actually chartered in 1898], when it was organized as a social club. In 1907 it conducted a religious school in cooperation with the B'nai B'rith. It was then known as the Hebrew American Club and occupied quarters in the downtown section [of Providence]. . . . The YMHA, which immediately preceded the Jewish Community Center in continuous existence, was organized in 1919 with 150 members." The accuracy of this statement may be questioned, since as previously noted The Providence YMHA was chartered in 1912. The Hebrew American Club was in fact chartered on July 23, 1910 "To enlarge the growth and development of mind and body, to produce better citizenship, and to promote a spirit of brotherhood and sociability among its members." A "Hebrew Educational Alliance", however, was chartered in 1907. In 1915 both the YMHA and the YWHA had quarters at 230 Westminster Street which would have been between Eddy and Union Streets in downtown Providence.

With a view to developing a "Modern" Talmud Torah* and providing a central Hebrew School building the "Hebrew Educational Institute" was chartered on April 16, 1914 "For Hebrew religious and literary education, moral, intellectual and physical culture." The new organization sought suitable quarters.

A news story in the *Providence Journal* of June 4, 1914 headed, "Hebrew Institute Obtains Buildings", described the purchase of the Bailey W. Evans Homestead on 65 Benefit Street. The purchase price was \$20,000. This sum, which would "establish a Jewish Center for moral, mental and physical culture", was still to be raised. Many persons were expected to aid in this endeavor, with a campaign extending through July 4 of that year. The Evans Homestead consisted of two buildings, the main three story brick house fronting on Benefit Street and in the rear a two story brick building, which would be made over into a school. The larger building, which was to be a center for varied

*A Talmud Torah (literally "Study of the Torah") was a community supported Hebrew religious elementary school, in contrast to a Cheder which was supported by tuition.

Jewish activities, would contain an auditorium, a free library, a reading room, free employment bureau, free loan association, social rooms for young men and women, a free legal advice department, a federated charities office, and administrative offices. The rear school building would contain eight rooms and an office for the principal. The news article explained that religious education would be conducted according to the modern methods and classes would be held after public school hours. In no way would this education compete with public school. The school would develop branches on Orms and Howell Streets. The Hebrew Educational Institute obtained a state charter in 1914 "For Hebrew religious and literary education, moral, intellectual and physical culture."

By 1916 the Hebrew Institute was ready to join forces with the YMHA. The *Providence Journal* of October 23, 1916 carried this story: "Two Hebrew Organizations Plan to Consolidate Soon. YMHA and Education Institute will Join Forces." It was anticipated that the YMHA would move from its present quarters now at 128 North Main Street to the Home of the Educational Institute in the Evans Mansion at 63 Benefit Street. The following officers were elected: President, Morris Grossman; Vice President, Henry Kominsky; Recording Secretary, Philip Zawatsky; Financial Secretary, Herman Siegel; Corresponding Secretary, Michael R. Cohen; and Treasurer, Nathan Temkin. Temkin was also delegate to the second triennial convention of the National Council of the YMHA and Kindred Associations of America held in New York that November.

The *Providence Journal* of November 21, 1917 reported that the Hebrew Institute had opened its membership campaign with twelve teams of workers to canvass the Jewish people of the city and a goal of 2000 members. They had as their objectives the creation of a "bigger and better institute" which would be "a greater force in the Jewish-American community." The article noted that the center received educated members of its race as well as immigrants and attempted to fill the educational, social, and religious needs of all classes. They accomplished this through the Talmud Torah Department, which was a free Hebrew school providing instruction calculated to give a better understanding of Jewish life and history. In addition, there were several young men's and young women's clubs, boys' and girls' departments, and classes for older people. Philip C. Joslin was chairman of the membership committee. He had on his committee: Col. Harry Cutler, Rabbi Israel S. Rubinstein, Doctor J. N. Blumental, Sol S. Bromson,

Miriam Hellinger, Max L. Grant, J. H. Gunther, Abraham Jacobs, Harry Lyon, Phillip V. Marcus, Herman Rosenthal, Jacob Silverman, and Barney Taber.

Five days later the *Providence Journal* reported that 500 members had been obtained on the first day of the campaign, with additional names added daily. Dues were \$3, \$5, \$10, and \$25 per year, according to class of membership. It was indicated that the enthusiastic response was evoked by the inspired speeches delivered at the opening dinner and descriptions of the purposes of the campaign and the good work accomplished at the Institute among the "Hebrews".

According to the 1934 Jewish Welfare Board study, the arrangement among the two "Y's" and the Talmud Torah was a "loose arrangement".³ At the time of the purchase of the Benefit Street building the YMHA and YWHA had been occupying rented quarters. They elected a joint board of directors consisting of 21 members selected at large from the Institute and three members from each department, i.e., the YMHA, YWHA, and the Talmud Torah. The 1921 officers of the amalgamation were: Samuel Cohen, President; Samuel Priest, 1st Vice President; Philip Joslin, 2nd Vice President; Adolph Ginsburg, 3rd Vice President; Nathan Hilfer, Secretary; and Samuel Galkin, Treasurer. The Welfare Board study noted, however, that "The four organizations—the Hebrew Educational Institute, the Talmud Torah, the YMHA, and the YWHA—continued to meet in the same quarters as separate entities until the fall of 1925. . . ."

In 1922 A. A. Finklestein of the Institutional Synagogue of New York City was appointed Executive Director of the Hebrew Educational Institute on Benefit Street. The *Providence Journal* of October 5 reported that plans were under way to give him a formal welcome at a reception in his honor. One of his first duties would be to organize the YMHA and YWHA into groups and clubs. It was believed that his background in YMHA work would aid him in accomplishing this reorganization.⁴

Fortunately the minutes of the Hebrew Educational Institute for the period 1920 through 1924 are still available for study. They commence with the Annual Meeting of January 20, 1920. Philip C. Joslin presided. The YMHA membership had grown from 15 to 168 members and that of the YWHA from 51 to 200. The group was small, but very active. Dances were held every Saturday night and lectures every Sunday. A billiard room was in use, and the installation of a bowling alley was



JACOB I. COHEN
Community Center Director 1926-1948

contemplated. They hoped to raise enough money to pay off their mortgage. Discussion of ways in which to raise this money and money for other purposes comprised the major portion of these minutes. In 1920 a ball netted \$449.22. Whist games were also cited as a means of raising money.

Vandalism, it appears, has always been a problem. In August of 1920 "it was reported that during the vacation of the Talmud Torah and the absence of a janitor some children broke into the Institute, destroyed records, vouchers, and bills belonging to the office. They stole pool balls, sticks, tickets, playing cards, candy, popcorn, crackerjacks and damaged the typewriter."⁵ A committee was appointed to take up the complaint with parents and to protect the rights of the Institute.

Problems continued to arise within the "loose arrangement" of the three organizations. Carl Jagolinzer reported that at a meeting of the YMHA it was moved and carried that the "YMHA sever all connections with the Hebrew Educational Institute, provided suitable arrangements could be made whereby the YMHA can remain in this building as a separate organization".⁶ The Talmud Torah reported the critical condition of its group due to the absence of a principal.⁷ The teachers could not perform their duties properly, and attendance was decreasing. This situation was resolved somewhat the next month when a temporary principal was appointed from the office for an extra \$5 per week compensation.⁸

Interest in the community was apparent. For example, Herman Galkin organized a boy scout group and urged the committee to invite boys in the military service to homes during Passover. Galkin was also concerned about the Jewish boys in Sockanossett School, the juvenile reformatory at Howard, Rhode Island.

Donations from the various synagogues were received each Yom Kippur eve. In addition, money raising affairs included such imaginative endeavors as a carnival, a motor boat party, a minstrel show, and a husking bee, the latter netting \$85.37.⁹ Activities, both social and charitable, were typical of the period, such as a "Victrola" concert, and lectures on Americanization, Jewish History, and health matters. Armistice Day on November 11 was observed by a memorial service. Chanukah was celebrated at the Hope High School.¹⁰ Entertainment was provided for the children of the Jewish Orphanage, and a smoker was held for the "Brown University boys".¹¹

In 1922 a Junior Synagogue was organized, made up of the group identified as "Juniors" and the Boy Scouts. Religious services on Satur-

days were held from 9 to 10 A.M., followed by a discussion of topics of Jewish interest from 10 to 11 A.M. A notice went out that "All boys of the neighborhood are welcome."¹² By the end of that year courses were offered in business administration, Hebrew, Yiddish reading and writing, Principles of Judaism, and domestic science. There were two orchestras, a junior and a senior group. Clubs included a "musical culture" group, the "Y" players, and a debating society.¹³

At the Annual Meeting of January, 1923 it was disclosed that the Talmud Torah had been forced to close because of lack of funds, but through the always energetic efforts of the Ladies of the YWHA it was now reopened. The same ladies had also established a girl scout troop. Because of continuing disharmony among the three constituent groups a resolution was adopted at this meeting to merge the three into one strong central body.¹⁴ A committee was appointed to study the problem and take action on the resolution. In the following month Finklestein resigned.¹⁵

Evidently the YMHA still desired to be autonomous despite the resolution. In April of 1923 they declared in a statement that the "YMHA be the recognized young men's organization in the Institute to arrange and conduct only for the Jewish young men educational, social, athletic, civic and other activities that will tend to develop Providence's Jewish Youth into 'better Jews, better Americans'".¹⁶ They were willing to contribute financially to the Hebrew Institute and to meet at 65 Benefit Street.

II. THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER 1925-1934

By 1924, the last year of the Hebrew Educational Institute at 65 Benefit Street, references were now being made to the establishment of a Jewish Community Center in the City of Providence and the need for one to be built in the near future. A fund raising drive was planned for the early part of 1925.¹

One of the last official acts of the Hebrew Educational Institute was adoption of the following resolution: "The Hebrew Educational Institute, representing 500 men and women of Providence wishes to place itself on record as being unalterably opposed to the future restriction of immigration as per the Johnson bill now before Congress, in view of the fact that it is discriminating and un-American. . . ." In spite of the fact that World War I had depleted the membership of the YMHA, and neighborhood changes had decreased the enrollment of the Hebrew School, the Hebrew Educational Institute survived until 1925.²

Following the national trend toward the formation of Jewish community centers throughout the United States, the Jewish Community Center of Providence was founded in October, 1925. Isaac Woolf, President of the Hebrew Educational Institute, and many young leaders were responsible for its formation. In connection with the new organization, now to be known as the Jewish Community Center, a recently completed gymnasium at the Benefit Street location was dedicated. The *Providence Journal* for three days, October 10, 11 and 12, devoted much news space to this event. Mayor Joseph H. Gainer and Jacob Asher of Worcester were the principal speakers at the exercises. Rabbis Israel S. Rubinstein, Samuel M. Gup, and Morris Schussheim, and Philip C. Joslin, Speaker of the Rhode Island House of Representatives, were also on the speaking program. In the *Providence Sunday Journal* of October 11 an almost full page spread contained these headlines: "Gymnasium added to JCC. Renovated Building on Benefit Street to be Dedicated Today. Scope of Work of Organization, formerly called Hebrew Educational Institute, to be Increased. Entire Families will Profit by Programme of Education and Athletics Proposed." The article went on to explain the purposes and goals of the Center: "All are to participate not only in religion and educational activities, but in vocational and club work, including Americanization, civics and domestic science; also in gymnasium work and physical culture to strengthen their bodies. . . . The new work for the Hebrew Educational Institute was decided upon about one year ago, when the idea was conceived of adding to the plant a gymnasium. This was to be placed in charge of a paid physical director, while a general secretary was to be engaged to take charge of the work to be embraced by the enlarged program. Almost from the first the Young Men's Hebrew Association and the Young Women's Hebrew Association came in as constituent parts of the association, lending their assistance for the promotion of the work. Each of those bodies is now deeply interested in the newer undertakings of the institute, now the JCC. This afternoon many of the Jews of Providence will participate in the formal dedication of a \$25,000 gymnasium which building has been provided and is to be completely outfitted that the Community Center can conduct the physical culture work." Joseph Finberg of Attleboro, Massachusetts and Alvin T. Sapinsley of Providence were in charge of arrangements for the building and its equipment. The gymnasium was originally the old stable at 65 Benefit Street. The Dedication Committee was chaired by Max L. Grant with Jules P. Goldstein, Samuel M. Magid, Samuel Stein, Edward Radding, and

Bernard Goldowsky as committee members. Abraham Resnick, executive secretary of the Brockton, Massachusetts YMHA, was to be general secretary of the Jewish Community Center.

In addition to describing the whole physical education program, the *Sunday Journal* enumerated other educational opportunities, such as classes in household arts, millinery and dressmaking, Jewish history, Hebrew, Yiddish and Jewish literature, public speaking, handicrafts, and commercial subjects, and also participation in lectures and debates. A member could choose to act in the little theatre, participate in the work of a choral society, or play in an orchestra. Leaders' and teachers' courses were to be offered. Of practical service to the Jews of Providence were classes in citizenship, civics, Americanization forms, and naturalization. Vocational guidance was also offered.

The role of the Jewish Welfare Board in aiding the formation of the Center was described in this same article. Benjamin Rabinowitz of the Board had worked among the various YMHA groups of the country in order to help them become affiliated with the Jewish Community Center undertakings. This movement would hopefully "so interest the Jewish families that they will look to the local organization as the very best recreation and educational center, the aim of which is to keep the boys off the street. If the heads of families can be made interested, it is argued that they will bring their children under the influence of the Community Center, which . . . means everything counting for good citizenship."

The dedication must have been considered a success for the *Providence Journal* of October 12 reported that an appeal for \$25,000 resulted in pledges of \$14,179 in less than one half hour. At the dedication ambitious plans for construction of a group of buildings to cost \$500,000 were revealed.

Abram Resnick, the first executive secretary, explained that the "greatest problem would be to educate the community to an understanding of the concept of the Center." The program, he went on, would be threefold — one segment set up for the general community, one for the general membership, and one for the junior membership.

In January of 1926 the Talmud Torah moved out of 65 Benefit Street and occupied space in the Howell Street Synagogue.³ The role of the Jewish Community Center was now being formulated. The idea of a Sunday School was introduced, undoubtedly to provide religious studies to replace those formerly offered by the Talmud Torah. There is

reference to the formation of a Federation of Jewish Charities, and the Jewish Community Center offered its facilities for the purpose of calling together all Jewish welfare organizations.⁴ The YWHA was still reporting under its own aegis, and we learn that Gertrude Tarnapol was in charge of its Minstrel Show, which cleared \$1700. The YWHA was proud of the fact that it would soon celebrate the eleventh anniversary of its founding.⁵ The summer program of the Jewish Community Center had been a success in its first year, with a summer playground program highlighted by a picnic at the farm of Joseph Finberg.⁶

In November, 1926 Resnick was succeeded as Executive Director by Jacob I. Cohen.⁷ In his first monthly report Cohen wrote of the need for volunteer club leaders and also told of the Center's first radio program on Radio Station WJAR. This was in the form of a Chanukah program.⁸

In these the infant years of the Jewish Community Center, there was constant change in the emphasis of priorities as its role continued to be undefined. For example, an offer by boxer "Young Montreal" (Maurice Billingskopp) of a gift to the Center of a large quantity of gymnasium, locker, and other equipment was accepted,⁹ but Cohen in his executive director's report of September 1927 went on record as saying he was not opposed to athletics, but felt the primary object of the Center was to serve as a social and educational outlet. For this purpose a radio program was introduced as a means of bringing the center to the people of Providence. Most important that year was the opening of a branch library in the Center with the cooperation of the Providence Public Library.¹⁰ Music, as well as books, was to be offered the membership through a violin and piano instruction program. For fifty cents a child could have a violin or piano lesson for one-half hour, or an hour's instruction for one dollar. Sadie Taber, Rose Millman, and Benjamin Premack were the instructors.¹¹ It was in this year also that the men's club of the Jewish Community Center was newly organized to take the place of the YMHA. It would be conducted under the supervision of the Executive Director.¹²

In spite of funds given to the Jewish Community Center from the budgetary allowance of the Providence Community Fund (\$12,985),¹⁰ the Center was beset by financial difficulties. It was found necessary to take out a mortgage on the Center property for \$4,000 and to reduce the programs to a minimum because of the restricted budget.¹³ In a 1927 flyer for membership enrollment, Jules P. Goldstein, chairman of the membership drive, stated: "The purpose of this drive is to increase

the number of contributing and participating members by enrolling as many as we possibly can to subscribe an annual payment. This will insure a steady income to support activities that are conducted in our own city for our own community. The moral, social, educational, and recreational development of the youth of our Jewish community should be a matter of civic and personal pride to all of us".¹⁴ To give this emphasis, Cohen requested a playroom with ample games, such as chess and checkers, for the many boys who came in daily. He hated to turn them out into the street. He ended his report with this tribute: "Mr. Max L. Grant, our President, has been an inspiration at all meetings."¹⁵

The facilities of the Jewish Community Center now were fully engaged. There were sixty-nine different activities in the building, including Young Judea, Camp Fire Girls, Boy Scouts, Jewish Choral Society, Junior Hadassah, and Workmen's Circle. Also there were a library, a baby welfare clinic, a junior playroom, and a poolroom. Religious services were held on Saturday mornings. The many lectures offered were thought to be the best selling point during membership enrollment.¹⁶ The Center played a major role in assisting numerous transients, both young and old, who came to Providence from all over the country. Cohen recommended that the Center operate an employment bureau to assist both the transient and local persons, with the cooperation of the many Jewish employers in the city.¹⁷ A rule was established to require a physical examination for all children before any gymnasium activities were permitted. Through the services of doctors and dentists such as Doctors Banice Feinberg, Henry L. C. Weyler, Louis I. Kramer, Perry Bernstein, Joseph B. Webber, Philip Dorenbaum, and James C. Krasnoff, many medical problems, including malnutrition, were discovered. This led to consideration of establishing a clinic.¹⁸ There were problems in obtaining volunteers as leaders during 1928, but the Brown University Christian Association helped alleviate the situation by supplying volunteer club leaders. Again, Joseph Finberg's philanthropy was cited. The summer playground was outfitted with fine equipment which he had donated. A milk program was added in the summer (free, or if one could pay there was a charge of one or two cents per cup).¹⁹

A homey touch is found in the minutes of a board meeting held during 1928 recorded by Arthur J. Levy, acting secretary: "Following the meeting Mrs. Feinberg was hostess at a buffet supper served to the board, including some of the hostess' exclusively patented strudel."²⁰

Executive Director J. I. Cohen wrote at the end of that year: "Situated in one of the oldest Jewish communities in the United States, the Center is the youngest institution in the city. . . . The Center fills a definite need in the community. Otherwise, why would hundreds of men and women, boys and girls come to us to seek recreation, companionship, friendship, pleasure, and education. Larger numbers will come as our program becomes more attractive, as our building becomes more pleasant and comfortable."²¹

In 1929 a Sunday School program was initiated with a registration of 175 children. The school held classes from kindergarten through the eighth grade to graduation. Many children who enrolled were new to the Center, and the Board hoped thus to introduce them and their parents to the many activities offered by the Center.²²

Cohen commented on the problem faced by the Center in having to compete with "talkies, automobiles and radio." He noted, however, that the Book Review and the Jewish Problem courses had done reasonably well, although attendance was not as good as at social activities such as dances.²³

As early as December, 1930 Cohen wrote in his Executive Director's report: "Daily this building is getting more and more crowded. . . . Difficulties are already encountered in satisfying the desires of various groups for space. . . . We are rapidly reaching the saturation point—the point beyond which it will be almost unwise to accept more members for we are not able to serve them."²⁴ In another report he complained that the building was poorly located geographically. "Women especially find it difficult to climb over the hills." He hoped for a new building within the next five years.²⁵

The effects of the depression of the 30's could be felt in all the Centers. In the Jewish Community Center of Providence evidence appeared in an Executive Director's report of 1932: "With the unemployment situation there must be a check on all who are able to pay so that they do not abuse the privilege"²⁶ Or in this comment by Cohen in 1931: "Today with hundreds of young men and women without occupation and bored with time hanging heavily on their hands, the Center begins to occupy a more prominent place in the lives of these people. . . . After gloomy and probably discouraging days looking for a job they come here in the evening to be refreshed and strengthened for another day. Thus we keep them morally and physically strong. . . ."²⁷ In the annual meeting report of 1931 President Goldstein stated that the Unemploy-

ment Relief Fund had sent them a man for hire so that now some much needed repair work could be done to the Center's buildings and grounds.²⁸ There were 225 students in Sunday School. Anyone could attend, even if unable to pay. Contributions came in to the playground—lollipops from Charles Silverman, ice cream from Saul Abrams, and cake from Abe V. Flink.²⁹

This chapter closes with the formation of the Women's Committee of the Jewish Community Center and the initiation of a study of the Center³⁰ to be conducted for the Jewish Welfare Board by Louis J. Kraft.³¹

III. TWENTY YEARS AT 65 BENEFIT STREET — 10 YEARS AS JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER¹

“. . . the building at 65 Benefit Street was dedicated to SERVICE 20 years ago when our old friends and relatives realized that the Jews in Providence needed and deserved a place where they could learn to live together regardless of their positions in society, or the length of their years in the city. These pioneers in Social Service had the modern viewpoint 20 years ago when they established a place where the youth and adults could develop self-reliance, build character, where morale could be strengthened and food for the mind served. They realized the desire of Jews to be together in a Common Meeting Place, and they appreciated that by offering a place for the youth to affiliate they were building a Community spirit for the years to come. The high ideals of the founders 20 years ago were passed on to a younger group in 1925. For the past ten years the Center in its new form has been carrying on with an ever increasing desire to be of service to the community and willingness to be the link that binds all Jews of the city together into a REAL COMMUNITY!" This is part of a message from the Center President of 1934, Milton C. Sapinsley, which was contained in a booklet, "Center Doings."²

This report was followed by one from J. I. Cohen, Executive Director: "Twenty years ago a group of public spirited citizens bought our main building to carry on a general program of Jewish Educational, Recreational and Cultural activities. For a period of eleven years until 1925 the Center was known as the 'HEBREW EDUCATION INSTITUTE'. In 1925 the name was changed to the 'JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER.' It was more than a change in name—it was a radical departure in point of view, method of work, and scope of activities. THE

JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER in Providence is one of a large chain of similar institutions throughout America that have one definite purpose in mind — TO BRING TOGETHER EVERY MEMBER OF A JEWISH COMMUNITY UNDER ONE CENTRAL JEWISH AUSPICE — A CENTER BY ALL AND FOR ALL.”³

Cohen further explained the last statement. The Jewish Community Center had been organized to serve as a meeting place for the entire Jewish community of Providence. It counted within its membership persons from all walks of life and every part of the city. It conducted an extensive program for children, offered activities for youth, had a place for the parent, and provided these adults with a varied program. As of that date it had over 100 organized activities catering to many human needs and desires. The Baby Health Clinic, which had opened in 1927, took care of 622 babies during the 1933-34 season. Mothers from the neighborhood who were unable to go to a physician could come to the Center weekly and have their babies weighed by a physician free of charge. Doctor Banice Feinberg was the Clinic's first physician. That year also the Center could boast a membership of “almost 1400”, making it the largest Jewish unit in Providence. Almost 80,000 persons had passed through its doors in one year. It had a professional staff equipped with the background and knowledge to direct its activities. Its Board of Directors was composed of Jewish leaders in the community. All of this was done at the modest cost of \$15,000 gross — of which more than \$4,000 was paid by those who took part in the activities, leaving a net cost to the community of only \$11,000. Cohen was justifiably proud of this record.

Max L. Grant, whose name was associated with the Center from its inception, wrote the following tribute to it in the same booklet:

WHAT THE COMMUNITY CENTER IS—WHAT IT IS NOT

NOT merely a building of stone and mortar — BUT the building of men and women.

NOT an institution for those poor in material resources — BUT those rich in ambition for physical, spiritual and intellectual advancement.

NOT a lounge for the idle — BUT the work-shop for the busy.

NOT a dream of to-morrow — BUT the life of today.

NOT merely a playground for children — BUT the meeting ground for young and old.

NOT a theory of a few — BUT the conviction of the many.

NOT a partisan in discussion — BUT the home of discussion.⁴

The religious school in 1934 reported that 4,816 students had attended its sessions during the year. It had 22 instructors and offered courses for students from 6 to 16 years of age. In the spring of 1934 the largest class, comprising 6 boys and 8 girls, was graduated.⁵

An interesting account of the Purim Day Masquerade with its election of Queen Esther noted that this event attracted city-wide attention. In 1933 practically every Jewish home received a miniature megillah* and in 1934 a replica of a Haman tasch** was mailed. Freda Simon was elected the first queen.⁶

In 1934 the Jewish Welfare Board carried out its study of the Jewish population in Providence, devoting a large section to the Jewish Community Center. It described in detail the physical structure of the building at 65 Benefit Street and considered it very well kept in spite of the difficulties in maintaining an old, non-fireproof structure. It made suggestions about improving the heating system, adding a permanent stage to the gymnasium, and more locker room space. The Center was commended for its attendance figures, which reflected an active interest on the part of the membership as well as good use of the facilities. The chief handicap to further growth was lack of modern facilities, leading to a recommendation for a new building, preferably centrally located with a branch for South Providence, which should have a part-time director. The report concluded: "A modern Jewish Center will be no experiment, but the logical outgrowth of the mature interests of the Jewish community and of its sustained encouragement to the many worthwhile endeavors that have developed in more recent years in response to the needs of the Jewish youth and the requirements of a harmonious, united Jewish community."⁷ However, because of economic conditions, a suggested \$500,000 center was delayed in favor of a fund raising campaign for renovation of the Benefit Street building.

Arrangements for a South Providence branch were made in October of 1934, at a cost not to exceed \$100. Rooms were used evenings at the Talmud Torah (the South Providence Hebrew Educational Institute located at 129 Chester Avenue), at the South Providence branch of the Public Library, and at the South Providence Hebrew Free Loan Association. There were no charges for these facilities.⁸

*Scroll containing the Book of Esther.

**Triangular filled cake, served during the Purim festival, literally "Haman's Pocket."

An interesting note in the Director's report revealed that the Center had obtained the services of Edward I. Friedman, a former intercollegiate wrestling champion (now an attorney), to teach wrestling if the Center would buy him a suit for \$10 to "safeguard him from infections from mats which are not too clean."⁹ Another small item reflected the changing mores of 1934, with J. I. Cohen reporting that "A number of young ladies, some of whom are as young as 16 or 17 years of age, desire the privilege of smoking in the building. We are making ourselves unpopular by asking them to refrain from such a practice. . . ."¹⁰

Two fires in 1935 caused by a defective chimney raised the question of the safety of the structure. A committee was set up to investigate the entire main building.¹¹ It was also noted that the children's program was late in getting under way due to that year's severe outbreak of infantile paralysis. It was characteristic of the times that help to work in the Center was obtained through the WPA (Works Projects Administration). The weekly Saturday evening dance was discontinued, since attendance had substantially fallen off. Informal dances had given way to the radio, the automobile, the "talkies", and dine and dance spots.¹²

The question of girls smoking was still an issue in 1936, but now there was a more tolerant attitude with talk of providing them with a lounge. The Executive Director wrote: "How prudish or modern can we be in the face of the changing world and changing by both sexes". There was a complaint from the 15-17 year olds that the center's 11 P.M. closing time on dance nights was too early.

By 1937 the Board had concluded that plays brought in more money than operettas, as evidenced by the successful performance of "Counsellor-at-Law", which had netted the Center \$420.

IV. BAR MITZVAH YEAR OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER — 1937

The Providence Jewish Community Center was now one of 300 centers in the United States. It was affiliated with the Jewish Welfare Board and belonged to the New England Association of "Y's" to which it played host that year. Seventy-five per cent of the Center's budget was covered by the Providence Community Fund. Since 1925 the Center had attained recognition by both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities for providing indispensable services to young and old. It was commended not only for its Sunday evening programs and religious



school, but for its daily educational programs as well. Yet it still operated on a \$15,000 budget and in a 70-year-old building.¹

The summer program had expanded in 1938 with the use of the Beach Pond Camp facilities, which the Jewish Community Center could use for two weeks during the summer. Seventy-two children were accommodated, some free through the assistance of such organizations as the Jewish Family Welfare and the Council of Jewish Women. Nine councillors were engaged as well as a Jewish cook. They conducted Friday night services. The day camp comprised a six week program of five days weekly from 10 A.M. to 5 P.M. The charge for the day camp, if the parents could pay, was \$2 per week per child. That summer 125 children were accommodated with total payments of \$74.² The fall program was once again delayed because of the Great September Hurricane and flood.³

V. 1939-1940 BUILDING EXPANSION

Under the leadership of Milton Sapinsley and Samuel Workman a \$75,000 fund-raising campaign was conducted in early 1939 to provide for a new gymnasium-auditorium and extensive renovations to the main building.¹ The main entrance would be reconstructed so that the entrance would be at the basement level, creating a four story building. There would be a general lounge room, a woman's lounge room, an auditorium holding 200, a new stage in the auditorium, shower and locker rooms, a gymnasium, expanded health and meeting rooms, and changes in the boiler rooms.² The cornerstone for the expansion was laid on November 26.³ However modest the new facilities would be, it was felt necessary to stimulate a revival of interest,⁴ particularly since world conditions had made imperative an expanded role for the Center, (It was also raising money for the United Palestine Appeal and the Joint Distribution Committee).⁵ A fire in December did enough damage to the gymnasium so that public school gymnasiums had to be used.⁶

VI. THE WORLD WAR II YEARS

The role of the Jewish Community Center during this period was varied. It offered to the newly arrived refugees from Poland, Austria, and Germany free memberships for one year. Rabbi David De Sola Pool, speaker at the dedication of the renovated quarters in 1940, spoke of the fear of extinction of Europe's Jews.²

LAYING OF CORNERSTONE
OF
THE NEW CENTER AUDITORIUM — GYMNASIUM

SUNDAY AFTERNOON, NOVEMBER 26, 1939 at 3 o'clock

INDOOR PROGRAM

1. Opening Remarks - Samuel Rosen, Chairman Cornerstone Committee
2. Invocation - Rabbi Morris Schussheim - Temple Beth Israel
3. Star-Spangled Banner - by Jewish Center Orchestra and audience
4. Mr. Rosen presents Samuel H. Workman - President Jewish Community Center
5. Selections by the Jewish Center Orchestra, under the direction of Benjamin Fremack
6. Brief Greetings by:

Judge Philip C. Joslin	Mrs. Isaac Woolf
Max L. Grant	Samuel M. Magid
Milton C. Sapinsley	Walter I. Sundlun
7. Address - Archibald Silverman
8. Hatikvoh - Jewish Center Orchestra and audience.
9. Benediction - Rabbi Israel M. Goldman - Temple Emanuel

OUTDOOR PROGRAM

1. Placing of steel box containing Center records into foundation by Samuel Rosen, Samuel H. Workman and Saul Abrams
2. Placing of the Cornerstone in position - Milton C. Sapinsley, Max L. Grant, Jules P. Goldstein and Samuel Soforenko
3. Placing of mortar around the Cornerstone - Mrs. Isaac Woolf
4. Blessing over the Cornerstone - Rabbi William G. Braude - Temple Beth El
5. Closing remarks by Samuel Rosen

Copy of this program, written on parchment together with other records, is being placed in the foundation as a reminder to future generations of this afternoon's event.

Providence, Rhode Island



Dedication of World War II Honor Roll at the
Jewish Community Center.

To all Jewish servicemen away from home and stationed in nearby military camps membership privileges were automatically extended. Weekly Saturday dances were resumed, attracting many of the young men. Servicemen had their own recreation room and canteen in the Center. They were even provided with a small dormitory to accommodate those who could not get back to their camps on late Saturday nights.³ On an average about 300 servicemen per week attended the Center. Cohen wrote in 1943: "65 Benefit Street has become a popular number with Army and Navy men as our neighbors on Benefit Street daily can testify. In every military camp in Rhode Island and even in Massachusetts it is well known that we are always ready with counsel, recreation, and hospitality".⁴ These out-of-state servicemen undoubtedly took the place of the large number of members who had been drafted or enlisted. The names of the latter were listed on an honor roll at the Center. By September of 1944, 500 names were on this roll, including two with gold stars. Cohen described a new difficulty in this way: "With the complete loss of young male members and the growth of our female membership . . . additional problems [are] created by the girls being interested in only one activity".⁴ However, they undertook to make the most of this situation by making attendance compulsory at a series of lectures sponsored by the YWHA on how to deal with the servicemen. The Center also issued a mimeographed newspaper called "Mail Call" which was sent to all members in the service, keeping them abreast of activities at the Center.⁵

The expanded facilities had come at a most opportune time to accommodate the servicemen. The building was, for example, the scene of a second Passover seder sponsored by the Army and Navy committee of the Jewish Welfare Board.⁶ There were other manifestations of the war. The Center was obliged to compete with the high salaries offered by industry for office and maintenance help.⁷ Operating on the home front the Center assigned air raid wardens, received information on how to perform in case of blackout and air raid tests, and conducted Red Cross classes.⁸ With the return of the servicemen and women free memberships for at least six months were granted without regard to whether they had been members in the past.⁹

In the meantime Center activities and plans went on as before the war. The Sunday evening programs attracted standing-room-only audiences. In 1943 a "Life Membership" program was initiated with a charge of \$500 for each life member, and a goal of \$25,000.¹⁰

VII 20TH ANNIVERSARY ANNUAL MEETING

On Wednesday evening, May 9, 1945 a program was presented to commemorate 20 years of growth of the Jewish Community Center. Honored were the previous presidents, the late Isaac Woolf (President of the Hebrew Educational Institute from 1922-1925); Max L. Grant, first president of the modern center from 1925-1929; Jules P. Goldstein, president 1929-1934; Milton C. Sapinsley, president 1934-1938; Samuel H. Workman, president 1938-1944; and the then current president Saul Abrams, who had first been elected in 1944.¹ A brochure distributed at this meeting revealed that a 1942 fund raising campaign (in addition to the gymnasium-auditorium campaign of 1939) had reduced the mortgage and provided for a beautified Center. "Since the outbreak of World War II", it was reported, "the Center became the headquarters for many war activities and particularly attractive for men and women in uniform from all over the world. 570 young members of the Center are now in the Armed Forces of our country." As part of the exercises there was a dedication of the Benjamin N. Kane Library, and also of additional honor roll names of members in the service. Accompanied by the orchestra, the audience closed the meeting with the singing of "God Bless America."²

In 1945 J. I. Cohen resigned after twenty years as Executive Director of the Jewish Community Center. During October of that year his successor, Simeon Kinsley, presented his first report to the Board and in December wrote: "I had the supreme experience of a new center executive — both janitors quit and both furnaces broke down all in the same day". He went on to explain that the center had had to close for half a day to spot gas the building as a defense against rodents. He was looking for a "pied piper", but urged a building campaign in the spring.³

In spite of problems with the physical structure, the Community Center had accommodated 2,000 adults and 1,500 children in February. Among the programs offered were contract bridge for adults and a swing band for youngsters. A nursery school opened in February under the financial sponsorship of the Women's Association.⁴ Also in that month a large advertisement in the *Jewish Herald* announced a membership campaign. "The Jewish Community Center is an agency serving every age and every section of Jewish life. It meets the needs of every age for supervised leisure time. It develops human personality and cultivates citizenship along sound lines. It upholds the basic concepts

of democracy and encourages freedom of expression. This invitation to join the Jewish Community Center should be accepted by everyone interested in building strong men and women, both physically and mentally. It should serve as the opportunity to support an agency of recognized civic value."⁵

During Kinsley's years as Executive Director (1945-1949) need was felt for a South Providence program. Saturday night canteens had been held at the Sons of Abraham Synagogue located at 362 Prairie Avenue, and day programs with both Jews and non-Jews attending were presented in Roger Williams Junior High School on Thurbers Avenue.⁶ J. I. Cohen conducted the South Providence extension activities, which cooperated with South Providence temples and synagogues and men's clubs.⁷ Also in South Providence a day camp was held in an open area opposite the Elmwood Avenue entrance to Roger Williams Park.⁸ Jewish Community Center children were no longer sent to the Beach Pond Camp, and Camp Centerland now carried on its activities in Goddard State Park.⁹ The Children's Theatre, which could no longer hold performances at the Benefit Street building because of the parking problem, moved to the Plantations Auditorium on Abbott Park Place.⁷

The next Executive Director of the Jewish Community Center, Morris Kritzman, came to Providence from the Trenton, N. J. YMHA. With Kritzman's arrival in 1949 the need for a re-evaluation of the role of the Center in the Jewish community was recognized. What to do about the Sunday school with its enrollment of only 35 students? What to do about the Zionist groups which wanted to use Center space? These and other questions could hopefully be answered by a "Self-Study Survey" to be conducted under the direction of Kritzman at the Jewish Community Center and Joseph Galkin of the General Jewish Committee.¹⁰

VIII. THE 50's, AND THE CENTER HAS A NEW HOME

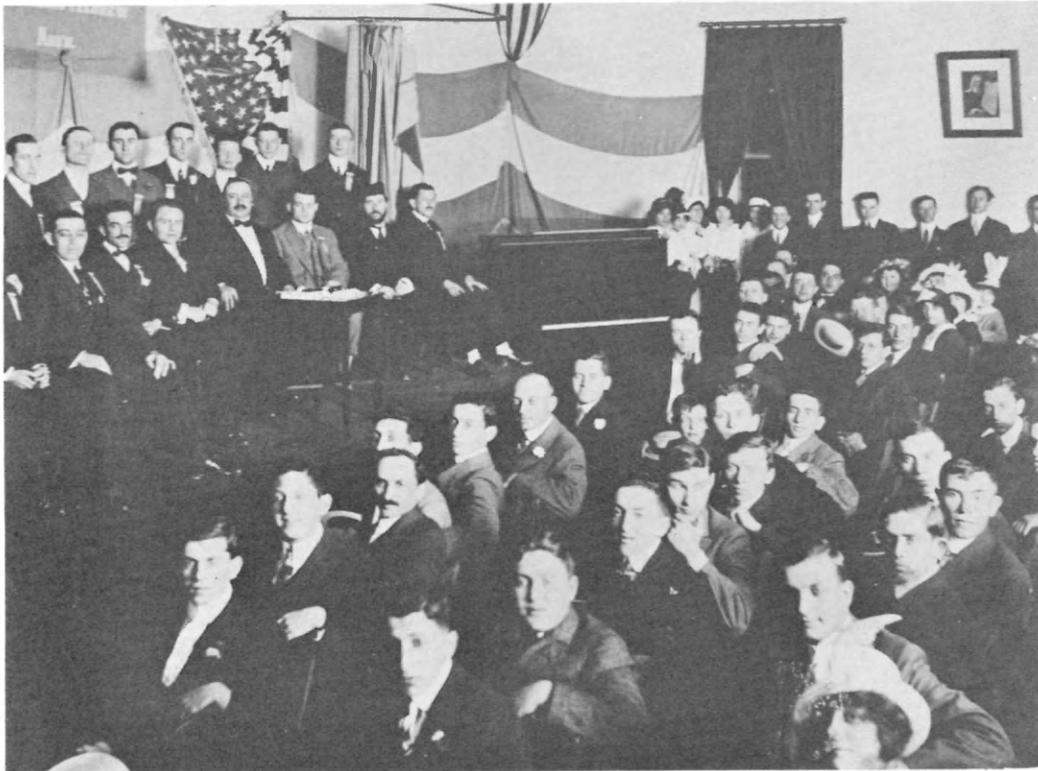
At the Executive Board meeting of September 23, 1950 it was concluded that a new building campaign should start in the spring of 1952, a date that would not conflict with The Miriam Hospital's anticipated building fund drive. After many months of study and search for a proper site the following transaction was offered: to exchange the property on Benefit Street for buildings and lots on Sessions Street which had been an abandoned police station.¹ It was also voted that the Jewish Community Center obtain a mortgage loan not to exceed \$40,000 on the property to be acquired. Architect Henry

Turoff proposed a plan for converting the main existing structure into an administration and club room building and the garage into a youth canteen. His plan would cost approximately \$32,000.¹ By September of 1951 the total cost for renovations, furniture, and improvements was estimated to be \$55,000.²

While negotiations were under way for a new center on the east side of Providence, an offer was received from the Jewish War Veterans for the use of their building as a south side neighborhood center. It was estimated that a capital expenditure of \$5,000 would be necessary if it were to be used.³

The proper location for a Jewish Community Center had always been a debatable question. As late as March of 1952 ex-president Saul Abrams expressed the view that the Jewish Community Center should have been established in the downtown area of Providence and thus would have become the social and cultural center of the Providence Jewish community as early as the 1920's. He stated further that the Center for years had the "power in Providence" in the field of adult programs with its lecture series, its musical presentations, and theatrical productions. Because the Center was "stuck at 65 Benefit Street" its adult membership and program dwindled and was taken over by Temple and Synagogue sisterhood and brotherhood programs. Because of the subsidy from the Community Chest and its "undesirable" location, the young people who went to the Center were labeled as underprivileged. On the plus side, he recalled the work of J. I. Cohen, Gertrude Tarnapol, and Simeon Kinsley, all of whom did great service for the youth and whose USO and camp programs were to be commended. From these programs came many leaders in the community. He hoped they would learn from these comments so that the new center would stress the importance of greater support from a large enrollment in adult programs of the Women's, Parents' and Men's Associations, all of which should underwrite expenses not met by the General Jewish Committee.⁴

There was more analysis of the purpose and needs of the Jewish community as reflected in a "Report of the Self-Survey of the Leisure Time Needs of the Jewish Community of Providence, Rhode Island" resulting from a 1951 study. The study, conducted under the auspices of the General Jewish Committee, stated: "The Jewish Community Center, as the agency with competence and experience in Jewish leisure time programming, which cuts across all religious and organizational lines, should offer an overall program of sufficient variety to



Providence Young Men's Hebrew Association Conference 1914.



Boy Scout Troop 1929.



Center Sewing Class 1928.



Community Center Cooking Class 1929.



Confirmation Class 1937.



Crowning of the 1948 KKK Queen, left to right: Charles Broude, Florence Spater, Rhoda Zeidel and Roslynn Chase.



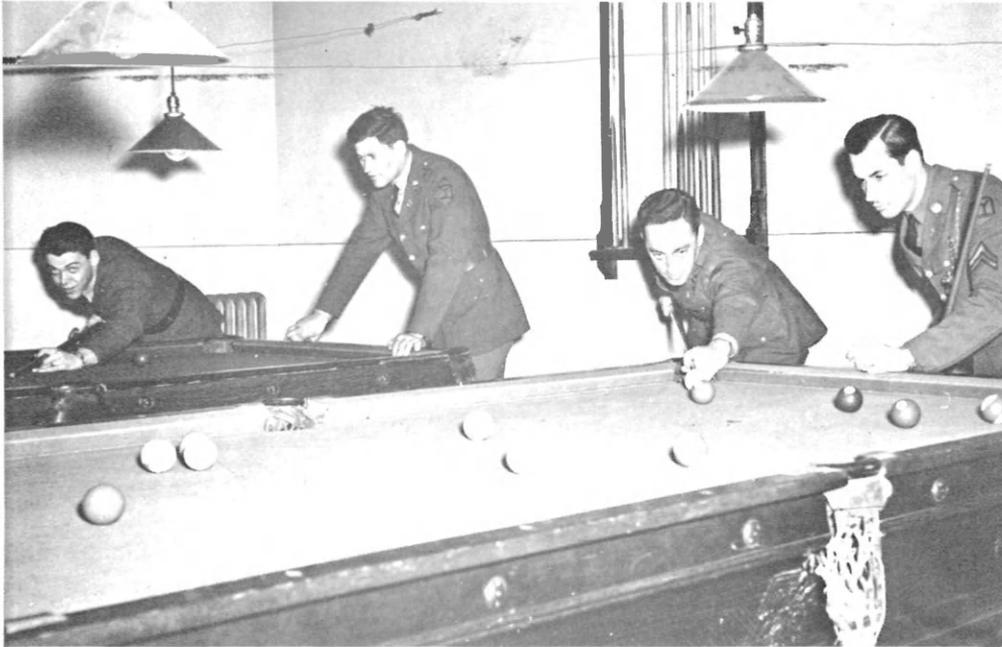
Courtesy of Providence Journal

Building on Benefit Street housing the Hebrew Educational Institute, YMHA, YWHA and Talmud Torah prior to remodeling.



Courtesy of Providence Journal

Sessions Street building of Jewish Community Center after conversion from police station.



World War II servicemen from the Yankee Division
guests at regular Saturday night parties.



Jewish Community Center Orchestra 1936,
Benjamin Premich, Director.



Center Players 1948 rehearsing for "Heaven Can Wait".



Children in Center Library at the Beneft Street building.



Weekly gathering of Golden Agers 1955.



South side building of Jewish Community Center 1955.



Courtesy of Providence Journal

Stable of Benefit Street building after conversion to gymnasium.

appeal to the many different interests and needs of the Jewish people. The program of the Jewish Community Center should strive to serve the entire Jewish community and particularly have facilities located in the East Side, South Providence and North End. It should serve all age groups from pre-school children to the older adults. . . . [It] should institute immediately a year-round recruitment and training program for leaders and program specialists who are to work with children and youth groups."⁵

The Executive Board in June 1952 voted to establish a Health Club in the Jewish Community Center.⁶ It became the George Friedman Memorial Health Center through a donation of \$3600 from Mrs. George Friedman, his widow, and the trustees of the George Friedman Memorial Fund.⁷ A progress report by Kritzman in October of 1953 stated: "We have our Sessions Street building. We have our mortgage. We do not have our gym. We have no facility in South Providence. We have no facility in the North End".⁸ The solution to the south side facility was solved the next month when the Center was given the Potters Avenue Police Station, which was to be vacated, for a rental of one dollar per year.⁹ It was necessary, however, to replace the boiler and make repairs in the building, monies for which were acquired from the Providence Community Chest and the General Jewish Committee.¹⁰

With the completion of repairs at the Sessions Street building, requests for use of the building came from other Jewish organizations. For example, in 1956 Temple Emanu-El requested use of the Center facilities for additional space in which to hold services on the High Holidays. This was granted.¹¹

In 1957 Morris Kritzman left the Providence Jewish Community Center after having served as its Executive Director from 1949. Often during Kritzman's years as Executive Director, the Executive Board minutes revealed differences of opinion on vital Center matters between him and the Board of Directors, the Center staff, and the Jewish Welfare Board of New York. At one point the Board recommended that his contract not be renewed after its expiration. Since his many and considerable contributions to the Center were recognized, it was urged that he be given every possible assistance in obtaining other employment. Peter Bardach reported early in 1953 that he had had contact with the New England section of the Jewish Welfare Board and stated that that organization could not send any more professional workers

because of the friction existing in Providence and the possibility of these professionals not getting along with the Director.¹² However, the differences must have been settled to some degree, inasmuch as Kritzman did stay on year by year until his ultimate departure in 1957.

Doctor Bernard Carp came to Providence in 1957 to replace Kritzman as Executive Director of the Providence Jewish Community Center. With the expanded facilities of the Sessions Street Center and with Carp's high ideals for it, the Center *News* (the Jewish Community Center's news bulletin) and the minutes of the Jewish Community Center board reflect the continuously active programs. A summer nursery school opened with the help of parents.¹³ The baseball league opened its 1957 season with more than 300 men and boys enrolled.¹⁴ In October the first meeting of the Mr. and Mrs. Club was held.¹⁵ Tween and Teen Age canteens were also formed.¹⁶ By the start of 1958 there was difficulty in placing all who applied for the nursery school and teen-aged girls' groups.¹⁷ Also filled to capacity was the initial JAC training program.¹⁸ Camp Centerland won American Camping Association accreditation, the only day camp in Rhode Island to be so accredited.¹⁹ Sample quotations from a series of articles written by Carp titled "The Modern Jewish Community Center" will give a picture of the busy and varied program of the Center in those days. "Even with our present serious limitations, the Center is a busy place. Just glance at last week's Center News issue. In one single seven-day period in our two buildings you will note these headlines: 'Jewish Family Service Director Speaks to Leaders' Institute', 'Be an Actor — Join the Center Players', 'Junior High School Teen Tips Discussion', 'Young Adults Run Sunday Night Dance', 'South Side Parents Discuss . . .', 'Teen Washington Trip . . .', 'Classes Re-register for Ballet', 'Modern Dance, Painting'. These are only a FEW of one week's activities." In addition, among those groups meeting at the Center that week were "the B'nai B'rith Youth Groups, the Councilettes, the eight Girl Scout and Cub Scout troops . . . the regular East Side and South Side Golden Age Clubs."

Although the Jewish Community Center had been in this building only six years, Carp recognized that it was not adequate. In the same series of articles he wrote, "25,000 Jews . . . in a metropolitan area of over 750,000. Its Center is now in two converted police stations on the East Side and South Side of town. The story of Providence is still to be written. . . . Will it tell how Providence has met the challenge of providing a wholesome Jewish environment for present day American youth and adults?"

Confirming the sentiments of Carp, a motion was adopted at the executive board meeting of May 13, 1959 that a new building fund planning committee be appointed to plan and organize a building fund campaign to include the present mortgages and to notify and advise the General Jewish Committee and United Fund of the Center's intentions to conduct a building campaign in 1962. In subsequent minutes are found references concerning the acquisition of a new site. Charles J. Fox, president in 1960, indicated the importance at that time of the Center's obtaining land for future development purposes. The possibility of remodeling the Brown University gymnasium for a Center building was discussed; it was felt that the Brown land near it should be bought in any event.²⁰

IX. THE COMPLEX ROLE OF THE CENTER IN THE 60'S

By the 1960's the role of the Center, always a dynamic one, was meeting the needs of its members in different ways. The Center on Sessions Street no longer had the role of a settlement house to Americanize and take care of the immigrant Jew who came into the port city of Providence. It no longer had as a major function the providing of services to the men and women in the Armed Forces. Carp, always aware that the basic philosophy of a Center was related to social work, reported on the changing population patterns, the higher standard of living, and the shifting needs of that population, creating new challenges.¹ There was constant pressure for more and better services for Jews of all levels using the Center. There was a great need for better physical facilities (the Center was still using the Nathan Bishop Junior High School gymnasium on Elmgrove Avenue)² and equipment, and also for stronger community involvement. There was a further problem in evaluating the usefulness of the South Side Jewish Community Center because of a population shift.³

Through the talents of Robert Borod, Robert Kaplan, and Norman Tilles a very professional performance of the comedy "Bells are Ringing" was presented on April 6, 1961.⁴ This stage show netted the Center in excess of \$1500 for camp scholarships. However, the performance of "Guys and Dolls" the following April involving similar hard work did not produce similar financial results. It was decided to close the book on musicals as money-raising endeavors.⁵

Emphasis on musical programs was due largely to Carp's knowledge and background in music. There was a music appreciation series

under Doctor Morton Gould.⁶ A Jewish music festival and a permanent Jewish Music Council was organized by Carp.⁷ In 1963 as part of that year's National Jewish Musical Festival theme, "Bridging Israel and America through Music", Carp was invited to lead a national group of musicians and music lovers to the Music Festival in Israel.⁸ Also during that year for Open House three "Pops" concerts were presented with a 25 piece orchestra and Barbara Orson as vocal soloist.⁹

The Century Club made up of \$100 contributors reported a growth from 59 members in 1959 to 104 in 1962. Its primary purpose was to balance the budget and to help amortize the mortgage. The chairman of this group of civic minded citizens was Bertram L. Bernhardt. Members of his committee were Murray Halpert, Louis Handwerker, Max Leach, Joe Ross, and Meyer Tanenbaum.¹⁰

During these years smoking again became an issue. While formerly it had been a moral question of young girls smoking in the corridors and at public meetings, interest was now directed to the health aspect of smoking. It was argued now that youth in the Center should refrain from smoking because of the danger to their health.¹¹

Another pertinent issue during the decade was the Center's stand on Civil Rights. The Jewish Welfare Board requested affirmation by the Jewish Community Center of Providence of equal rights for members of all religious, ethnic, and national groups. This was followed by a public re-affirmation of the Center's policy as an agency designed primarily to serve the Jewish community, but welcoming to its membership everyone without regard to color, creed, or national origin.¹²

The 39th Annual Meeting of the Jewish Community Center, held on May 27, 1964, took the theme, "The Center in Transition." "As part of this program, we recognize the great contribution of our fathers, fifty years ago, in founding the YM-YWHA and the Hebrew Educational Institute, which merged into the present Center in 1925. In their day, our Founders served their community well. This work we have continued. The facts . . . show that they began one of the most significant and widespread of the Jewish community services that we have today. It has changed and grown through the years, constantly alert to the needs of the day. . . . We intend to intensify our services as we have done in the past year, but we must also be prepared for a year of transition."¹³

At the 40th Annual Meeting a steering and executive committee was authorized to carry out necessary clearances with the communal agencies

involved to determine needed facilities, program, location, and cost of a new center. Originally this had been allocated to the Century Club.¹⁴

By 1966, after many months of seeking an appropriate site for the new Center, it was decided to exchange the Center's present property for a major parcel of land owned by the City bordering on Sessions Street and Elmgrove Avenue.¹⁵

A most important function of the new building would be to provide facilities for the Golden Agers. A study undertaken by the General Jewish Committee of Providence had included an evaluation of the Golden Ager program of the Jewish Community Center. At that time neither the South Side nor East Side programs provided daily lounge facilities, although weekly meetings with programs were held. It was reported that staff was aware of the program limitations, the minimal participation, and inadequacy of the buildings. It served over 325 persons, mainly from among the older, less acculturated Jewish groups. It was explained that "At present many will not affiliate with it because of the image conveyed by limited activities." The General Jewish Committee through a special grant provided transportation so that some residents of the Jewish Home for the Aged could attend. The study concluded that the new Center should make an effort to reach the segment of older people not now attending the program: namely, the more affluent, acculturated older persons, the segment of older people more rooted in an immigrant culture, and a third segment which consisted of the more isolated and withdrawn individuals.¹⁶

While concern with financing and planning of the new enlarged facilities was uppermost, it was clear from items in the weekly *Center News* that the Center was continuing to be very active and productive. Headlines such as these appeared: "Enlarged waterfront, more area at Camp Centerland"¹⁷, "South Side Nursery School initiates Morning Sessions",¹⁸ "Trips Offered: to Bermuda, Washington, D.C., for SrHi Group," "Summer Cross-Country Tour,"¹⁹ "Center Joins R. I. Fine Arts Council,"²⁰ "Program of First Annual Jewish Music Concert,"²¹ "Senior Adults Gold Nuggets present, 'L'Chai-im'".²²

An important motion was adopted at the November 19, 1966 Executive Board Meeting ordering that, since the Center now served all of Rhode Island, the name be changed to THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER OF RHODE ISLAND.²³

Early in 1967 a building fund campaign was set for the spring of

that year with Bertram L. Bernhardt as general chairman, Max L. Grant as initial gifts chairman, and Harry Licht as chairman of the building committee. Lester Millman was chosen as architect.²⁴ Consideration was given at this time to making provision in the new building for the offices of the General Jewish Committee.²⁵ Later, space for other Jewish organizations such as the Bureau of Jewish Education, the Rabbinical Council, and the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association was considered. Because of high cost of construction the initial plans to provide such space had to be abandoned.²⁶

An event occurred in the Middle East in 1967 which had far-reaching effects on the Jewish people throughout the world. Because of the Six-day War between Israel and the Arab nations, all plans for the new building were temporarily halted. A Special Resolution adopted by the Board of Directors stated: "The Board of Directors of the Jewish Community Center of Rhode Island agrees to delay further active solicitation for new building funds while giving complete support to all-out efforts of the state of Israel until this crisis has passed". Although all energies would now be directed toward aiding the people of Israel, it was made clear that interest in the new building would be sustained and that there would be periodic reviews with the General Jewish Committee concerning the proper time for resumption of campaign activities.²⁷

By September 22, 1967 President Sidney Meyer announced that the Center was now ready to resume campaigning for the new building. Ground-breaking ceremonies were scheduled for the spring of 1969.²⁸ Among decisions that had to be made for the new building was consideration of a recommendation by the Rabbinical Council that a ritual bath (Mikvah) be included in the new center.²⁹ However, due to lack of funds space for the mikvah could not be considered.

Before the end of 1967 the sale of the South Side building to a non-profit charitable foundation, Ulpan*, was authorized. It was agreed that the Older Adult program be allowed to continue in this building one day per week.³⁰ The year 1967 closed with a report from the building fund campaign committee indicating that the fund had passed the \$1,125,000 mark.³¹

In 1968 a champagne ball with comedian Sam Levenson as the chief attraction, held for those who had pledged \$500 or more to the building fund, was considered highly successful.³²

*Talmudic Hebrew meaning "Study Group."

The Jewish Community Center of Rhode Island continued to be involved with Jewish problems throughout the world. Members joined the march to protest suppression of Russian Jewry,³³ and sponsored a Warsaw Ghetto Memorial Program with Tuviah Friedman, the man who had tracked down Adolph Eichmann, as guest speaker.³⁴ The Center also co-sponsored the Israel Independence Anniversary celebrations.³⁵ There were symposia on such timely subjects as sex education, narcotics, alcohol, and tobacco, and a series on "Judaism for Now."³⁶

On May 2, 1969 the new Center building contract was awarded to Molony & Rubien Construction Company, and on May 18 ground-breaking ceremonies were held.³⁷

X. 1971 AND THE DREAM IS A REALITY

With Dedication Day scheduled for June 8, 1971 a goal was set of 1250 family unit members plus individual memberships in the various categories. Carp was requested to discuss with the Rabbinical Council of Rhode Island the question of "sabbath programming." The various types of membership with extra Health Club membership were determined.¹ As the day for dedication drew closer, a gala benefit dinner dance was held at the Kirkbrae Country Club on April 3.² By April 8 the charter member enrollment had ended and the "Open House" phase begun.³ Every Jewish family in the area was to receive an invitation to attend one of the Open House tours. By May 27 over 600 had attended tours of the new building.

The Dedication Day Exercises started with a 2 P.M. special tour and reception for the staff and members of the Board of the Centers in the Northeast Region of the National Jewish Welfare Board. This was followed by a dedication of the Mezzuzah* on the Center doorpost and with exercises and speeches by various key members of the dedication committee. The eventful day closed with a dedication dinner dance. During the week open house was held under the auspices of the following groups: Monday: Children's Open House and Senior Open House; Tuesday: Community Friendship Night; Wednesday: Senior Adults' Open House and Junior Highers' Open House; Thursday: Pre-Schoolers' Open House, Center Sports Award Night; Saturday: Singles' Dedication Dance; Sunday: Young Adults' Open House program.

The importance of the new Jewish Community Center building to the Rhode Island community was emphasized in various remarks de-

*Literal Hebrew: "Doorpost." A small oblong container affixed to the door-jamb, containing a rolled-up paper with verses from deuteronomy.

livered on Dedication Day: Harlan J. Espo, President, said: "This is an historic day in the evolution of the Jewish community of Rhode Island. After years of hope and planning, a dedicated and enthusiastic group has made possible the construction of the modern Jewish Community Center that we will dedicate today. . . . We have some insight as to what a force for growth and unity in the Jewish community this Center will eventually represent. It will be our task now to serve that community, unite that community, and exploit that community's resources for dynamic improvement. . . ." Bertram L. Bernhardt, Chairman of the Building Campaign: "Nearly 2,000 Rhode Island families have contributed to the financing required for the construction, furnishing, and equipping of this new Center building. The result is what we dedicate today. . . . More work and more dollars will be required to complete the task we have undertaken." And from Doctor Bernard Carp for whom this day had a special significance: "Herzl once said, 'If you will it, it is no legend.' Today there is the State of Israel. Here, too, in Rhode Island through persistent determination our dream has become a reality. After 46 years of living in buildings originally designed as homes and police stations, the Jewish Community Center finally has its own specifically planned facilities which provide opportunity for the highest expression of its hopes and aspirations. . . ."4

The new Center pool opened on July 6, 1971, and shortly thereafter the Center's Health Clubs. Sabbath (Saturday) afternoon activities were now being held. They included use of the pool, gameroom, and the health clubs. Lectures and discussions on Judaic subjects were also offered on the Sabbath. During the first year in the new building the wide variety of programs was a reflection of the expanded facilities. A highlight event of the year was the Israel Anniversary Festival held in the new Center on May 7, 1972. Itzhak Rabin, Ambassador to the United States from Israel, was guest speaker.⁵

Despite the new building many of the same problems which had existed in the two previous "homes" of the Jewish Community Center had to be faced. Need for money and for more members was still present. The Center Membership Committee had a goal of enrolling 300 additional families as Center members.⁶ Volunteers to aid with programs and to serve on committees must be recruited.⁷

Carp, who was credited with being "the man who built the new center",⁸ decided on early retirement as of May 1, 1971. He gave this reason: "As I began approaching this 15th Anniversary, I began to

do some deep soul-searching and finally came to the conclusion that it is now time for the Center to seek some new and fresh executive guidance and direction."⁹ In appreciation for his devotion to the Jewish Community Center of Rhode Island he was given a testimonial at a program on May 14, 1972 which followed a brief annual meeting.

Carp's successor as executive director, Sigmund J. Hellman, assumed his new duties in August of 1972.

It is likely that the new Jewish Community Center of Rhode Island will have a far greater role than before in its service to the Rhode Island Jewish community. The precepts expounded by Louis Kraft in an earlier day for Jewish community centers throughout America seem appropriate. It shall serve ". . . as the agency to turn to to meet needs for recreation and informal education activities for all age groups, wherever the need exists . . . to deal dynamically with the problems and needs of purposeful Jewish living . . . in the larger setting of the American and World society. . . ." And, he added, "the key word is 'involvement' — involvement of our centers, of the lay leadership, the membership, involvement not limited to adopting resolutions, but in programs of education and appropriate action."¹⁰

NOTES

CHAPTER I.

¹*Brief History of the Jewish Community Center of Providence, Rhode Island* (Issued by the Center on mimeographed sheets in workbooks—1964)

Further history of the YMHA from

The Development of the Jewish Community Center, Purposes, Principles and Practice. Selected Papers of Louis Kraft. Published by the National Association of Jewish Center Workers, New York City.

1854—first YMHA organized in Baltimore, Md. 1857—Augusta, Ga. YMHA. 1858—Buffalo, N. Y. 1859—Cleveland, Ohio. 1861—Syracuse, N. Y. 1862—Louisville, Kentucky. 1874—New York City. 1875—Philadelphia. "The Association was organized for the purpose of cultivating and fostering a better knowledge of the history, literature and doctrines of Judaism; to develop and elevate our mental and moral character; to entertain and edify ourselves with such intellectual agencies as we may deem fit, finally and above all it is our mission to promulgate the sublime and eternal principles of Judaism to the world, and when necessary to defend though honorably and peaceably, the faith of our ancestors." Association of YMHA's of New England, 1911.

²*Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes.* Volume 2. June 1956. Number 1. "Chartered Organizations", pp. 30, 32, 58, and 63.

³*Study of the Cultural and Recreational Resources of the Jewish Community of Providence, R. I.* with special reference to the Jewish Community Center. Jewish Welfare Board Study of 1934. Part II. Pages 1-43.

⁴*Providence Journal.* October 5, 1922. P. 24. A. A. Finklestein had been Assistant Superintendent and Employment Secretary of YMHA on 92nd Street in New York City. During the war he had been in charge of the Jewish Welfare Board at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. At the end of the war he was Executive Secretary of the YMHA of New Brunswick until 1919.