



**RHODE ISLAND
JEWISH HISTORICAL NOTES**

FRONT COVER
Temple Beth-Israel 1956

RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL NOTES

NOVEMBER, 1983

VOLUME 9, NUMBER 1



Copyright November, 1983 by the

RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

130 SESSIONS STREET, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02906

TABLE OF CONTENTS

JEWISH IMMIGRATION INTO PROVIDENCE: A COMPARISON OF THE SETTLEMENT OF SOVIET JEWS, 1970-1982 WITH THAT OF RUSSIAN JEWS, 1881-1924.....	5
by <i>Brian Kempner</i>	
TEMPLE BETH—ISRAEL, 1921-1981	30
by <i>Eleanor F. Horvitz</i>	
TOURO SYNAGOGUE REDEDICATION CENTENNIAL	68
NEWPORT SYNAGOGUE, A REWARDING LEGACY	70
by <i>Rabbi Arthur A. Chiel</i>	
PETER HARRISON AND THE NEW HAVEN CONNECTION	77
by <i>Rabbi Arthur A. Chiel</i>	
HOW TOURO SYNAGOGUE GOT ITS NAME	83
by <i>Bernard Kusinitz, M.A.</i>	
HISTORY AND MYSTERY ON FAREWELL STREET AND WYATT ROAD — THE JEWISH CEMETERIES OF NEWPORT COUNTY, RHODE ISLAND 1894-1982	94
by <i>Bernard Kusinitz, M.A.</i>	
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES	109
by <i>Seebert J. Goldowsky, M.D.</i>	
THE TWENTY-NINTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION	112
NECROLOGY	115
ADDENDA AND ERRATUM	117
LIST OF LIFE MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION	Inside Back Cover

The Library of Congress National Serials Data Program (NSDP), Washington, D.C. 20540, which operates the U.S. Serials Data System, has assigned the following International Standard Serial Number (*ISSN*) to the *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, a publication of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association: **ISSN 0556-3609.**

JEWISH IMMIGRATION INTO PROVIDENCE:
A COMPARISON OF
THE SETTLEMENT OF SOVIET JEWS, 1970-1982
WITH THAT OF RUSSIAN JEWS, 1881-1924

BY BRIAN KEMPNER

The experience of recent Soviet Jewish immigrants in the American urban setting has been a topic almost wholly ignored by American historians and political scientists. Since these newcomers started arriving in the United States in the 1960s, there has been very little research into how and why they came, where they settled and worked, and the problems they encountered in the transition from the old world to the new. Few scholars have examined their religious beliefs or their interaction with the rest of the American Jewish community. Even fewer have compared the current wave of immigration with that of Russian origin at the turn of the century. While this dearth of knowledge exists regarding Soviet Jewish immigrants in the United States, it is particularly true of those in Providence. Between 1970, the first year of their settlement in the city, and October 1982, over 500 Soviet Jews have entered Providence; yet little is known about them. Aside from a brief United Way report on their situation and an even shorter 1981 *Providence Journal* article, nothing has been published about their experiences. An understanding of their plight is essential, for it not only provides an insight into what life is like in the city, but gives important clues about how the city can better meet the needs of foreign immigrants in the future.

A study of the current condition would be incomplete without an examination of the history of Providence's Jewish population and institutions. The first part of this paper, thus, is devoted to an analysis of the urban life of the first wave of Russian Jews who came to Providence between 1881 and 1924. While much has been written about Russian Jewish immigration into the United States during these years, the library of books and articles on the experience of those who chose to reside in Providence is not particularly large. I have relied mainly on material in the library of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association, interviews with elderly Jews who came to Providence at the time, and discussions with local Jewish leaders familiar with the city's history. I have limited my analysis of Providence Jewry to five significant problems: 1) why they came, 2) where they lived, 3) the jobs they took, 4) their religious attitudes, and 5) assistance and benevolence associations helping in their transition. For purposes of brevity, I have left for future study such topics as Jewish political beliefs and relations with other ethnic groups.

In the second part of the paper, I examine the situation of Soviet Jews who have immigrated to Providence since 1970. In order to elucidate the current situation, a large portion of this section is concerned with comparing it to the earlier wave of immigrants. A study of this nature is difficult, for little has been written about the recent settlers. I have, thus, based my findings primarily on interviews with several Soviet refugees in the city and discussions with leaders of the Providence Jewish Family and Children's Service and the Jewish Bureau of Education, and the director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry in Washington. I have also consulted the few studies and pieces of literature available on the subject. It is my hope that a comparison of the two waves of Russian immigration will bring to light some of the problems a newcomer faces in the city — that, if nothing else, it will make their transition a little easier in the future.

THE FIRST WAVE

While 1880 is an important year in the history of Providence Jewry, by no means does it mark the beginning of the city's Jewish population. Solomon Pareira, a native of Holland, had moved to Providence over forty years earlier, in 1838, and became, according to David C. Adelman, the city's first Jewish settler.* By 1850, nine families with Jewish names were listed in the Municipal directory.¹ Usually referred to as "the Deutchen," or German Jews, these early settlers were frequently German-speaking, and came from such countries as Poland, Bavaria, Hungary, Holland, and Germany. They were mostly young people who had left their homes in Western Europe to seek economic opportunity in the United States. All but one of the new arrivals found occupation in the clothing industry, either as tailors or merchants. Several, including Pareira, opened highly successful clothing stores in what is now the downtown section of Providence; most lived near their businesses.² In 1854, the community organized its first synagogue — Congregation Bnai Israel.

From 1850 until after the Civil War, Providence attracted only a few additional Jews. After 1870, however, the number of Jews in the Providence area increased significantly because of the growing number of "German" immigrants. By 1880, about 150 Jewish families lived in Providence.³ Doctor Sidney Goldstein in *Population Survey* noted that most of them were merchants of various descriptions, ranging from peddlers to owners of substantial dry goods stores.⁴ Because of their small number, the city was able to absorb them rather easily, and by 1880 many were well established politically, economically, and socially.

*This is controversial. See Segal, B., and Goldowsky, S. J., *RIJHN* 7:461-470, Nov. 1978. Ed.

Although there were a small number of Russian Jews in the early Jewish population, it was not until 1881, with the growth in Eastern European immigration, that Providence Jewry experienced really dramatic gains. In the late 19th century, the outlook for Jews in Eastern Europe became increasingly dismal. Few Jews in Russia and Russian-held Poland were allowed to live outside the Russian Pale, which consisted of the fifteen western provinces of European Russia and the ten provinces of Russian-held Poland. According to Arthur Goren in *The American Jews*, "The Jews in the Pale lived with no civil rights, ruinous restrictions on trading, and periodic expulsion from towns and villages."⁵ Jews in Austria-Hungary and Romania confronted experiences that were little better.

After the assassination of Russian Tsar Alexander II in 1881, the new regime introduced policies that encouraged anti-Jewish outbursts. In *World of Our Fathers*, Irving Howe described the events which led Russian Jews to look to America for a better life:

There had already been a trickle of Jewish emigration to America — 7,500 in the years between 1820 and 1870 and somewhat more than 40,000 in the 1870s. But the idea of America as a possible locale for collective renewal had not yet sunk deeply into the consciousness of the East European Jews. During the reign of Alexander II many of them had experienced modest hopes of winning equal rights as citizens. By the 1880s, that hope was badly shaken, perhaps destroyed.⁶

The banishment of 20,000 Jews from Moscow in 1891 and the massive pogroms, like that in Kishinev in 1903, combined to deepen the Jew's desire to leave.

Between 1881 and 1924, the year the United States enacted restrictive immigration laws, 2.3 million Eastern European Jews entered the United States — over 75 per cent from the Russian Pale. Fleeing to escape the pogroms and antisemitism, the settlers looked to America as a land of economic opportunity and religious refuge. Most of the immigrants settled in major cities, such as New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia. A significant number, however, sought smaller cities, such as Providence.

By 1885, the city directory listed about 250 Jewish names. The number grew to almost 450 in the next five years and swelled to 992 by 1895 — a fourfold increase in ten years. Such growth was truly impressive, especially when compared to the growth of the city as a whole. From 1890-95, the Providence population increased 23 per cent, while the number of Jewish families increased 131 per cent.⁷ By no means were Jews the only group to enter the city in those years of heavy immigration. Significant numbers of Italians, Irish and Portuguese also came.

By 1900, 1607 Jewish families were listed in the city directory. Sidney Goldstein concluded, "The Jewish community of Providence was overwhelmingly of Eastern European origin."⁸ In that year, between 75 and 80 percent of the city's almost 8,000 Jews were born in Russia or Russian Poland. Both the 1910 and 1920 U.S. Census found well over 7,000 Russian Jews in the city.⁹

Immigrants who chose Providence did so primarily for two reasons: 1) the city's economic prosperity, and 2) the chance to be near other Jews. In 1900, Providence was the prosperous manufacturing center of a generally flourishing state. The jewelry industry provided over 12,000 jobs, and employment opportunities existed in textiles, cotton weaving, dyeing, hosiery, and knit wear. For many immigrants, the city's economic activity was enticing. Rhode Island's per capita income was \$293, compared to the national average of \$203. Also attractive was the opportunity to be near other Jews. As one third-generation American Jew recalled, "My grandfather peddled on Block Island, but he wanted to be among Jewish people and so moved to Providence."¹⁰

RESIDENCE

Like other urban immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Russian Jews crowded into ethnic enclaves. Within the tight confines of the Jewish quarter, the immigrants found work, housing, and social and cultural institutions that offered continuity with the past as well as transition to the new life. Like Jews in New York's Lower East Side, Boston's North End, and Chicago's West Side, the Providence Jews crowded into the small area known as the North End. In their study of generational change in Providence Jewry, *Jewish Americans*, Sidney Goldstein and Clavin Goldscheider found that

Preoccupied with economic survival and disoriented through migration and resettlement, they sought the comfort of their own communal institutions. The immigrants needed self-contained, segregated, and tightly knit community life as a kind of decompression chamber in which they could begin the adjustment process to the new forces of a society vastly different from the old country.¹¹

Crowded into the North End along Chalkstone Avenue, Shawmut Avenue, and North Main Street, the early Jewish settlers found their transition to the new American lifestyle a little easier.

When the first wave of immigrants from Russia came in 1880, they chose the North End because the nucleus of the Providence Jewish community

already existed there. The Jewish institutions and aid societies were already established there, providing the new settlers with some assistance in their new surroundings. Further, the North End provided the immigrants, who had little money, with cheap housing.

Many Providence residents came to look on the North End as the area of the "Jewish problem". Most houses in the area were crowded and without baths. Many of the streets were unpaved. Housing consisted primarily of two- and three-story wooden frame buildings with three tenements on each upper floor. The first floor was usually occupied by a small shop or industry.¹² Jacob Riis's description of New York Jews in *How the Other Half Lives* could well apply to Providence: "The tenements grow taller and the gaps in their ranks close up rapidly as we invade the Hebrew Quarter".¹³ Eleanor Horvitz's study of Jewish life in the North End at the turn of the century provides clues as to the severity of the crowding in this section of town. On just one street alone, North Davis, there was enough business traffic to support 16 grocery stores, 2 variety stores, 2 liquor stores, 3 bakeries, 2 blacksmith shops, 5 tailor shops, 7 shoemaker shops, 7 junk businesses, 2 dry goods stores, 5 tinsmiths, a capmaker, a furniture dealer and a grain dealer.¹⁴

A second important area of Jewish settlement at the beginning of the 1890s developed in South Providence on Gay Street, Willard Avenue, Prairie Avenue, and Robinson Street. While never attaining the size of the North End, the so-called Willard Avenue section grew into a tight community with a strong sense of identity. Communal activities were frequent and included dances, lectures, picnics, and literary debates. Since the area also contained shops supplying most of its residents' needs, the Jews of South Providence looked upon their neighborhood as a self-contained unit.¹⁵ In her observation of the South End in 1910, Bessie Edith Bloom Wessel concluded tentatively that the area had better conditions than the North. These conclusions were mostly unfounded, however, since the South End, like the North, was seriously burdened with overcrowded tenements and unpaved and congested streets.¹⁶

A third smaller Jewish settlement arose in Fox Point, composed primarily of families with stores along South Main Street. This area, however, never gained much importance. While the three areas did not harbor all Providence Jews, the few scattered in other neighborhoods had little connection with the city's organized Jewish life.

As the early settlers became better established economically and as the North End and South Providence became overcrowded with new immigrants and the children of the earlier ones, expansion into new parts of the city was inevitable. Alice Goldstein, in her study of Jewish residential

mobility at the turn of the century, concluded that the development of the Jewish community in Providence indicated high levels of immigration as well as considerable movement within the city. Migration out of the North End to the East Side began early in the 20th century, as families moved across North Main Street into the blocks ascending the hill — onto Pratt, Pleasant, Howell, Lippitt, and Benefit Streets and Carrington Avenue. Moving to the East Side was considered a real step up the social ladder. “The Jews who remained behind in the North End thought of it as the hoity-toity section,” according to Alice Goldstein.¹⁷ Jews from South Providence were more likely to move into the blocks between Broad Street and Elmwood Avenue. The cleavage between the North End and South Providence was thus maintained, even as Jews left their initial areas of settlement. While there was certainly considerable movement within the city, the North End nevertheless remained the dominant section until the 1930s.

OCCUPATION

In *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan described the background of most Jews who entered America in the late 19th century: “They arrived with no money, few skills”, and little education.¹⁸ The newcomers were also the victims of a language barrier which hindered economic advancement. Even those having some job skill were obliged to enter low-level jobs because of their poor command of English. To earn money, immigrants labored in slaughterhouses, docks, construction gangs, factories, mills, and sweatshops. Most worked long hours in the most abject conditions and received low wages. “Penury and poverty are wedded everywhere to dirt and disease, and Jewtown is no exception,” wrote Riis.¹⁹

While some Jews remained as workers, others soon entered businesses for themselves, as peddlers or small shop owners. They went on their own not only because of the deplorable factory conditions, but also because of the long inflexible work hours which interfered with their religious rituals. In business for themselves, Jews could more faithfully observe the Sabbath and Holy Days. One second generation Jew recalled, “They had to look for their own business where they did not have to go to work on Shabbos (Sabbath). If you went to work for someone, you had to work their hours.”²⁰

“Having come to the United States with considerable entrepreneurial experience, but little ready cash, peddling was a logical avenue of commerce for Russian Jews,” observed Thomas Kessner in *The Golden Door*.²¹ In a short time, peddling and the installment business were widely taken up by recent immigrants. Most observers of the Jewish section were astounded at the high concentration of small businesses and peddlers in such a small

area of the city. Further, the growth of the Jewish population created a demand for stores catering to Jewish needs — kosher bakeries and meat shops.

The 1905 Rhode Island State Census showed that 21 per cent of all employed male Russian Jews were peddlers, and a further 22 per cent were retail dealers or salesmen, while the rest were engaged in a wide variety of occupations. Conducting a random sample of the employment of 100 Jewish families throughout Providence in 1910, Bessie Edith Bloom confirmed this diversity of occupations among recent Russian immigrants. She gave the following breakdown.²³

Peddlers	24	Butchers	2
Storeowners	17	Painters	1
Jewelry Workers	12	Real Estate	1
Tailors	8	Expressmen	1
Tinsmiths	7	Carpenters	1
Laborers	6	Glaziers	1
Shoemakers	6	Capmakers	1
Bakers	2	Others	10

Though the numbers are small, they are representative of poor Jewish districts.

As the years passed, many of the immigrants acquired some wealth. Though Bloom's figures do not bear this out, by 1910 the numbers of retail merchants, proprietors of medium-sized businesses, white-collar workers, and professionals, though still small, constituted a much larger share of the gainfully employed Jews than had existed a decade or two earlier.

Most Jews settling in the Providence community were originally Orthodox, as were the majority of Jews who migrated to the United States at the turn of the century. Through synagogue attendance, community activities, and religious festivals they tried to maintain their old culture in the new urban setting. In fact, the city's earliest synagogues were almost exclusively Orthodox. Although the first congregation in Providence had been organized in 1855, it was not until the late 19th century, with the influx of Russian Orthodox Jews, that Providence witnessed a significant growth in the numbers of Jewish congregations. Between 1855 and 1920, 23 separate synagogues were chartered in the city. A number of others existed on a less formal basis. These places of worship played an important role in the immigrant's urban experience, both religious and social. Worship brought the newcomers together and helped ease the transition between the old world and the new. They sponsored sports teams, dances, religious gatherings, and educational classes.

By the late 1880s, a number of Orthodox congregations had already been established. They met in rented halls, places of business, and even private homes. Among them were Sons of Jacob established on Goddard Street, Sons of Zion on Canal Street, Sons of David on Chalkstone Avenue, and Congregation Tiferes Israel on Shawmut Street. *The Providence Journal* story of the opening of one of the city's first synagogue buildings, Chevra Bnai Zion in 1892, points up the importance of religious worship to Providence Jewry: "... the entire Hebrew population in the northern section of the city turned out to witness the dedication of the new edifice."²⁴

For most Jews, retaining their Orthodox heritage in the new urban society was a great struggle. City life made the observance of Orthodox customs very difficult. A group of German Jewish intellectuals, recognizing this dilemma, in 1877 established a Reform movement.²⁵ They attempted to reconcile Judaism with the demands of the city by relaxing the rigorous laws and rituals of Orthodoxy which could be difficult to observe. Russian immigrants at first spurned Reform Judaism and struggled with much difficulty to preserve their old customs. For many the economic necessity of violating the Sabbath posed a dilemma. A further problem was the inadequacy of Hebrew education in America and the declining strength of the rabbinate. Also, many found that the old religious practices inhibited their acceptance into the secular world of the city and tended to separate Jews from their Christian brethren.

Most immigrant parents saw to it that their children received some sort of Orthodox Jewish education. In 1892, the first Talmud Torah, or Hebrew School, was opened in Providence. Modeled after the European Talmud Torah, a charity school for those unable to afford tuition, these schools admitted children from poor families free of charge. By 1910, there were two large Talmud Torahs in Providence, where the children were taught the scriptures in Hebrew, and at least three Sabbath schools, where the children were taught Jewish history in English.²⁶ As for public schooling, the majority attended State Street or Chalkstone Avenue Primary Schools, went on to Candace Street Grammar School, and then on to Hope High School.

While most Jews upon arrival opted to remain Orthodox, over a period of time many became less pious in their new urban environment. This turning away from Orthodoxy was particularly evident among second generation Jews, who were less devoted to the strict Orthodox culture of their parents and were more impelled to become a part of middle class city life. By the 1920s, the first Conservative congregation in Providence was established. Comprised primarily of second generation Russian immigrants, Conservative Judaism was a compromise between their American middle class desire for secular integration and their ties to the traditional culture. Unlike

Reform Judaism, which was viewed as too liberal, Conservative Judaism retained many of the old customs, while doing away with some of the ancient rituals which they considered outdated. Though this new brand of Judaism became increasingly popular, not all Russian immigrants switched their allegiance. Many remained steadfast in their Orthodoxy.

ASSISTANCE AND BENEVOLENCE ASSOCIATIONS

Adjustment to urban life was difficult for Providence's Russian Jews. Many, especially those who came before 1900, had never been exposed to a city before. The massiveness of the buildings, the throngs of people, and the quick-paced life were terrifying to many of the newcomers. Knowing no English, possessing few job skills and little education, these early settlers often needed assistance in their efforts to start a new life. Never having experienced life in which they were granted religious, civil, and political freedom, many Jews did not understand how to deal with it. Though many of those who came after 1900 were more skilled, had attained higher levels of education, and to an increasing extent had been exposed to some city life back home, the transition to new surroundings was still difficult.

By the time Eastern European Jews arrived in Providence in large numbers, "German" Jews were already favorably established in the community. Many owned businesses and had become wealthy. These middle class "American" Jews saw the large numbers of Russian immigrants as a serious problem.²⁷ They were sensitive to the mounting anti-immigrant and antisemitic feelings that the influx was creating among Gentiles, fearful that, by association, they would lose some of their social status. Many non-Jews in the city saw the Russians as dirty, physically inferior, and vulgar. The "German" Jews, too, felt superior to the recent immigrants, whom they viewed as unrefined and unsophisticated.

Despite the antipathy of the Americanized Jews to the newcomers, the "German" Jews did accept some responsibility for the social adjustment and physical welfare of the recent immigrants.²⁸ Arthur Goren, in *The American Jews*, explained the reaction of the established Jews thus:

In part their response was self-serving: expediting the integration of the new arrivals would remove the stigma the immigrants placed on all of them. However, American Jews also felt compassion for victims of oppression and recognized their common identity. While they complained of the continued flow of immigration, they opened their philanthropic institutions to the Russian Jews, raised funds to meet their needs, and fought efforts to limit immigration by law.²⁹

The community responded to the newcomers initially by expanding some of the existing facilities and establishing several new ones. Most of the early work was done by the synagogues, which, through charitable funds, took care of some of the immigrants' needs. While the synagogues continued to serve an important function in this regard, as time went on, new beneficial and charitable organizations were established. By 1889, the problems of the newcomers were sufficiently pressing to inspire a small group of women in the North End to establish the Ladies Hebrew Union Aid Association for the purpose of giving aid and charity to the poor. Concerned with the care of the sick and destitute, they opened the Jewish Home for the Aged at 161 Orms Street. By 1912, they needed more space and purchased a new house at 191 Orms Street, where it was to remain until 1932.

The Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA), a social, beneficial, and literary group, obtained a charter in 1898, while the Young Women's Hebrew Association (YWHA) was chartered in 1900. Devoted to educating the new immigrants, these groups sponsored lectures, literary debates, Jewish history classes for adults, and Bible classes for children. They further sponsored athletic teams, dances, and other social gatherings for the newcomers.³⁰

The Gemilath Chesed, or Providence Hebrew Free Loan Association, which met for the first time in 1903 at 317 North Main Street, was an invaluable organization for the Russian settlers. The organization lent money without interest to immigrants, to be paid back in small installments.³¹ It was essential to the immigrant, who, without money, relied on the association to enable him to start a business or obtain merchandise for peddling. During these years, the first national organization of Jewish women was established. Founded in 1893 to deal with the problems of philanthropy, education, and religion, the National Council of Jewish Women established a Providence branch at the turn of the century. In 1908, the Council spent over \$1000 for the North End Dispensary. Located at 49 Orms Street, its purpose was to provide surgical and medical treatment to the poor and needy sick of all denominations. Rendering much needed help to the newcomers, in one year alone, 1908, the dispensary provided a total of 4868 treatments, including 44 operations, to 1579 patients.³²

Other groups were formed to look after needy immigrants, such as the Miriam Society, a group of twelve women, organized for the purpose of maintaining beds in area hospitals for newcomers. For a period of 18 months, during 1908-09, they contributed \$425 to various hospitals. One thousand patients were treated at the Rhode Island Hospital through their efforts.³³ The Jewish Orphanage of Providence, founded in 1910 at 1213 North Main Street, sheltered 51 Jewish children, many of whom were

themselves Russian immigrants. The year 1909 saw the formation of the Providence Hebrew Butchers Association and the North End Traders Mutual Aid Association to provide mutual aid to their members. Besides the numerous charities and mutual aid associations, there were six literary societies and several social clubs, which sponsored English classes, balls, athletic teams, and other functions for the Jewish community and newcomers.

In "The Year 1905 in Rhode Island," Beryl Segal described a new type of communal activity that took place in the city between 1903 and 1914. The 1903 Russian pogroms and two years of violence that followed spurred a burst of activity on the part of Providence's Jewish community. Ad hoc coordinating bodies raised emergency money for relief purposes, organized protests, and negotiated with members of the American government to intercede on behalf of Russia's Jews.³⁴

Despite the array of social, philanthropic, and charitable organizations, there was much room for improvement. The societies were often poorly organized and operated haphazardly. Frequently short of fund, they received in those days no support from the federal government. There was no central organizing bureau to coordinate activity or to prevent overlap of functions. As Bessie Edith Bloom noted, "Thousands and thousands of dollars are spent for charity every year, and various societies are working for similiar ends. Organization, experienced leadership, and scientific methods would lead to greater economy and to better results."³⁵ Though there were many programs for immigrants, due to the sheer size of the influx or the lack of caring, the newcomers, with few skills and a tremendous language handicap, never received the attention they needed in a new country. While the Council of Jewish Women and the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) were in existence at the time to help them, the immigrants encountered many difficulties upon arrival.

Some were met at the docks by relatives, hustled through immigration, and given comprehensive assistance for a temporary settlement, but many arrived in the city with no advisers to guide them or see to it that their early days in the community went smoothly and that they found a job and had enough to eat. Most were forced to fend for themselves, which for many immigrants was an onerous burden.

SOVIET JEWS

By the late 1920s, many of Providence's second generation Jews had moved to the East Side. Here they built major Jewish institutions that continue to serve Jewish people throughout the city and state. It was not

until 1950 that a significant number of Providence Jews began to move out of the city and into surrounding suburbs. Synagogues and other organizations were established in Cranston and Warwick. Soon, Jewish communities were formed in Kingston, Narragansett, Westerly, Pawtucket, Woonsocket, Barrington, and East Greenwich. In fact, today, there are few areas of the state in which Jews do not live.

In order to coordinate the activities of the expanding Jewish community, to prevent waste of resources, and to insure comprehensive programming, the General Jewish Committee of Providence was formed in 1945. Reorganized as the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island in 1971, it is now located at 130 Sessions Street in Providence and serves as the central funding body for many of the state's Jewish agencies. As of this writing, there are over 22,000 Jews in the state, according to an *American Jewish Yearbook* survey. Less than half reside in Providence, the remainder choosing the outlying suburbs.³⁶ The most recent group of Jewish settlers in the city are the Soviet Jews.

In the years after World War II, very few Jews left the Soviet Union. From October 1968 to October 1982, however, 261,994 Jews were granted exit visas. Over 162,000 of them went to Israel. Most of the remainder came to the United States. According to Zvi Gitelman in "Why are they Choosing America?", there are several reasons why Jews favor the United States over Israel. These include the belief that the United States holds more vocational and economic opportunities, the fear of war in Israel, and the desire to live in a powerful country.³⁷

Since 1970, when the first Soviet Jews settled in Providence, over 500 have entered the city. Due to some out-migration, usually for employment purposes, there are currently just over 400 in the city. They constitute a small, but important community. About half of them arrived in 1979. During 1982, only three are believed to have entered the city, reflecting the recent Soviet cutback in emigration. Over 50 per cent of the immigrants from the Soviet Union chose to live in New York; those who came to Providence did so for a number of reasons. Some did so because they already had friends or relatives in the city, some to settle in a place where life would be calmer than in the major cities, and others because they were directed to Providence by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society in Rome. Isaac Vaisfeld, who came to Providence from Odessa in 1975, described his reasons thus: "We looked at the map, me and my wife, and we see it is close to the ocean. Odessa is on the Black Sea, and we say it will be good."³⁸

A detailed explanation of the complicated dynamics of how and why the Soviets let Jews out in some years, but not in others, would exceed the scope of this paper. Basically, however, as Jack Spitzer, President Of B'nai B'rith

International explained, "Jews are pawns of U.S.-Soviet relations."³⁹ Starting in 1965, Soviet authorities, determined to enter into a period of detente with the United States, began to let Jews leave. When the Soviets want improved relations with the United States or are interested in purchasing U.S. merchandise, they let Jews out as a signal of good behavior. When relations between the two countries are strained, as they are today, few Jews get out. From a high of 51,000 departures in 1979, only about 3,000 Jews were expected to leave in 1982.

In many cases, Soviet Jews came to America for reasons other than those of the settlers at the turn of the century. Unlike the earlier period, Jews in the Soviet Union today are not confined to the Pale or subject to violent pogroms. They are, however, victims of a virulent, government-sponsored antisemitic campaign, which prevents them from access to top jobs in government and industry, from the universities, and from economic advancement. Those who are courageous enough to apply for visas often lose their jobs, are stripped of academic credentials, ostracized by friends, and thrown into jail. Unlike earlier times, however, most Jews in the Soviet Union today are not religious and do not practice Judaism. They are forbidden by the government to speak Hebrew, own Bibles, or participate in the culture with which they are identified. For the most part, the principal motivation for emigration was to find better economic conditions, and not for religious reasons. As Dan Jacobs points out in *Studies of the Third Wave*, "Only to the extent that anitsemittism hampered their opportunities was it a motivation for leaving."⁴⁰ Mira Eides, a Providence resident since 1973, explained why she came: "There was no future for us in the Soviet Union. We left so our children could have a better chance to make it."⁴¹ Jews also came to seek political freedom and to escape a totalitarian society plagued by economic shortages.

Jews at the turn of the century, likewise, left to find better economic opportunities, but they had a much better sense of religion because of their Judaic background and their identity as victims of organized persecution, pogroms, and banishments. For the earlier immigrants, fleeing for their lives, America was important not only as a land of opportunity, but, to a much larger extent than today, as a land of religious freedom and refuge from life-threatening persecution.

ASSISTANCE AND BENEVOLENCE ASSOCIATIONS

The transition from a closed, totalitarian society, where the government provides most of life's needs and where, as a result, individual initiative and responsibility are reduced, to an open society based on responsibility and individual action is difficult for most Soviet Jews.⁴² Though, unlike the

earlier period, many Soviets have been exposed to the fast pace of city living back home, it is still hard for the newcomers to make choices which were once the prerogative of the state — which job to take and where to live. Most immigrants are deeply suspicious of their neighbors and authority, including resettlement workers, and have a rough time understanding their new freedom. Further, though often educated and skilled, few can speak English, a barrier which makes their transition much more burdensome than it would otherwise be.

In late 19th and early 20th century Providence, there were several aid groups, each devoted to meeting a certain aspect of the settler's needs. There was, however, no central agency to make sure that all of the immigrant's wants were met. The various assistance groups were not well coordinated, were often poorly financed, and could not adequately meet all of the newcomer's transition needs. Today, however, the resettlement of Jews is well funded and highly organized. From the moment the immigrant steps off the plane, all of his requirements are taken care of by the Jewish Family and Children's Service, an agency funded by the Jewish Federation. Social workers at the Service take on major responsibilities for the initial resettlement of new families until they are reasonably well established and able to make it on their own.

In 1900, unless an immigrant had family in Providence, nobody was likely to meet him at the docks upon arrival, and no organization existed to provide him with money to relieve the burden of his first several months in the city or to see that he secured a decent job or adequate residence. Today, however, Esther Miller, supervisor of the refugee program at the Jewish Family and Children's Service, is notified ahead of time by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society that a new immigrant will be coming. For over ten years, she has met every Soviet arriving at Theodore Francis Green Airport. With the help of volunteers from the National Council of Jewish Women, Ms. Miller rents a totally furnished apartment and stocks it with groceries even before the family arrives in America. "The minute they come into America, they can set up housekeeping," Ms. Miller explained.⁴³

Each family is completely supported for three months with a check from the Service while the members learn English. Though Ms. Miller would not reveal the amount provided per family in 1982, the 1976 figure was \$80 a week for a family of four.⁴⁴ Some hardship cases require more than three months of help and may be provided for for up to one year. Unlike the earlier period in which the federal government gave no money to communities to help resettle the Jews. It now gives the city \$900 for each newcomer. This is almost one-half the average total cost to the community of \$1850 for each settler.⁴⁵ Praising the ability of the Jewish population to absorb the Soviets, the United Way

concluded, "Because of the small size of the Russian community and the ability of the Jewish community to meet most refugees' needs," there have been few Jewish immigrants on public assistance or welfare programs.⁴⁶

To ease the pains of adjustment, all of the immigrant's needs are cared for. Adults are enrolled free of charge for three months in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at the Jewish Community Center almost immediately upon arriving in the city. These classes are mandatory for those who want to receive aid from the community. Younger children are enrolled in the Hebrew Day School. In 1981, 30 Soviet Jewish children studied there. The immigrant is given free membership in the recreational and social/educational programs at the Jewish Community Center for the first year and offered reduced membership rates thereafter.⁴⁷ Full free medical care is provided at The Miriam Hospital. The Bureau of Jewish Education sponsors free cultural and educational services, while various congregations in the state have also been actively involved in the resettlement work, including Temples Beth-El and Emanuel in Providence and Temple Torat Yisrael in Cranston.⁴⁸ Most important, the Jewish Family and Children's Service has been highly successful in its efforts to place immigrants in decent employment through Jewish contacts in the business world. Most Soviet Jews have acquired jobs within several weeks.⁴⁹

Within a relatively short time, when the settlers are earning their own wages and are more accustomed to their new society, they are taken off the Service's rolls. The role of the Service, however, does not end. Social workers make themselves available for routine support and crisis counseling throughout the Jewish immigrant's early years in Providence.⁵⁰ Primarily through the work of the Service, the transition of the Soviet Jew, though difficult, is less onerous than that of his predecessor at the turn of the century.

Several non-Jewish agencies have also played important roles in Soviet Jewish resettlement. The International Institute, largely because of its Russian-speaking director, has helped to counsel and advise refugees, while the Rochambeau branch of the Providence Public Library on the East Side has started a collection of Russian books.⁵¹

RESIDENCE

Russian settlers at the turn of the century lived primarily in the North End and in South Providence. Often residing in small, run-down tenements on unkempt streets, Jews were crowded among their co-religionists and dominated whole neighborhoods of the city. Observers knew very well

where the Jewish section was, for the Jews there were a majority. The situation for Soviet immigrants today is very different, since they are too few to be a majority in any neighborhood. They have been settled in comfortable single and multiple family dwellings, located along clean, tree-lined streets. The Jewish Family and Children's Service assures that the immigrant's very first house is in a respectable neighborhood and has ample room and sufficient furniture. Since they are fewer in number than the early settlers, recent immigrants have not experienced the housing shortages which occurred in the early days from the vast influx of immigrants. New Soviet arrivals are not crowded together in tiny apartments as were the earlier group and, in fact, the majority have relocated at least once in search of better housing.

Two-thirds of the newcomers were settled on the East Side of Providence, many in the area between Rochambeau Avenue and Twelfth Street, primarily because of the considerable Jewish community already in that area.⁵³ The East Side houses more Jews than any other section of the city and contains one of the community's most important social institutions, the Jewish Community Center at 401 Elm Grove Avenue. Former Soviet Jews do not dominate the East Side as their predecessors once did the North End sections or South Providence at the turn of the century. While many new Soviet immigrants live close to one another, many other groups also inhabit the East Side. In fact, 10 per cent of the Soviet Jewish newcomers live in South Providence.⁵⁴

As in the earlier period, there is a good deal of residential mobility. As the immigrants become adjusted and improve their lot, many move to more attractive apartments or homes. Some have moved as many as four times since coming to Rhode Island.⁵⁵ According to Esther Miller, "They stay on the East Side if they make a little money. If they do very well, they go to the suburbs."⁵⁶ Fifteen per cent of the settlers have bought homes in Cranston, Warwick, or Pawtucket. Some, in fact, have bought homes in South Providence because real estate is less costly in this area than in some other sections.

The native Providence Jewish community has been more sympathetic toward immigrants than were German Jews in the late 19th century. Nevertheless, the Soviet refugees, at least at first, are not completely accepted socially by the resident Jews. They are viewed by some as foreigners with a strange language, culture, and attitude. "While there is not hostility as in the early days, there has not been complete social acceptance either," observed Elliot Schwartz, Director of the Bureau of Jewish Education.⁵⁷ For the first few years, the refugees tend to socialize primarily

with one another. Feeling like outsiders in the new society, they seek relationships with one another to help ease the transition between the old world and the new. Over time, however, the newcomers have generally been accepted by both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities, particularly as they have learned English and become more accustomed to American culture and institutions.

OCCUPATION

The Soviet Jews who come to America are very different from their earlier counterparts. Most today are skilled workers with solid educational backgrounds. To be sure, there are still some with little education and scant vocational training, but they are a minority. The United Way has concluded, "The Soviet Jews as a group are relatively well positioned culturally, educationally, and by work experience to make a successful adjustment to life in this country."⁵⁸ The transition, however, has not been entirely smooth or trouble-free.

In a study, "Soviet Jews' Adjustment to the United States," Rita and Julius Simon found that the current wave of immigrants "bring much human capital with them."⁵⁹ Their 1982 survey revealed that the mean level of education nationwide is 14 years for adult male immigrants and 13 years for females. Sixty-four per cent received diplomas from an institute of higher education, which is equivalent to an American baccalaureate degree. Ten per cent had studies toward a higher degree, and five per cent had completed the degree.⁶⁰

Many had similar achievements in their occupations. In 1977, the *American Jewish Yearbook* categorized immigrants according to the jobs they had held in the Soviet Union. Of those who came between 1971-75, 28 per cent were professionals, 11 per cent engineers, and 12 per cent technicians, while 14 per cent were white-collar workers (managerial, clerical, sales). Only 17 per cent were blue-collar workers (machine trades, benchwork, structural work), 12 per cent in service trades, two per cent in transportation, and only one per cent unskilled.⁶¹ Appreciably more skilled than their counterparts at the turn of the century, Soviet Jews today are better equipped for rapid economic advancement than were the early settlers.

Despite the high level of skills and education, however, the transition from the Soviet to the American economy is difficult for most workers. Because of language barriers, problems of professionals and technicians in gaining certification and acquiring western knowledge and skills, and mismatches between job categories in the two countries, few immigrants are able at first to find employment similar to that which they held in the Soviet

Union.⁶² Most must settle for jobs for which they are overqualified until they have sufficient knowledge of English. Engineers work as draftsmen and doctors as medical assistants. Esther Miller described their predicament:

In the beginning, it is very hard for them. They can be resentful at having to do some menial work. Somehow it is not what they expected. But after six months they start to realize that whatever work they are doing is a beginning for them, that when you are in a new country, you have to start from the bottom.⁶³

It takes time for them to start believing they will ever attain the level of skills or position they held in Russia. Very few understand the concept of economic mobility.⁶⁴

All Soviet Jews who have entered Providence found employment within a few weeks of arrival through the efforts of the Jewish Family and Children's Service. In this respect, they have been fortunate, as local Jewish businesses have been able to absorb the small numbers involved. In other cities, where the influx has been larger and the Jewish community less helpful, Jews have not been as fortunate. Nationwide, within six months after entry, only 60 per cent of the males and 34 per cent of the females found employment. Within a year, this number had risen to only 78 per cent and 56 per cent.⁶⁵ "I get the first job for them, usually in a business or factory," said Ms. Miller. "The men who give the jobs are aware that they will not get full value for their money for a while."⁶⁶

Success stories in the employment field are becoming more and more evident. Dual incomes, resulting from the strong Soviet tradition of women working outside the home, have permitted many Jews to become homeowners, possibly as many as 30 per cent.⁶⁷ As the English language is learned and recertification and retraining completed, the better educated and skilled immigrants have made significant gains in employment. Some now fill positions comparable to those they held in the Soviet Union. More than 15 are engineers, and at least eight have opened their own businesses. Recent immigrants own Providence branches of the International House of Pancakes and of Dunkin' Donuts, a delicatessen, and an auto body shop.⁶⁸ While many work in the jewelry shops and factories, as in 1900, a much smaller proportion today are involved in peddling or small businesses. On the other hand, a much larger number are in the professions and skilled trades, a number that will increase as more Soviets become familiar with the English language and American customs. An occupational breakdown for recent immigrants is contained in the Appendix. For more recent immigrants and those who had a hard time learning the language, economic

advancement was slow. Some remained in unskilled jobs at close to the minimum wage, particularly those with few skills.⁶⁹

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Unlike the earlier settlers, the current wave come to America with little regard for religion, let alone Orthodoxy. Brought up in an intensely anti-religious society, where Hebrew and the Bible were banned, Jewish schools outlawed, and Jews discriminated against, few retained the spirituality or “Jewishness” of their ancestors. The thriving Jewish culture of the Pale has, for the most part, been replaced by a secularized Soviet Jewish society. It is a great paradox that Jews are not allowed to learn about or participate in that which has marked them for abuse — their religion. Certainly, a few have retained their pious tradition. They, however, are to a large extent the elderly, alive before religion was outlawed or those old enough to have parents who still observe the faith.

Only 2.1 per cent of the Soviet Jews in America considered themselves to be “very religious” in the Soviet Union. Another 13.3 per cent described themselves as “somewhat or fairly religious.” The largest number, however, 66.3 per cent, considered themselves “not at all religious” in their homeland. Only 10 per cent described themselves as having had some form of Jewish education while they were living in the Soviet Union.⁷⁰ The United Way study revealed that “Unlike earlier waves of Jewish immigration to this country, the Soviet Jews found themselves with few cultural and religious links to their nominal co-religionists who presented themselves as their hosts.”⁷¹ As a result, the integration of the immigrants into the Jewish community, not only socially, but religiously has been extremely difficult.

In 1900 considerable stress was placed upon Americanization of large numbers of Russian Jewish settlers, who were steeped in Orthodox religion. Religious Jews were encouraged to become less observant in order to become more a part of secular city life. Today, however, the pull of the Jewish community is in the opposite direction, to expose them to religion and educate them about their Judaic heritage. According to Elliott Schwartz, most of the Providence newcomers know nothing about Judaism. A few of the older ones speak Yiddish, but it is unknown to the youths. None know any Hebrew.⁷²

Like the Jewish Family and Children’s Service, The Jewish Bureau of Education plays an integral role in the resettlement process. The Bureau has taken primary responsibility for the newcomers’ Jewish education. Their reorientation into Jewish life is started almost immediately upon arrival. The English as a Second Language courses, mandatory for all settlers, have a

Judaic content. The materials used to teach English, while simplified for purposes of instruction, all relate stories about the Jewish religion.⁷³ Children under high school age are sent free of charge to the Providence Hebrew Day School, where they learn about Jewish culture, along with their daily lessons. The city's congregations and the Jewish Community Center have all offered free one-year membership.

The Jewish Community Center has also set up weekly lectures on tradition and history, along with discussion sessions and bus trips to such Jewish attractions as the Touro Synagogue in Newport.⁷⁴ In April 1981, the Jewish Community Center sponsored a Passover service for Soviet Jews. One hundred fifty immigrants appeared, many hearing for the first time the story of the Jews' release from slavery in Egypt.⁷⁵ Several congregations extended their concern for Soviet Jews beyond free membership. Torat Yisrael in Cranston and Temple Emanuel in Providence have special discussion sessions and services for Russian immigrants.

The reaction of the immigrants to Jewish education is mixed. Some are interested in learning about the religion which caused them such hardship in the Soviet Union. Others show little enthusiasm. Many want to escape Judaism in the unaccustomed free environment and start over with a new life.⁷⁶ While no studies have been conducted to analyze the reaction of Soviet Jews to Judaism once in Providence, the work of Rita and Julius Simon may provide some hints. Conducted in 1982, their nationwide survey found that 25.6 per cent of the Soviet Jews in America consider themselves "somewhat religious," 12.1 per cent "fairly religious" and 3.8 per cent "very religious" compared to 16 per cent who said they were either "somewhat, fairly, or very" religious in the Soviet Union.⁷⁷ It appears that, over time, Soviet Jews in America become increasingly religious. In the earlier wave of immigration, the opposite was true. Unlike Jews at the turn of the century, however, Soviet Jews spend little time in the synagogue. According to the Simonses, only 7 per cent "attend regularly." Of these 89 per cent are affiliated with a congregation — 37 per cent Conservative, and 34 per cent Reform.⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

The experiences of Soviet Jews in Providence differ significantly from those of Russian Jews who came to the city at the turn of the century. Far fewer in number, recent Soviet immigrants for the most part are better educated, more highly skilled, and less religious than their earlier counterparts. Further, the Jewish community which the Soviet emigrés have encountered since 1970 has little resemblance to that of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Larger and better organized, the established Jewish

community of today is more sympathetic to newcomers than was that of the turn of the century. The transition for the recent settlers has not been as difficult as that of the first waves of Russian immigrants. Entering America better equipped for city life, Soviet settlers since 1970 have found a Jewish community very willing to extend a helping hand.

While groups experienced serious dislocations in the move from the old world to the new, the Soviet Jews have had an easier time adjusting to Providence than did their predecessors.

APPENDIX
EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS OF SOVIET JEWS WHO CAME TO PROVIDENCE
BETWEEN 1970-1980

While a complete listing of the occupations of the newcomers is not available, below is a break-down of 167 Soviet Jews who settled in Providence between 1970-1980.

Machine Operators 18	Bench worker 1
Jewelry Worker 15	Mental worker 1
Engineer 15	Manicurist 1
Student 11	Chef 1
Bookkeeper 7	Department manager 1
Auto mechanic 6	Resettlement worker 1
Draftsperson 6	Volinist 1
Seamstress 4	Pianist 1
Programmer 3	Oceanographer 1
Carpenter 2	Real estate agent 1
Sewing machine mechanic 2	Boxmaker 1
Electrician 2	Office worker 1
Medical assistant 2	Purchasing agent 1
Proprietor of jewelry business 2	Laundryman 1
Proprietor of delicatessen shop 2	Dressmaker 1
Chemist 2	Printer 1
Key punch operator 2	Supervisor 1
Technician 2	Polisher 1
Toolmaker 2	Refrigerator mechanic 1
Nurses aide 2	Plasterer 1
Typist 1	Physicist 1
Proprietor of pancake restaurant 1	Math. teacher 1
Proprietor of doughnut shop 1	Proprietor of cleaning business 1
Shoemaker 1	

Retired 22	Unemployed 4
Housewife 6	Disabled 1

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adelman, David C. "Providence Jewish Communities Unite." *R.I. Jewish Historical Notes*, April, 1958.
- Bloom, Bessie Edith. "Jewish Life in Providence." *R.I. Jewish Historical Notes*, November, 1970
- Bongartz, Roy, "Russian Jews in Rhode Island." *Sunday Journal Magazine* (Providence), December 27, 1981.
- Chudacoff, Howard P. *Evolution of American Urban Society*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J. :Prentice Hall, 1981.
- Dimont, Max. *The Jews in America*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978
- Fine, Morton, and Himmelfarb, Milton. *American Jewish Yearbook*. New York: American Jewish Committee, 1977.
- Gitelman, Zvi. "Why Are they Choosing America?" *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 1, 1977
- Glazer, Nathan and Moynihan, Daniel Patrick. *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1963
- Goldowsky, Seebert. "The Jewish Home for the Aged of Rhode Island." *R.I. Jewish Historical Notes*, April, 1958.
- Goldstein, Alice. "Mobility and Nativity of Jews in Providence, 1900-20." *R.I. Jewish Historical Notes*, November, 1979.
- Goldstein, Sidney. *A Population Survey*. Providence: General Jewish Committee, 1964.
- Goldstein, Sidney, and Goldscheider, Calvin. *Jewish Americans*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968.
- Goren, Arthur. *The American Jews*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1982.
- Horvitz, Eleanor. "Jews of the North End." *R.I. Jewish Historical Notes*, November, 1979.
- Howe, Irving. *World of Our Fathers*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976.
- Ingall, Carol. "The Day the Anarchist Came to Town." *R.I. Jewish Historical Notes*, November, 1979.
- Jacobs, Dan, and Paul, Ellen. *Studies of the Third Wave*. Colorado: Westview Press, 1981.
- Kressner, Thomas. *The Golden Door*. New York: Oxford Press, 1977.
- Riis, Jacob. *How the Other Half Lives*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1951.
- Segal, Beryl. "The Year 1905 in Rhode Island." *R.I. Jewish Historical Notes*, November 1968.
- Simon, Julius, and Simon, Rita. *The Soviet Jews' Adjustment to the United States*. New York: Council of Jewish Federations, 1982.
- United Way of Southeastern New England. *A Study of the Services to the non-English Speaking Communities in Rhode Island*, March, 1982.

NOTES

- ¹Sidney Goldstein, *Population Survey* (Providence: General Jewish Committee, 1964), p.10.
- ²David Adelman, "Providence Jewish Communities Unite." *R.I. Jewish Historical Notes*, 2:88, April, 1958.
- ³Goldstein, *Population Survey*, p.10.
- ⁴Goldstein, *Population Survey*, p.10.
- ⁵Arthur Goren, *The American Jews* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1982), p.40.
- ⁶Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Harcourt, 1982), p.6.
- ⁷Sidney Goldstein and Calvin Goldscheider, *Jewish Americans* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 26.
- ⁸Goldstein and Goldscheider, *Jewish Americans*, p.26.
- ⁹Alice Goldstein. "Mobility of Natives and Jews." *R.I. Jewish Historical Notes*, 8:69, November, 1979.
- ¹⁰Interview with Mim Hoffman, River Vale, New Jersey, 25 November 1982.
- ¹¹Goldstein and Goldscheider, *Jewish Americans*, p.64.
- ¹²Goldstein. "Mobility of Natives and Jews." p.68.
- ¹³Jacob Riis. *How the Other Half Lives* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1951), p.76
- ¹⁴Eleanor Horvitz. "Jews of the North End." *R.I. Jewish History Notes*, 8:15, November, 1979.
- ¹⁵Goldstein, "Mobility of Natives and Jews." p.68
- ¹⁶Interview with Mim Hoffman.
- ¹⁷Goldstein, "Mobility of Natives and Jews." p.71
- ¹⁸Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. *Beyond the Melting Pot.* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1963), p. 143.
- ¹⁹Riis. *How the Other Half Lives.* p.76.
- ²⁰Horvitz. "Jews of the North End." p.17.
- ²¹Thomas Kessner. *The Golden Door.* (New York: Oxford, 1977), p.109.
- ²²Alice Goldstein. "Mobility of Natives and Jews." p.69.
- ²³Bessie Edith Bloom (Wessel). "Jewish Life in Providence." *R.I. Jewish Historical Notes*, 5:389, November, 1970.
- ²⁴Horvitz. "Jews of the North End." p.31.
- ²⁵Bloom. "Jewish Life in Providence." p.402
- ²⁶Bloom. "Jewish Life in Providence." p.399
- ²⁷David Adelman. "Providence Jewish Communities Unite." p.188.
- ²⁸David Adelman. "Providence Jewish Communities Unite." p.188.
- ²⁹Arthur Goren, *The American Jews.* p.62.
- ³⁰Interview with Arnold Binder, Providence, Rhode Island, 10 November 1982.
- ³¹Eleanor Horvitz. "Jews of the North End." p.45.
- ³²Horvitz, p.41.
- ³³Bloom. "Jewish Life in Providence." p.403.
- ³⁴Beryl Segal. "The Year 1905 in Rhode Island." *R.I. Jewish Historical Notes*, 5:68, November, 1968.
- ³⁵Bloom. "Jewish Life in Providence." p.405.
- ³⁶Morton Fine and Milton Himmelfarb. *American Jewish Yearbook* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1977). p. 237
- ³⁷Zvi Gitelman. "Why Are They Choosing America?" *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 1, 1977, p.44.
- ³⁸Roy Bongartz. "Russian Jews in Rhode Island." *Sunday Journal Magazine*, December 27, 1981, p. 10.
- ³⁹Interview with Jack Spitzer, Washington D.C., 4 August 1982.

- ⁴⁰Dan Jacobs and Ellen Paul. *Studies of the Third Wave* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), p. 8.
- ⁴¹Interview with Mira Eides, Providence, R.I., 1 December 1982.
- ⁴²Fine and Himmelfarb. *American Jewish Yearbook*, p.169.
- ⁴³Interview with Esther Miller, Providence, R.I., 15 November 1982.
- ⁴⁴Interview with Esther Miller.
- ⁴⁵Interview with Esther Miller.
- ⁴⁶United Way of Southeastern New England. *A Study of the Services to the non-English Speaking Communities in Rhode Island*, March, 1982. p. 35.
- ⁴⁷United Way, p.35.
- ⁴⁸Interview with Elliot Schwartz, Providence, R.I., 6 November 1982.
- ⁴⁹Interview with Lois Schlar, Providence, R.I. 2 November 1982.
- ⁵⁰United Way, p.34
- ⁵¹United Way, p.35.
- ⁵²Interview with Mira Eides.
- ⁵³Interview with Esther Miller.
- ⁵⁴Interview with Esther Miller.
- ⁵⁵Interview with Lois Schlar.
- ⁵⁶Interview with Esther Miller.
- ⁵⁷Interview with Elliot Schwartz.
- ⁵⁸United Way, p.32.
- ⁵⁹Julius Simon and Rita Simon. *The Soviet Jews' Adjustment to the United States* (New York: Council of Jewish Federations, 1982). p. 9.
- ⁶⁰Julius Simon and Rita Simon. *The Soviet Jews' Adjustment to the United States*, p.9.
- ⁶¹Fine and Himmelfarb, *American Jewish Yearbook*, p.123.
- ⁶²United Way, p.32.
- ⁶³Roy Bongartz. *Sunday Journal Magazine*, p.10.
- ⁶⁴Roy Bongartz. *Sunday Journal Magazine*, p.10.
- ⁶⁵Fine and Himmelfarb, *American Jewish Yearbook*, p.130.
- ⁶⁶Interview with Esther Miller.
- ⁶⁷United Way, p.32.
- ⁶⁸Interview with Esther Miller.
- ⁶⁹Interview with Mira Eides.
- ⁷⁰Julius Simon and Rita Simon. *The Soviet Jews' Adjustment to the United States*, p.66.
- ⁷¹United Way, p.33.
- ⁷²Interview with Elliot Schwartz.
- ⁷³Interview with Elliot Schwartz.
- ⁷⁴Interview with Elliot Schwartz.
- ⁷⁵Roy Bongartz. *Sunday Journal Magazine*, p.12.
- ⁷⁶Interview with Elliot Schwartz.
- ⁷⁷Julius Simon and Rita Simon. *The Soviet Jews' Adjustment to the United States*, p.67.
- ⁷⁸Julius Simon and Rita Simon. *The Soviet Jews' Adjustment to the United States*, p.69.

EDITOR'S NOTE

RUSSIAN JEWISH IMMIGRATION TO RHODE ISLAND

Brian Kempner has compared Russian Jewish immigrants who arrived in the 1970s with those who arrived around the turn of the century. David C. Adelman extracted from the Providence City Directories the names of Jewish residents of Providence for the years 1850 through 1900, taken at five-year intervals. These, in addition to lists from other town and city directories and naturalization lists, appeared in the first three volumes of the *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*.¹ Based on this material, Dr. Marvin Pitterman analyzed and tabulated the occupations of Jewish residents, mostly immigrants from eastern Europe, during this period.² In a more recent paper Joel Perlmann of Harvard University discusses the occupations of Russian Jewish immigrants to Providence during the years 1900-1915.³

Taken together these several studies provide a fairly complete occupational history of Eastern European Jewish immigrants to Providence covering more than a century.

S.J.G.

NOTES

¹Adelman, David C.: Jewish Family Names. *RIJHN* 3:5, No. 1, November 1958.

²Pitterman, Marvin: Some casual observations. *RIJHN* 3: 44-54, No. 1, November 1958.

³Perlmann, Joel: Beyond New York; The Occupations of Russian Jewish Immigrants in Providence, R.I. and in Other Small Communities, 1900-1915. *American Jewish History* 72:369-394, No. 3, March 1983.

TEMPLE BETH-ISRAEL 1921-1981

BY ELEANOR F. HORVITZ

This is the story of how one Temple ministered to the spiritual and social needs of its Congregation during its sixty years of existence. The origins of the first Conservative Temple in Rhode Island are described by Benton Rosen in a paper published in the *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*.¹ Legally chartered as the Providence Conservative Synagogue, it has always been known as Temple Beth-Israel. Its first New Year services were held on the evening of October 2, 1921. On February 28, 1981 the City of Providence purchased the synagogue building as a site for a neighborhood center. Thus, Temple Beth-Israel, Synagogue and Congregation, came to an end. The Congregation with its remaining members merged with that of the Conservative Congregation of Temple Beth Torah in Cranston. The joint Congregation assumed the new name of Temple Torat Yisrael.

A temple or synagogue is a many-faceted institution. The dictionary defines a synagogue as a building or place used by Jews for worship and religious study. The building at 155 Niagara Street, Providence, originally renovated from a German beer hall, met the physical requirements of a synagogue, but a temple is much more than a building for worship. The components of Temple Beth-Israel were diverse — a religious school, rabbis and many cantors, choir, Sisterhood, Brotherhood, and Daughterhood with their many activities, both cultural and fund-raising. Many clubs met in its building, such as the Boy Scouts, Young Judea, Masada, and United Synagogue Youth. Its many activities required leaders, workers, and the cooperation of the entire Congregation. It emerges as a group of very dedicated, loyal, and hard-working men and women largely from the same neighborhood. They survived three fires, World War II, and difficult economic times to worship together for sixty years.

THE FIRST DECADE — RABBI HURWITZ

Rabbi B. Leon Hurwitz, although not as yet ordained, assumed his duties as Rabbi of the Congregation in October of 1921. *The Providence Journal* of October 7, 1921 mentioned Rabbi Hurwitz in an article about *Sukkot**: "The Providence Conservative Tabernacle (modern Orthodox) begins this evening its three-day observance of the Succoth or Feast of Tabernacles, with a special service. Rabbi B. Leon Hurwitz will preach on 'The Succoth Message'. One of the picturesque features of this festival will be the great tent erected on the grounds of the temple at Niagara Street and Atlantic

*Festival of Tabernacles. Also rendered Succoth.

Avenue, to which members of the congregation will repair before the services have ended to enjoy refreshments and a musical programme. This tent is furnished with elaborate decorations and is hung with all varieties of fruits, boughs, leaves, and other foliage. The Succoth feast is under the auspices of the Temple Sisterhood. General services will be conducted by Rabbi Hurwitz and Joshua Bell.”

Rabbi Hurwitz taught in the Sunday School. One of his students² remembered him as a round-faced man with a little mustache, who would clap his hands to bring the class to order. She still had memories of the smell of beer which continued to pervade the classroom located in the building’s dank basement.

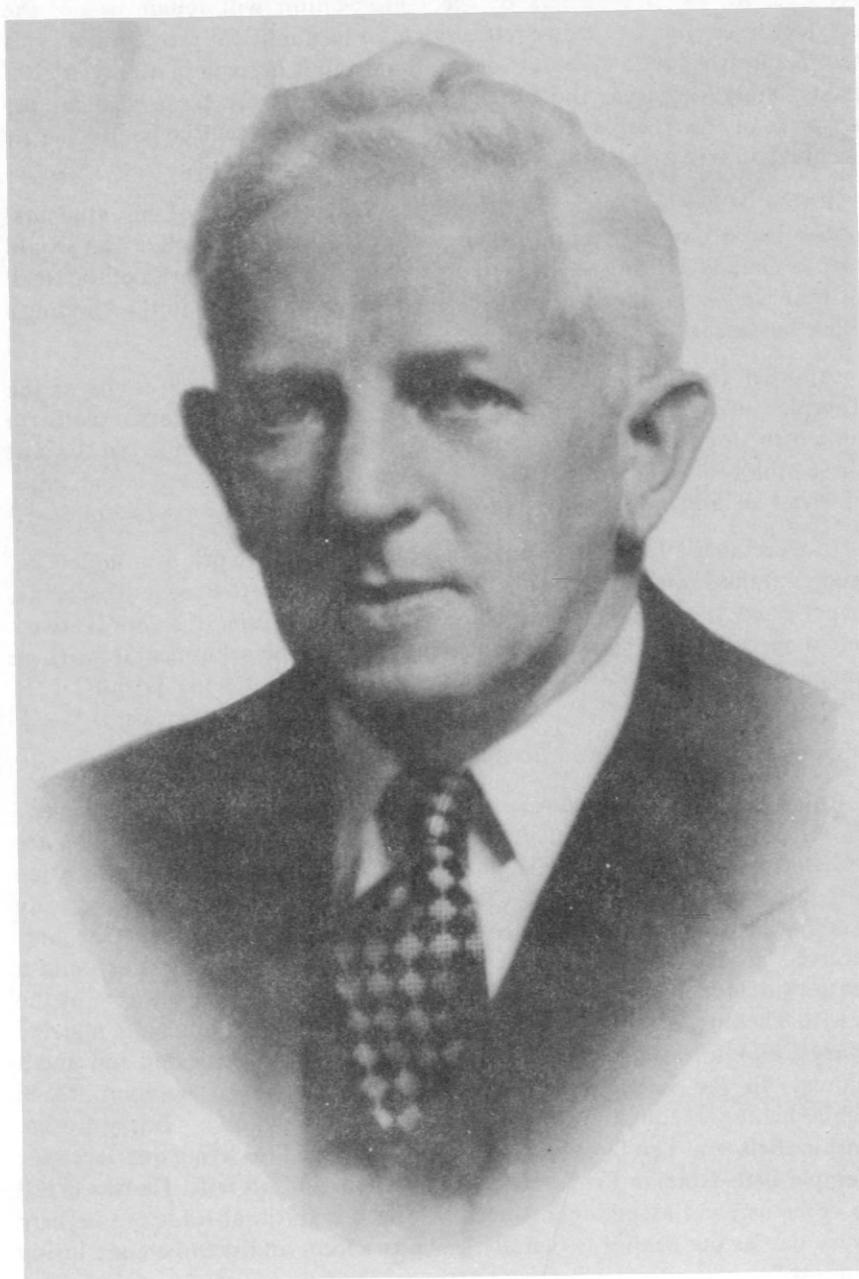
Another former member of the Congregation had recollections of the Temple’s first year. Around the perimeter of the hall was a raised platform on which stood the old beer tables and chairs. Everyone preferred to sit at these tables for the services, while those who lost out had to sit in the center of the hall and cope with folding chairs that were prone to collapse.³

In December 1922, Rabbi Hurwitz returned to New York to complete his studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary. According to Benton Rosen, in a paper titled “Temple Beth-Israel Finds a Spiritual Leader,”⁴ Rabbi Hurwitz left a record of “remarkable organizational and developmental work in behalf of the pioneer Conservative congregation in Rhode Island.”

RABBI MORRIS SHUSSHEIM ASSUMES LEADERSHIP

Rabbi Morris Schussheim of Columbus, Ohio was selected to replace Rabbi Hurwitz. His arrival in Providence was noted in *The Providence Journal* of December 26, 1922. Born in Austria in 1895, the Rabbi came with his mother to New York City in 1902, where his father had already established himself. He attended public schools in New York City and received his bachelor’s degree from the City College of New York and a master’s degree from Columbia University. He was ordained a Rabbi by the Jewish Theological Society of America. In 1921 Rabbi Schussheim married Mary Chipkin of New York, who, like himself, was a dedicated Jew and a Zionist. In the Rosen paper appear letters exchanged between Rabbi Schussheim and founding members of the Congregation — Harry Rosen, Joshua Bell, and Leo Grossman. The latter arranged for living quarters near Temple Beth-Israel in Providence for the Rabbi and his wife. He was urged to come as soon as possible, since “We need a spiritual leader to be here every day as our school is literally going to pieces and members are losing interest.”

By the time Rabbi Schussheim arrived enough money had been raised to



Rabbi Morris Schusheim, D.D. 1895-1970



Temple Beth-Israel Religious School students, 1922.

purchase the Temple building, which had previously been rented. Plans were made for extensive renovations.⁵ A broad expansion of Temple activities was begun.

Frieda Rosenberg was one of sixteen students in Rabbi Schussheim's first confirmation class in 1923. The girls, she recalled, wore long white dresses, carried bouquets of white roses, and "looked more like brides than confirmands".

The Hebrew School was enlarged. Barnet Hurvich in 1924 became the first teacher. In 1925 he was replaced by Morris Shoham, who remained at the Temple until 1946. The bar mitzvah students *davened** together every Sunday morning under Shoham's tutelage. Pearl and Samuel Ernstof introduced the serving of breakfast to the boys of the bar mitzvah brotherhood. Under Mrs. Ernstof's direction breakfast was served to this group for 25 years. This custom, which they originated, spread to other synagogues throughout the country.⁶ Morris Shoham also served as director of the Junior Congregation service. He exerted a strong influence

*Prayed (Yiddish)

on his students in the religious school and he took a personal interest in congregational matters as well.⁷

As the Temple grew there were many changes and innovations. A constant, however, was the ongoing financial problems — meeting mortgage payments, salaries, and other expenses of the Temple. In the early days there were no “big givers”, and expenses of necessity were kept modest. The Congregation met its bills with a series of drives and fund-raising activities.⁸

Study groups for women and a men’s club were organized. A temple library was established with the proceeds of a religious school bazaar directed by Mrs. Schussheim. A choir was organized under the direction of Jonas Goldenberg, who volunteered his services. Goldenberg had sung with a boys’ choir in Europe and had had an extensive musical training.

Joseph Schlossberg served as cantor in the years 1922-1929 and 1934-1949. Son of a famous cantor, he taught the choir the Hebrew words by transliterating them into English and also taught them scores from his own memory to sing without written music. In later years he occasionally filled in as cantor when called upon.

In February of 1929 Rabbi Schussheim resigned as spiritual leader of the Congregation and moved to Palestine with his family. He was succeeded by Rabbi Jacob Sonderling.

RABBI JACOB SONDERLING BECOMES SPIRITUAL LEADER

According to Rabbi Jacob Sonderling’s son, Paul,⁹ his father had left Germany in 1923 because he felt that German Jewry had become dormant and that there was no one influential enough at the time to revitalize the German Jewish community. He considered America to be the key to the future of world Jewry. Members of the Congregation during his two years as Rabbi recalled him as a colorful man.

Several women congregants described him as handsome and dramatic — like an actor. One woman even likened him to her impression of what God must look like, with his long white flowing beard. The Rabbi was well known before his coming to Providence. He had made visits on behalf of the World Zionist Organization and had spoken to Zionist audiences in Providence prior to his taking the rabbinical post.¹⁰ Providence was one of the most active Zionist cities in the United States. The ten thousand dollars annual salary which he demanded was unprecedented at the time, particularly for a small new congregation. However, the money was raised.

He was described thus by Max Nussbaum in the 1965 Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis:¹¹ “He was the most colorful rabbi I



Rabbi Jacob Sonderling 1878-1964

have ever known. The long, black, and later white beard — famous on two continents — gave him the appearance of an ancient Patriarch. He called attention to himself by his mere presence. . . . He was a fascinating combination of extreme elements; of East and West; of Orthodoxy and Reform. . . . He was born in Lipny in German Silesia, which is on the East-West frontier (now part of Poland). He had a Hungarian mother and a Galician father, and both were from Chassidic stock. A Zionist from his early youth — Theodore Herzl called him ‘My fighting Rabbi.’” According to Nussbaum, “He was called in 1908 to the pulpit of the Hamburg Temple, the cradle of Reform Judaism. He held that position until his migration to the United States. During WW1 he was the Chief Jewish Chaplain on the Eastern German Front and a member of Hindenburg’s General staff.” Nussbaum considered Sonderling “a teacher of teachers and a Rabbi of Rabbis; a man who brought drama to religion, Chassidism to Reform, Zionism to American Jewry, and kindness to his fellowman. He represented the totality of our Jewish heritage at its very best.”

Rabbi Sonderling during his short stay at Temple Beth-Israel left a musical legacy. He was greatly interested in the role of music in the service. He was responsible for bringing Igor Greenberg (he later changed his name to Gorin) as Cantor for the High Holy Days of 1930. An interesting story is told about Gorin:¹² “Rabbi Sonderling traveled to Europe every summer. On one occasion he brought back a baritone hazzan (cantor). A reception for him was held at the Temple. One of the women members asked him if he knew a certain person in his home town. He said she was his mother. She said she was her sister, and that was how an aunt and her nephew came to meet. The pandemonium that broke out in the vestry that night was unimaginable”. Igor Gorin went on to become a noted concert and motion picture singer. Rabbi Sonderling was also responsible for the installation of an organ — the first in a Conservative Temple.¹³ Rabbi Sonderling went from Temple Beth-Israel to Hollywood, where he became the movie stars’ Rabbi, converting many famous non-Jews to Judaism.

RABBI MAURICE MAZUR COMPLETES THE FIRST DECADE

In 1931 Rabbi Maurice Mazur replaced Rabbi Sonderling. In that same year the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Temple was celebrated. Rabbi Mazur was the opposite in every way to his predecessor. He was a bachelor who kept to himself, a man well versed in English literature and poetry, but not a social person who could communicate easily with his congregation.¹⁴



Temple Beth-Israel confirmation class, c. 1928-1929.

THE SISTERHOOD

The Sisterhood was organized shortly after the establishment of the Temple. Its members were hard-working and dedicated. During the period of the Great Depression, the Temple, like all institutions and businesses of the time, experienced deep financial difficulties. The burden of the mortgage was taken over by the Sisterhood in 1933 during the presidency of Mrs. Leo Weiner. In the ensuing ten years the Sisterhood met the regular interest payments and reduced the principal of the mortgage by almost six thousand dollars. This very important obligation which the Sisterhood had assumed was characteristic of the vital role women played in the history of the Temple.

A dinner-dance under the sponsorship of the Sisterhood was held annually, usually in the old Narragansett Hotel. This was considered to be *the* social event of the Jewish community, according to some of the participants. While the entire membership joined in making this affair a financial and social success, the competence of the chairpersons was often mentioned. The program book distributed at the affair contained many advertisements and produced substantial revenue.

Edythe Jay in the *Rhode Island Jewish Herald* of December 12, 1941 described one such affair held at the Narragansett Hotel on December 9: "Temple Beth-Israel's annual dinner-dance was held in the Crystal Ballroom . . . the setting is admittedly familiar, as are the people about whom we're writing, but there's something different." It was two days after President Roosevelt's announcement that the United States had entered the war. The colorful gowns and gay atmosphere belied the dire events of recent days.

Despite the considerable effort devoted to the dinner-dance, many other activities engaged the women. They always realized maximum profit since they themselves prepared the refreshments served at bridge affairs and other fund-raising events. An example of their energy and devotion was their total preparation of a chicken dinner for the 135 members of the Men's Club.¹⁵ Whists or bridges held on the lawns of their summer cottages to raise money for the Temple were common.

Tillie Kenner, an early Sisterhood member, described the women's involvement in Good Brotherhood Week, initiated by Rabbi Schusheim: "Pearl Ernstof and I were the co-chairmen of the first affair. It was held in the vestry and about 250 persons attended. The vestry had not yet been remodeled. We bought crepe paper in blue and white, and I climbed a ladder to decorate the ugly-looking poles. The ministers of the four nearby denominational churches were invited, together with some of their parishioners. The guests were first shown the sanctuary, after which they met



Rabbi Schusheim and Cantor Israel Breitbart at Sukkot ceremony, c. 1934.

in the vestry, where Rabbi Schussheim who was still officiating at the time spoke on good brotherhood and what it means. The refreshments, pastries and sandwiches made by our members, were highly praised.”¹⁶

RABBI SCHUSSHEIM RETURNS

A strong movement was started to bring Rabbi Schussheim back to Temple Beth-Israel. In the interim between his leaving the Congregation in 1929 and his return in 1933, the Rabbi, an ardent Zionist, had traveled with his family for a year of study in Palentine. He had also served for three years as the spiritual leader of the Bay Ridge Jewish Center in Brooklyn, New York.¹⁷ Congregant Samuel Ernstof, being very ill, had in 1932 requested that, if he died, Rabbi Schussheim be requested to deliver the eulogy at his funeral. He and the Rabbi had had a very close relationship. Upon Ernstof's death, the Rabbi came from New York to officiate. Ernstof was the first congregant to have had his funeral in the Temple. A year later, in 1933, Rabbi Schussheim also officiated at the unveiling ceremony. His eloquent sermons so impressed the Congregation that they prevailed upon him to return to Temple Beth-Israel.

THE FIRE OF 1941

Disaster struck when a great fire broke out in the Temple on June 1, 1941, the first day of Shavuot*, while the Congregation was preparing for Confirmation exercises. Confirmation Services were hastily transferred to the Jewish War Veterans Hall. The conflagration completely ruined the interior. The Temple could not be used for nearly a year while repairs were in progress.

The Congregation expressed gratitude to the Jewish War Veterans of Providence, who had generously provided quarters until the Temple could be rebuilt. The Westminster Unitarian Church and its minister, the Reverend Richard W. Seebode, were among those who came to the aid of the Congregation in its adversity. They devoted a whole Sunday collection to the Rebuilding Fund.

The fire was of such magnitude that *The (Providence) Evening Bulletin* of June 2, 1941 devoted two columns to the story: “Temple Beth-Israel today moved into temporary quarters and went ahead with plans for its 20th anniversary after its building on Niagara Street was practically destroyed in a spectacular two-alarm fire early yesterday morning . . . The fire was discovered just after 4:00 o'clock by James Cook, a passing milkman, who saw flames glowing in the windows . . . Fire Chief Thomas H. Cotter, who

*Feast of Weeks, which occurs 7 weeks after the Sabbath of Passover.

directed firemen at the blaze, said today no evidence had been found as to the cause of the fire. He said it apparently started in the kitchen and had burned up through the entire structure. Rabbi Schussheim, told of the fire by the caretaker, Jacob Reich, fought his way through dense smoke to the altar and saved the five golden Torahs containing the sacred Scriptures, the most holy object in the Temple . . . When firemen responded to this alarm they found the interior full of dense smoke and already a mass of flames. Soon after 4:30 o'clock a section of the roof caved in at intervals . . . The fire practically destroyed the auditorium on the second floor, class rooms, the Rabbi's study, and a prayer room on the first floor."

The fire practically razed the Temple. Coming as it did at a time of ever-increasing government restrictions due to the war and shortages of building materials, it was a difficult task to rebuild.

However, a building committee was soon appointed by the president, Jacob Licht, with Dr. Ilie Berger as chairman. At the next annual meeting Ira S. Galkin was elected president of the Temple. There had been criticism of the building committee by some members who felt the committee had overextended financially and that money expended could never be raised. The building committee itself was optimistic, and many of them actually appeared on the premises each day to see for themselves that no detail of construction was overlooked. The architectural style was considerably altered, new equipment was installed throughout, the sanctuary was remodeled, and stained glass windows were installed.

The building committee did in fact achieve its goal, and on May 17, 1942 the new Temple was dedicated. The dedication exercises included greetings by Governor J. Howard McGrath, Mayor Dennis J. Roberts, and United States Senator Theodore Francis Green. Professor Louis Finkelstein, President of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, gave what was described as an inspiring address. Rabbi William G. Braude of Temple Beth-El delivered the invocation, and Rabbi Israel M. Goldman of Temple Emanuel brought the greetings of his congregation. The service was conducted by Rabbi Schussheim, while Cantor Joseph Schlossberg and the Temple choir provided the musical accompaniment with Mrs. Barney Kenner as soloist.¹⁸

THE WAR YEARS

During the years of World War II, Temple Beth-Israel was extremely active.¹⁹ Under the direction of Mary Schussheim a USO unit was established at the Temple. Only the City of Providence USO was larger. The Daughtershood held weekly supper dances in the canteen. During Jewish Holy Days servicemen were invited to the homes of members. For the

servicemen food was always important. For the privilege of being hostess one had to make a donation. An anniversary could be the pretext for a contribution. One member provided a bus outing to Newport. One group specialized in knitting for the servicemen.²⁰

Thousands of servicemen were thus entertained, fed, and remembered on Jewish holidays with gift packages. Leviton Manufacturing Company offered its facilities to the men of the Congregation, who wrapped gifts for the servicemen, weighed the packages, and took care of the mailing.²¹

A Red Cross unit, the largest in the state, was established at the Temple with the cooperation of the entire Sisterhood in a three-shift work group. They made bandages and provided other medical necessities for the war effort. Thousands of garments and tens of thousands of bandages were provided. There was also a first-aid training course for the Daughterhood in anticipation of emergency needs. This was considered a high point of achievement in the Temple's public service.

A Temple bulletin early in 1943 announced that men in uniform of the Armed Forces of the United States would be welcome at the services as guests of the Temple. Rabbi Schusheim's New Year message contained these eloquent words: "In these desperate days when humanity, liberty, and truth are fighting for existence we may well turn our attention to religion and the institutions which it has produced and look to them for salvation. Undoubtedly guns, hatred, and murder will not give us a happier world. Let us give religion a chance."

THE MORTGAGE BURNING

The interval between the Temple fire in June of 1941 and the burning of the mortgage was a little more than two years. After the dedication of the new building a Mortgage Fund Committee was formed under the joint chairmanship of Leo Grossman and Leo Bojar. They finally accomplished this goal after laboring for more than two decades. The souvenir journal commemorating the mortgage burning contained this message: "The import of this mortgage burning event, celebrated at a time of world strife and upheaval, is as a result all the more significant to us. In vivid contrast to the destruction of all Houses of Worship in enemy-dominated lands, there is enacted in our great and free nation the spectacle of not only a rebuilding of a free House of Worship, but a liberation of all its financial obligations — a combination of acts which thereby further entrenches the roots of our Synagogue."

The weekend of January 28, 1944 was devoted to commemorating this significant event in the Temple's history. At the Sabbath Eve service,

Captain Max J. Routtenberg, Chaplain at Camp Miles Standish, read the sermon, joined by Rabbi Schussheim, Cantor Schlossberg, and the choir. A mortgage burying ceremony was held on Sunday afternoon, January 30 with the participation of Rabbi Israel M. Goldman of Temple Emanuel; Dr. Max Arzt, Professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary; Cantor Schlossberg; the Temple Choir; and officers and past presidents of the Temple and Sisterhood. An address was delivered by Rabbi Schussheim. This was followed by a dinner celebration and a musical program. Dr. Ilie Berger served as chairman and President Ira S. Galkin as toastmaster.

AFTERMATH — WORLD WAR II

At the close of World War II during the High Holy Days of 1945 Rabbi Schussheim said: "Our prayers have been answered and the war with its awful story of suffering is over. Soon our boys will be home. Reconversion and reconstruction will be the order of the day. In this task, religion must play a major role . . . In all these activities the Synagogue will be central."

The Congregation continued to aid Jews emigrating from Europe as they had the first arrivals who had escaped Hitler's grasp. Free membership was provided for the refugees, and Hebrew school was offered to their children without charge. Ira Galkin had served as president of the Temple during a period which included a fire and a war, and continued to serve until 1949, when he was succeeded by Coleman B. Zimmerman. The Temple now directed its efforts to reorganizing the religious and educational program. At the High Holy Days of 1949 Rabbi Schussheim announced plans for a permanent building program and a revitalized school. The seating capacity of the Temple would be increased, thus eliminating the inconvenience of "wings" at the rear of the Synagogue sanctuary. The plans also provided for better classroom and assembly facilities. The Hebrew and religious school building and planning committee was under the leadership of Robert Fein as chairman. By Yom Kippur of 1950 President Zimmerman could refer to the new Hebrew School as a reality. During the year, Benjamin Premack, choir director of the Temple, announced the formation of a Junior Choral Society.

Irving Brodsky became president in 1951. There were social and cultural activities for all groups of the Congregation, with such innovations as dancing classes for students from fourth grade through high school, men's Bible classes, and in 1952 the organization of a Temple Beth-Israel chapter of the United Synagogue Youth.

A special meeting of the board of trustees was called on January 20, 1952 by the president, Irving Brodsky, to consider the damage suffered by a fire in the lower vestry. An insurance committee with Joseph Schlossberg as

chairman was established. The loss of desks, equipment, and books was noted. It was felt that services could be conducted in the Temple proper without too much inconvenience. Hebrew classes could also be conducted in the Temple, while Sunday school classes could be held at either the Sackett Street or Lexington Avenue public schools. Also to be investigated was the cost of building a new structure fronting on Atlantic Avenue in addition to repairing the damage. At the April 29 board meeting it was voted to accept plans to construct a building 72' x 100' x 16' which would be attached to the present building. It would front on Atlantic Avenue and could seat 736. A new kitchen would also be added. The lower vestry would be completely repaired. Insurance monies to cover the loss and damage from the fire, as well as building campaign monies to be raised, would cover the cost of construction. The completion date was set for the High Holy Days of 1952. The formal opening of the Sunday school was set for October 19 in new classrooms with new equipment. The Men's Club planned to hold its open meeting and dinner in the new Temple auditorium, where the Rabbi welcomed some 75 new families to the Congregation.

Marshall Marcus succeeded Irving Brodsky as president in 1954. It was reported in September 1954 that 184 pupils were enrolled in the Sunday School and 45 in the Hebrew Department. The faculty consisted of ten teachers, including Cantor Schwartzman. The Hebrew students attended school three days a week in accordance with the policy of the United Synagogue of America.

In November of 1954 Rabbi Schussheim noted in a letter to the Congregation that Temple Beth-Israel had been singularly honored by being chosen as the site for the convention of the New England branch of the United Synagogue Youth of America. This choice, he felt, was a tribute to the strength and prestige of the Temple youth group. The development of youth activities in the Temple had always been a prime objective.

In 1955 it was decided that the students would be required to purchase their textbooks. At about the same time a Parent-Teacher Association was established. A report on the religious school emphasized that the classroom facilities continued to be inadequate.

According to a report of the membership committee in October 1955, the Congregation then had 369 members, 228 members seated in the main Temple and 141 in the auditorium. How active the Congregation was at this time can be appreciated from listings in the Temple bulletin for a typical week (January 27 — February 3, 1956). A "Land of Milk and Honey" service chanted by Cantor Schwartzman and the Temple Choir Sunday night at the Temple provided a cultural, social, and organizational get-together to hear Rabbi Gershon Cohen, Librarian of the Jewish Theological

Seminary. Sunday morning at ten o'clock the men met for the "3 C's": Culture, Companionship, Congregation — for prayer, sociability, and study. There were notices for the Men's Club Bowling League, the United Synagogue Youth, and the Sisterhood. Contributions to the Flower Prayer Book, Organ, Torah, and Simcha* Funds were listed. Bat mitzvah's** had recently been initiated by the Congregation. In 1956 for the third time a group of girls was to be consecrated in a bat mitzvah service. It was announced that an integrated school program had raised the standards for confirmation. A confirmand had to be at least sixteen years old.

The highlight of the year 1956 was an Anniversary Testimonial Dinner held at the Sheraton Biltmore Hotel on November 11 in honor of Rabbi Schusheim. It celebrated jointly the 35th anniversary of his ordination and of the founding of Temple Beth-Israel. Ira Galkin was general chairman of the affair. A souvenir program was distributed at the dinner. The invocation was delivered by Rabbi Sidney Ballon, and grace was said by Rabbi Eli A. Bohnen. Anniversary greetings were extended by Mayor Walter H. Reynolds, Governor Dennis J. Roberts, Henry Hassenfeld, Irving Brodsky, Rabbi William G. Braude, and other dignitaries.

Rabbi Schusheim was described in generous terms: "He has never ceased to relate the traditions of the past to the prospects of the future by means of education. As an instructor at the Seminary College of Jewish studies from 1930-34, as leader of student Menorah groups at Brown University and the University of Rhode Island, as an organizer and instructor at the School for the Jewish Woman in Providence, he has been a tremendous influence in developing an appreciation of Jewish education and culture. As President of the Providence Chapter, Zionist Organization of America, he made a major contribution to the life of Jewry the world over, and as President of the Rabbinical Association of Rhode Island, he gained respect for the synagogue in community affairs. His courses of instruction at the Rhode Island Council of Churches school and the Attleboro Council of Churches school and his series of television programs have done much to eliminate discrimination and to erect mutual understanding among Jews and non-Jews alike. As chaplain for the State Institutions he has helped many toward rehabilitation." Rabbi Schusheim was portrayed as a rabbi's rabbi.

There was also a tribute to President Marshall B. Marcus, who was the second generation of his family devoted to the Temple. It was during his administration that an electronic organ had been installed.

At the board meeting of May 15, 1957 President Marcus expressed the view that a synagogue cannot survive merely through religious services.

*A happy occasion, a celebration.

**Ceremony for girls similar to the bar mitzvah for boys.

“There is”, he added, “an organizational side of a synagogue that must be carefully tended”. In addition to diverse cultural, social, and fund-raising concerns, Temple Beth-Israel had many others, as expressed in its committee structure: Religious and Ritual, House and Property, Cemetery, School, Membership, High Holy Days, Finance, Social and Education, Overflow Service, Ushers, and Board of Trustees group to assist Sisterhood with the annual Dance Program.

Common to spiritual leaders of all religious groups is the distress over poor attendance at services. Temple Beth-Israel was no exception. Frequent exhortations by the rabbi and president to attend services appeared in the Temple bulletin. Possible improvements to the Temple building and regulations governing the various committees were under continuous review.

THE NEW BUILDING FUND

At the annual meeting of May 25, 1959 the comptroller of the Temple reported a financial loss. Total expenses for running the Temple were \$34,772.80, while income was \$34,676.80. The school income was \$5,122.50 compared to expenses of \$8,676.80. Eighty-one children attended the Hebrew school, and 92 were enrolled in the Sunday school. President Leo Grossman reported that the Temple was doing the work that was required of it and that members of the Temple had done much for the Jewish children, many of whom had become leaders in the community. However, there was need for additional classrooms and a new sanctuary. In spite of the unfavorable financial statement it was recommended that a building fund be started and that a new sanctuary be built at a cost of about \$150,000. Building construction would not commence until a sum of \$50,000 to \$75,000 was raised. A special fund was set up designated as the Temple Beth-Israel New Building Fund. Little was heard of the matter until a special meeting of the Board of Directors on June 28, 1960. A committee was then established to consult professional fund raisers as to the potential amount that could be solicited from their Congregation. It was instructed to bring in a preliminary sketch and an approximate cost estimate. Authorization was given for expenditures not to exceed \$2500 for preparation of preliminary plans and specifications.

New building plans were announced in lavish prose in the September 1960 bulletin: “Picture in your mind’s eye a new Sanctuary, larger than the one we now use, on street level with no stairs to climb, air-conditioned and modern in every way. Envision, as part of this Sanctuary, a new up-to-the-minute auditorium. Such an edifice, added to our present Temple, would accord Beth-Israel a modern home with every desirable facility for a

growing and very active Congregation . . . A new Sanctuary for Temple Beth-Israel is not a dream. It is a challenge. Your committee is a dedicated group and is sure to present plans to make this dream a reality. It prays that the Congregation will accept the challenge to build. It hopes that with God's help, actual construction will have started before another New Year is with us." The year had begun with a recommendation that more women be appointed to the Board of Directors and ended with an announcement that Rabbi Morris Schussheim would retire as of December 31, 1961.

A life pension satisfactory to the Rabbi was set up as well as a pension to be paid to Mrs. Schussheim should she survive her husband. A dinner in tribute to Rabbi and Mrs. Schussheim was held at the Colony Motor Hotel on December 10, 1961. Joseph Galkin, Director of the General Jewish Committee, eulogized the rabbi, who had been with the Temple for almost 40 years. He referred to his many achievements — his membership on the board of the Conference of Christians and Jews, his lectures to hundreds of Christians in the Attleboro Council of Churches on the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures. He told of how the Rabbi had reached many thousands of radio and television listeners in his weekly broadcasts on the Book of Books. The Rabbinical Seminary had bestowed upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity, and he had received a Doctor of Education degree from Rhode Island College. His greatest service had been to his Congregation, where he maintained close contact with the hopes and experiences of his congregants. The children were especially close to his heart, said Joseph Galkin, and he watched their development with the keenest interest. He taught Judaism and expounded its principles in hundreds of sermons from the pulpit and addresses to various convocations.

In attendance at the dinner were Governor John A. Notte, Jr., United States Senator John O. Pastore, and the then former Governor Dennis J. Roberts. At a candlelight ceremony several members of the Congregation spoke of the Rabbi's many concerns with community service, his colleagues, and Jewish marriage.

While a search for a successor was in progress, Rabbi Saul Leeman of the Cranston Jewish Center, head of the Rabbinical Association of Rhode Island, agreed to look after the rabbinical needs of the Congregation.

RABBI ROBERT LAYMAN

At a special Congregational meeting on April 8, 1962 Rabbi Robert Layman of Highland Park, New Jersey was unanimously elected the new Rabbi of Temple Beth-Israel. Thirty years old, married and father of two sons, he was a graduate of Temple University and Gratz College, and had received a Master of Hebrew Literature from the Jewish Theological

Seminary, where he was also ordained a rabbi. He would leave his post as Rabbi of Temple Beth El, Edison, New Jersey to assume the Temple Beth-Israel rabbinate. Rabbi Layman assumed his new position during September, but formal installation did not take place until November 4, 1962. Installed as the new cantor was Arthur Yolkoff. All rabbis in Rhode Island were invited to attend the installation. Rabbi William G. Braude was the principal speaker, and Rabbi Saul Leeman was the installing rabbi. A musical program and reception followed the installation ceremonies. The processional, in which Rabbi Layman and Cantor Yolkoff were conducted to the pulpit, consisted of eleven rabbis, the past presidents of the Congregation, and its officers and trustees. The installation ceremonies were praised extravagantly in the Temple bulletin of November 8, 1962: "What a wonderful, inspiring never-to-be-forgotten evening!. Surely another sign that Temple Beth-Israel has entered into a new era of greater, more effective progress in its mission of Service to God."

Rabbi Layman's tenure was brief. In the Temple bulletin of June 5, 1964 it was noted that "for plausible personal reasons Rabbi Layman will not renew his contract with Temple Beth-Israel." In July of 1964 Rabbi Jacob Handler, who occupied a pulpit in Manchester, New Hampshire, was engaged by the Congregation for an unprecedented four-year term.

RABBI JACOB HANDLER

Formal installation of Rabbi Handler took place on November 15, 1964. Rabbi Handler's educational background included a bachelor's degree from Vermont Teachers College, a Master of Arts in Government degree from the University of New Hampshire, and a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Burton College. He was ordained a rabbi at Yeshiva University and had served as a rabbi since 1941. An escort of honor included Rabbis Bohnen, Braude, Krauss, Rubell, and Leeman. The president and past presidents and Board of Trustees of the Temple also participated.

Rabbi Handler chose to come to Providence so that his two daughters might be educated at the Providence Hebrew Day School. He expressed his concerns about serving the Congregation at Temple Beth-Israel: "When I came to the Temple, I realized that it had a glorious background, but a very grim future. The first year I was here I was a substitute teacher in political science. I taught in all the schools. I became a teacher at the Rhode Island Junior College (later the Community College of R. I.) the first year it started, teaching political science. I am one of the few who has received this particular award — Phi Sigma Alpha, the National Political Science Honor Society, which I received in 1963."

In addition to his rabbinical duties and his teaching, Rabbi Handler



Rabbi Jacob Handler 1914-

became Jewish chaplain for the Rhode Island State Institutions. He replaced Rabbi Charles Rubell of Temple Beth Sholom, who had died. He conducted services in the Sidney Goldstein Chapel and also met with the families of the men and women who were in the State Institutions.

Rabbi Handler became very interested in the Boy Scouts and was chaplain for the National Jamboree on four occasions. He received the St. George award from the Boy Scouts, an unusual honor for a Rabbi. He was also involved with the National Conference of Christians and Jews.

On June 14, 1965, at what was expected to be a routine board meeting, Ira Galkin disclosed that he had received a telephone call from the president of the Cranston Jewish Community Center. He inquired as to whether the Board of Temple Beth-Israel would be receptive to exploring and holding discussions on the possibility of a merger of the two congregations. The surprise request caused much dismay, but President Yanover decided that he would appoint a committee to meet with the Cranston officials. Further discussion of the building and renovation plans were deferred.

However, by the November board meeting discussion about expanding the present building had revived. The Sisterhood had donated \$5,000 for the renovation of the downstairs area of the Temple. Simultaneous talks with the Cranston Center had been in progress, but negotiations eventually collapsed. By December much enthusiasm for a new building had been generated, and the board authorized the president to commission an architect to draw plans and specifications for an auditorium building in the rear of the Temple, the cost not to exceed \$75,000.

At the annual meeting of June 12, 1966, 80 per cent of those in attendance voted to proceed with the building plan. The addition to the present building was not to cost more than \$90,000, and each family was to be assessed \$150 to finance the addition. The *Rhode Island Herald*²² carried pictures of the leaders of the campaign: Rabbi Jacob Handler, Leonard Sholes, Temple president; Charles Coken, special gifts chairman; Leo Grossman, initial gifts chairman; and David Yanover, building chairman. According to the article initial pledges of \$50,000 had already been received. The new social hall to be erected on the Atlantic Avenue side of the Temple would measure 50 by 70 feet and accommodate 250 to 300 persons for a dinner. The new kitchen, 18 by 30 feet, would be fully equipped. The addition would contain a lobby, a coat room, men's and women's lavatories, a woman's lounge, and a bride's room. In September Fay Schachter, president of Sisterhood, presented a check for \$20,000 from her organization. Ground was broken on December 4, 1966, and completion of the hall was expected by June of 1967.

Temple board and Congregation minutes of the period indicate that

construction proceeded according to schedule. Coleman Zimmerman, chairman of the Dedication Committee for the new social hall, announced the following events: June 25, 1967 — open house, refreshments, and guided tours. The program for that day included a musical program by cantor Ivan Perlman of Temple Emanuel and the Melody Belles consisting of thirty blended voices. The affair would begin at 7:30 P.M. with a champagne cocktail party; speeches would be limited. A three-day formal dedication in September included Friday evening services on September 16, followed by a formal dinner-dance on the 17th and the dedication on the 18th.

TEMPLE BETH-ISRAEL'S THIRD FIRE

The festive atmosphere surrounding the new construction was short-lived, for on March 26, 1968 — six months after the dedication — Temple Beth-Israel was victim of its third fire. "Fire inspectors investigating blazes that heavily damaged a synagogue in Providence yesterday said today there was nothing to indicate incendiary origin," according to a newspaper account.²³ It reported that the Temple had lost its roof and that there was heavy smoke, fire, and water damage in other parts of the 2½ story structure. The only section of the synagogue to escape heavy damage was the new social hall. Valuable prayer books, Torahs, and other religious articles were carried to safety by members of the Congregation. The fire began on the second floor at the rear of the building, and was discovered at 3:45 P.M. when some twelve students attending a Hebrew class smelled smoke. They escaped without injury.

The *Rhode Island Herald* of March 29 reported that, despite the extensive damage, 6 p.m. services were held on the 27th. From 4 p.m. on the 26th to 3 a.m. on the 27th, "the members had watched their Temple burn. They were saddened, they were unhappy, but they were not disheartened. The smell of burning was everywhere. The roof was gone and the seven stained glass windows which had been installed when the Temple was rededicated were completely broken out." A reporter who had visited the Temple and interviewed its members was impressed most by the help that came from quite unexpected sources — the check from a non-Jewish neighbor, and the teenage boy who came to help put out the wet prayerbooks to dry in the sun. The greatest and most irreplaceable loss was the stained glass windows, which had been designed under the direction of Rabbi Schussheim.

Many offers of assistance poured into the Temple office. Among them was a letter from Reverend Roscoe C. Robinson of the Calvary Baptist Church nearby in South Providence: "We also as a church can realize what a major problem this presents to your congregation. All of us feel so deeply

sorry, and yet we do not know exactly what to do to be of help, except we do offer your our love and support, and also make available to you in any way that we can be helpful the facilities of our building . . . I have talked with other protestant clergymen in the area, and I know that you should feel perfectly free to approach any of our churches about any way in which we can be of help.”

The Congregation lost no time in planning for restoration of the damage caused by this third fire in its history. In his acceptance speech at the annual meeting of June 27, 1968 Leonard J. Sholes, president, remarked: “The greatest strength of Temple Beth-Israel is the strength of continuity, the chain that binds us to the past and leads us to the future. Our cooperation, our common effort yesterday and today have resulted in splended accomplishments. Once in June of 1941 and again in January 1953 fires damaged our Temple. Each time the Congregation with unfaltering spirit and tireless effort remodeled and rebuilt a bigger and more beautiful structure. In March of this year Temple Beth-Israel again was badly damaged by fire. This catastrophe did not interrupt our religious services. Our Temple life is so vital, so sure of its faith in itself that it was able to carry on all of its activities and all of its meetings. We took the disaster in our stride.”

President Sholes in the June 1969 Temple bulletin announced the dates for the dedication of the sanctuary as September 5-7, 1969. The announcement of these dates proved to be premature. Unfortunately construction did not progress as smoothly as it had in 1967. Delays on the part of the contractor and other problems postponed the completion of the construction. Julian Greene, chairman of the building committee, reported that the lower level would be completed in its entirety by October 24 and the sanctuary within thirty days thereafter. However, he hesitated to suggest a dedication date in view of the many problems encountered.

At the annual meeting of June 25, 1970 the building committee reported that the Temple building was about 99 per cent completed. A new interior was constructed within the old exterior walls, with new classrooms, Temple office, rabbi's study, cantor's room, directors' room, and chapel. A parking lot was provided, enclosed by a six-foot fence with an entrance leading directly from the lot to the Temple. The pulpit, which had not been included in the original contract, was a gift from the Sisterhood purchased at a cost of \$6,000. In view of the progress that had been made, the dedication committee was able to announce elaborate plans for a weekend celebration for September 18-20. On Friday, September 18 a guest rabbi would deliver the sermon. On Saturday a gala dinner dance would be held followed by the formal dedication on Sunday. By the end of August the plans were formulated. Eight living past presidents — Louis Backman, Jacob Licht, Ira

Galkin, Coleman Zimmerman, Irving Brodsky, Charles Coken, David Yanover, and Leonard Sholes were to be honored and presented with plaques. A musical program was planned for the evening, and Rabbi Samuel Kenner would be guest speaker. At Sunday's rededication the five men who rescued the Torahs from the fire (Norton Rappaport, Alfred Weinstock, Sidney Granoff, Samuel Granoff, Frederick Spigel, and Alan M. Kritz) would return them to the Ark. Governor Frank Licht, Senator John O. Pastore, Mayor Joseph Doorley, and Congressman Robert Tiernan would be seated on the pulpit. All of the Rhode Island rabbis and cantors were invited to be in the procession. Governor Licht after many years was returning to Temple Beth-Israel to be the principal speaker where he had once been a confirmand²⁴.

The former Niagara Street entrance was now closed. The sanctuary was turned around, and the former Atlantic Avenue entrance to the social hall was converted into a lobby leading to both structures, with the social hall situated to the left and a broad open stairway on the right leading to the new sanctuary at the upper level. At street level was a chapel for daily services, six classrooms for the nearly one hundred pupils in the religious school, studies for Rabbi Jacob Handler and Cantor Karl S. Kritz, the Temple offices, and a board of trustees' room.

Seating six hundred, the new sanctuary had been made more spacious by building it on the second level and including the third. A screen of blue and gold shielded the choir and organist, who were to the left of the pulpit area. Closed circuit television linked the cantor's reading desk with the organist at the console of a two-manual Conn electronic organ. New pews were finished in a brown mahogany color with gold seat cushions. Blue carpet covered the pulpit floor and the center aisle.

RABBI MORRIS SCHUSSHEIM DIES

On October 13, 1970 word reached the Congregation that Rabbi Schussheim had died the day before in Oakland, California, where he had lived since retiring in 1961. The Rabbi, who had served them for thirty-five years, had recently been honored on the 50th anniversary of his ordination.²⁵ Under his leadership the Congregation had grown from a few dozen families to several hundred. Its Hebrew school was enlarged, and the Sunday school was reorganized. Study groups for women were initiated, the choir was expanded, and the Temple library was established.

Rabbi Sidney Ballon delivered the eulogy on October 14 at Temple Beth-Israel, where the funeral services were held. Rabbi Ballon recalled that as a boy of ten in Temple Beth-Israel's Sunday school he had had his first meeting with Rabbi Schussheim. After Rabbi Ballon had been ordained, he

referred to Rabbi Schussheim as a rabbi's rabbi: "He radiated spirituality, gentleness and dignity. He was a counselor *par excellence*, who could understand the problems and feelings of other people and comfort them with his compassion and empathy Rabbi Schussheim was a man of great faith and humility."

Toward the end of 1970 the new social hall was designated the Ira and Anna Galkin Social Hall, in recognition of their generous financial support of the Temple and the time and energy which they had devoted to Temple Beth-Israel during their many years as members.

1970 — THE FIRST HALF OF THE DECADE

To mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Temple — its Jubilee year — a special service was held on Friday, December 17, 1971 with Rabbi Samuel Kenner, regional director of the New England Region, United Synagogue of America, as guest speaker. Cantor Karl Kritz and the choir presented a musical program. A Jubilee service was also held on Saturday morning. The weekend culminated in a dinner-dance on Sunday, December 19. As a high point of the celebration, the Congregation sponsored a pilgrimage to Israel under Rabbi Handler's direction. The tour, held in the spring of 1972, was a considerable success, according to participants.

Reports of damage to the building by neighborhood vandals had been frequent, but by 1972 an escalation of the damage was cause for serious concern. Fred I. Kelman, house committee chairman, reported: "We are experiencing much mischievous damage; broken windows by rocks thrown into our sanctuary; the fence, which had been damaged, was repaired, but again 25 pickets were broken. Screens have been damaged. The neighborhood boys use our parking lot for ballgames."

The year 1973 generally was uneventful, but problems continued. President Samuel Tippe in his message to the membership expressed appreciation to Fred Kelman for the superlative restoration of one of the stained glass memorial windows, which had been damaged in the fire. According to Rabbi Handler,²⁶ the pieces of stained glass which had been salvaged from the broken windows were put into one large window representing them all. President Tippe emphasized the depressed state of the Temple's finances and urged payment of dues and arrears to the building fund and the tuition accounts. Again he urged the need for new members. The Congregation apparently responded, for in the next month's bulletin it was reported that 25 new members had joined the Temple. Tippe also congratulated the Sisterhood for its very successful donor dinner, and observed that, "There is no question in my mind that the Sisterhood is the backbone of our Temple."

Because of the problems caused by break-ins in spite of new locks installed at a cost of \$300, a plan for installation of an alarm system was presented to the board. At the annual meeting of June 15, 1975 the Sisterhood reported an unprecedented gift to the Temple of \$9,500 for the year 1974-75. Of this sum \$5,000 was earmarked for paying off the mortgage and support of the religious school. Some \$1,200 of the total had been realized from advertisements solicited for a Sisterhood booklet.

MORTGAGE BURNING WEEKEND II

As in 1944, Temple Beth-Israel once again set aside a weekend, November 28-30, 1975, for a gala celebration. The service of Friday, November 28 featured a cantata for Hanukkah by the choir and Cantor. A dinner-dance catered by Louis' Kosher Catering was held on November 29, and on Sunday the actual burning of the mortgage was carried out. State and local dignitaries, as well as a bank official, were invited. Following the program, a champagne reception was held in the Anna and Ira Galkin Social Hall of the Temple.²⁷

In 1976 the Temple changed its "Man of the Year" award to "Person of the Year Award." The "Man of the Year Award" had been given for the first time to Solomon E. Selinker in November 1974 for being "Most instrumental in the planning of the Temple's services and providing inspiration and leadership in the raising of thousands of dollars for the Temple and its activities".

Another first for the Congregation occurred in 1977 when three women (Mrs. Aaron Cohen, Mrs. Jack Crovitz, and Mrs. Aaron Bromson) were honored by being called to the pulpit (*aliyyah**).

ECUMENISM

Very early in the Temple's history the Sisterhood participated in the Temple's observance of Brotherhood Week. On several occasions Rabbis Schussheim and Handler had participated in services and meetings with representatives of other faiths. In December of 1972,²⁸ at the first service of its kind in Rhode Island, the Most Reverend Louis E. Gelineau, Roman Catholic Bishop of Providence, shared the pulpit of Temple Beth-Israel with the Right Reverend Frederick H. Belden, Episcopal Bishop of Rhode Island, and Rabbi Jacob Handler. The idea for such a service had originated with Rabbi Handler. "The idea came to me", he said, "while we three clergymen were blessing the fleet in Galilee (Rhode Island). It occurred to

*A "calling up" to read the Scroll of the Law in the synagogue during worship, an honor exclusively for males since ancient times.

me that if we could bless the sea together, why couldn't we stand right here before the Congregation and pray together?"

On another occasion, according to a newspaper report of December 13, 1974, Rabbi Handler officiated at a Hanukkah celebration held by the Tenants Association of the Joseph T. Carroll Tower Housing for the Elderly on Smith Street in Providence. He was assisted in the interfaith observance by the Reverend Jude McGeough of St. Patrick's Church. Also participating was Thomas Twitchell of the United Presbyterian Church.

A third ecumenical service, sponsored by the Rhode Island Bicentennial Commission and Providence Lodge No. 14 of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, was held at the Temple on February 25, 1977. Religious leaders who participated included the Most Reverend Kenneth Angell, auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Rhode Island; the Right Reverend Frederick H. Belden, Episcopal Bishop of Rhode Island; Reverend Robert L. Carter, president of the Ministers Alliance; and Rabbi Jacob Handler.²⁹

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

As early as October 1977 Samuel Tippe reported at a board meeting that he had taken it upon himself to look around for a new location for Temple Beth-Israel. He felt, as did many of the members of the Congregation, that as long as the Temple remained in its present location membership would continue to decrease. Relocation was necessary, he felt. Rabbi Handler³⁰ recalled how divided the Congregation had been over the subject of whether or not to relocate. In retrospect, those who had voted to stay did not realize that the time had come for the move. The Rabbi himself envisioned using the Chateau de Ville, a restaurant complex at the Warwick Mall, a shopping mall, as an ideal location for a temple and community center.

The president, Carl Lefkowitz, in the Temple bulletin of September 1977 expressed his dismay at the fact that only a handful of people actively participated in the planning and operation of Temple activities. The Sisterhood had problems attracting women to take positions of leadership. It was difficult to gather enough men for the daily *minyan**. Rabbi Handler in fact held *Yiskor*** services very early in the morning to attract men from other congregations which did not hold services at that hour.

Another deterrent to attracting large attendance at services was the increasing amount of vandalism to automobiles parked near the Temple for services and for social events and meetings. To alleviate this problem the parking lot on Niagara Street was well lighted and patrolled.

*Ten adult males, the minimum required for communal prayer.

**Memorial prayer service for the dead.



Last confirmation class of Temple Beth-Israel, 1981. Front row, left to right: Ronda Minkin, Laura Jacobs, and Lisa Stone, confirmands; and Rabbi Jacob Handler. Back row, left to right: Ruth Fink, president of Sisterhood, and Ruth Ross, chairman of the school committee.

There was much discussion among board members regarding available alternatives to assure the Temple's future. In April of 1978 a committee was formed to study the feasibility of selling the building and relocating elsewhere or of merging with another temple. At the annual meeting Samuel Tippe, chairman of the building or merging committee, reported that a group called the Elmwood Group Commission had visited the Temple and found the buildings attractive. There was also the possibility that the federal government might seek a site for a senior citizen facility. However, by the annual meeting of July 1979 there had been no definite offer to buy the building. With no commitment from a buyer, the Temple continued to operate. Since the nominating committee reported that they could get no one to take over as officers of the Temple, Carl Lefkowitz consented to continue as president with the same officers and board.

The Sisterhood was able to report that, with even fewer meetings and fund-raising projects, they had managed to maintain all of their traditional commitments. Their *sukkah** was considered to be exceptionally beautiful that year. Their model *seder*** had been a success, as was their spring

*A temporary structure, roof covered with vegetation to celebrate the Harvest Festival (Festival of Tabernacles).

**Passover ritual.

donor dinner. The religious school annual report also indicated a successful year, although only 39 children were enrolled in the school, a decrease of 8 students from the previous year. Realizing that they were a Temple in transition, the chairman of the religious school committee, in his report questioned whether there would be enough students to carry on a viable program in the coming year. The chairman of the youth committee was more optimistic. The United Synagogue Youth had been very active during the year. Twenty-four students had engaged in almost thirty activities. He concluded that "As long as there is a Temple Beth-Israel, there will be youth, and as long as there is youth, there will be a Temple Beth-Israel."

By October of 1979 Fred I. Kelman, house committee chairman, reported that in the past month the Temple had been broken into three times, causing much damage. The situation was so bad, he felt, that if they were to stay in their present location they would need a security system.

In December 1979 an offer was tendered by the Concerned People of Elmwood to purchase the Temple building for \$225,000. This would include contents with the exception of the pews and all religious articles. The executive board recommended that the Congregation accept the offer. With the sale of the building, there would be three options open to the Congregation: (1) merge with another congregation, (2) purchase an existing building and relocate, or (3) purchase land elsewhere and build a new Temple.

As months passed and no deposit had been received from the group which had made the offer, the Temple's status was still in a state of flux. Vandalism continued at an even greater rate. Fences were cut, and graffiti were painted on the building. So many windows were broken that finally those in the social hall were boarded up to prevent further breakage. The silver owned by the Temple was put in storage at a bank for safekeeping. However, the religious school was still in operation, as were the youth groups, the United Synagogue Youth (U.S.Y.), and Kadima.* It was becoming more and more difficult to hold regular Friday night services because of poor attendance, although members did attend Saturday morning services in greater numbers. Rabbi Handler recalled that in those difficult days he would hold Friday night services for as few as eight members.

The City of Providence contemplated purchasing the Temple to use as a center for community services. Two appraisers from the Mayor's office set a net price of \$225,000 for the building. At a special congregational meeting

*Kadima, founded in 1903, endeavored to bridge the gap between traditional Zionism and local community problems.

on October 26, 1980 the terms offered by the city were presented. The city would provide relocation expenses, but asked for possession in time to hold a dedication on July 1, 1981. The voting was recorded as 108 to sell and 11 not to sell. At the conclusion of the meeting Rabbi Handler congratulated Solomon E. Selinker, president of the Congregation, for the excellent manner in which he had conducted the meeting. He also thanked the majority and minority, both of whom had in their hearts voted for what they had considered to be the best interests of the Congregation. He predicted that selling the building would not be the last chapter in the story of Temple Beth-Israel and hoped that the Temple family would have good days ahead.

The sale of the Temple to the city was reported in the press:³¹

Temple Beth-Israel at Niagara Street and Atlantic Avenue, the oldest Conservative Synagogue in southern New England, was sold yesterday to the City of Providence for \$225,000. The city will convert the Temple into a neighborhood center for Elmwood residents. The city obtained financing from the federal government through the Mayor's office of Community Development. Rabbi Jacob Handler said that the Congregation, whose membership has declined in recent years, will decide in two weeks whether to merge with Temple Beth Torah in Cranston or Temple Beth Am in Warwick. The Congregation bought the building from the old German Social Club for \$18,000 in 1921. Mayor Vincent A. Cianci, Jr. yesterday held a news conference at the Temple and signed the purchase agreement. Under the agreement the city will take over the building on July 1. According to Stephen J. O'Rourke, deputy director of the Community Development Office, the city will operate a senior citizens and youth counseling center at the Temple. Other MOCD financed social service programs for the Elmwood section will also be located there.

1981 — THE FINAL YEAR OF TEMPLE BETH-ISRAEL

Four Congregations approached Temple Beth-Israel with offers to merge — Temple Beth Torah, Cranston; Temple Beth Am, Warwick; Temple Sinai, Cranston; and Temple Emanuel, Providence. Temple Sinai's offer was considered to be a good one, but, since it was a Reform congregation and not a member of the United Synagogue, it was not taken seriously. Other alternatives, such as finding an available church building or buying land, were discussed.

The proposals were presented at a special meeting of the Congregation on February 22. In the ensuing discussion Temple Emanuel's offer was declined because Emanuel did not wish to incorporate the name Beth-Israel. That left the choice, if there were to be a merger, between Temple Beth Am and Temple Beth Torah. That evening a vote was taken on whether to build, buy, or lease. Forty-seven voted to build, 51 voted against building, and 2 were undecided. It was decided to meet on March 15 for the purpose of selecting a congregation with which to merge. At that meeting the Congregation voted to merge with Temple Beth Torah in Cranston.

On April 2, 1981 President Solomon E. Selinker addressed a letter to all congregants reporting the terms of the merger:

We are about to embark on the steps needed to close Temple Beth-Israel and to open as part of the combined Temple Beth Torah-Temple Beth-Israel. To date our committees have agreed on the following points:

All memorial plaques and other designated religious articles are to be housed in appropriate locations in the merged synagogue buildings.

All past presidents of Temple Beth-Israel will become permanent members of the combined Beth Torah-Beth Israel Board of Trustees. In addition, nine Beth Israel Board members will be appointed to serve on the combined board.

Appropriate representation will be extended to Beth-Israel members on the finance and religious committees.

For the High Holy Days, a renovated downstairs Synagogue will be prepared and an additional Rabbi and Cantor would conduct the services. In keeping with the regular procedure of Temple Beth Torah, all seats would be occupied on a first come, first seated basis with no preference to either group.

Dues structure for Beth-Israel members would be: (a) Year one, of the merged Temple all dues waived for Beth-Israel members in good standing; (b) years 2, 3 and 4, Temple Beth-Israel members would pay 50% of Beth-Israel 1980-1981 dues; (c) years 5 and 6, Temple Beth-Israel members would pay full 1980-81 Temple Beth-Israel dues; and (d) after the sixth year all combined Beth Torah-Beth Israel members would be on the same dues basis.

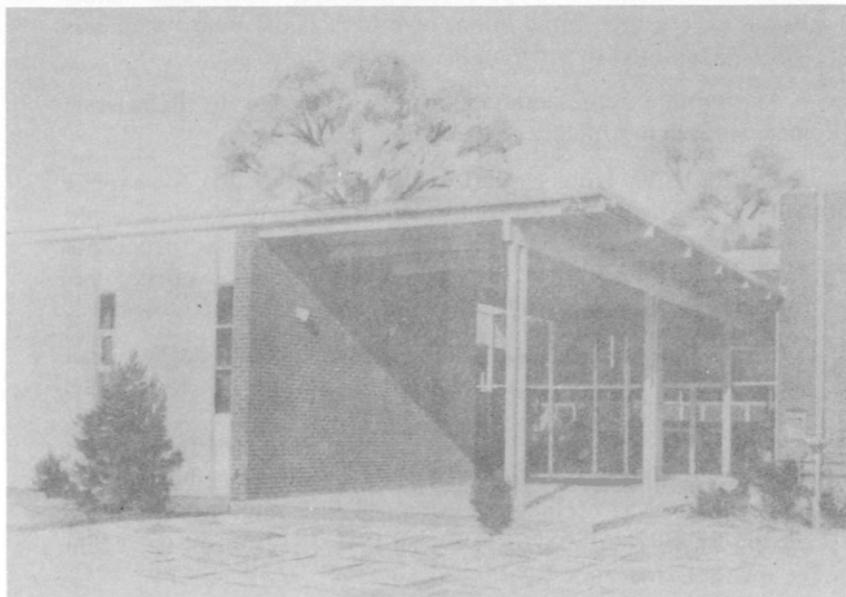
Merged Temple Beth-Israel members shall at no time be obligated to pay to a building fund of the merged temple.

A joint Temple Beth Torah-Beth Israel committee will supervise the disposition of the Temple Beth-Israel assets after the above points and other points to be discussed will finally be resolved.

A further notice was sent to the congregants by President Selinker on June 15, enumerating several additional points of agreement. The name of the merged temple was changed to Temple Torat Yisrael, which would incorporate both temple names. All of the funds of Temple Beth-Israel would be put in escrow and turned over to the merged Temple on July 1.

The congregants had now voted to merge with Temple Beth Torah. The legal work was completed. Further details were settled, such as the agreement between Beth Torah and Beth-Israel to use the latter's lecturns, some of its pews, and its Torahs. "When we merged", recalled Rabbi Handler, "I myself brought the six Torahs to Temple Beth Torah. I put them in the ark in a nice traditional manner, knowing that the Torahs were finding a beautiful place. I presented them to Rabbi Zelermyer. We gave them our excellent library. We gave them the endowment money that was left, plus cash from the sale and our original charter. We gave them the organ that had so enriched our Temple."³²

The Sisterhood perpetuated the name of Sisterhood of Temple Beth-Israel by establishing endowment funds at the Solomon Schechter Day



Temple Torat Yisrael
(photo from reproduction print)

School and the Providence Hebrew Day School. Rabbi Jacob Handler was named Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Beth-Israel. The active past presidents received *tallits** as gifts.

Closing activities were scheduled for the weekend of June 26-28, 1981. Everyone attending the Friday night and Saturday morning services was honored with an *aliyyah*. Sunday morning services were held on June 28 followed by the transportation of the Torahs to Beth Torah with appropriate religious ceremonies. A banquet was held on Sunday evening. Ruth Fink, who had been president of Sisterhood for ten years, spoke briefly:

Being president meant maintaining the dignity of our Temple as our founders would have wanted us to. It meant observing our holidays and festivals, fulfilling our commitment to the Jewish Theological Seminary, and working harmoniously for the good of our Temple. Our Sisterhood accomplished these goals, the work became a labor of love, and lasting friendships were made . . . In this spirit let us go to Temple Torat Yisrael with *mazel*** and *nachat**** to our new house of worship.

How did the members feel as they worshiped in the familiar Sanctum for the last time? What made this Temple so special to its congregants in the sixty years of its existence? Several devoted members were asked these questions. Their answers appear in Appendix I.

As the story of Temple Beth-Israel unfolded, it appeared inevitable that the familiar structure on Niagara Street and Atlantic Avenue could no longer serve as a house of worship for its congregants. Many of the early members had moved to the East Side of Providence. Some for a while retained dual membership in Temples Emanuel and Beth-Israel, but most eventually dropped their membership in the latter. Younger families moved to the suburbs and joined the newer synagogues established in Cranston and Warwick. With the loss of the younger families, and especially their children, there was loss of continuity. As attendance at the religious school declined, leadership of necessity remained in the hands of the older members.

The largest single factor in precipitating the move was the change in the immediate neighborhood of the Temple. Other ethnic groups with other religious needs gradually moved into the neighborhood, displacing the Jewish families. The Temple building became the target of vandalism.

*Prayer Shawls.

**Luck.

***Proud pleasure.

Former congregants of Temple Beth-Israel now worship together at a new location. Many of those who founded Temple Beth-Israel, as well as the many others who worshipped there during its sixty years of existence, have died. Many are buried close to one another in lots purchased through the Temple located in the western section of Lincoln Park Cemetery, although it is not specifically designated as Temple Beth-Israel's section. It is a source of satisfaction to many, as Rabbi Handler has observed, that the building was taken over for community service. "That is the best fate for a Temple structure no longer used for prayer," he said. It will be used by school children, by the elderly, and for educational purposes. It serves the neighborhood in which it is located as it did during its long history as a house of worship.

For its devoted congregants Temple Beth-Israel is now but a memory. For a new generation it is a part of history.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For their invaluable assistance in compiling the history of Temple Beth-Israel I am grateful to the following men and women:

William Bojar — telephone interview September 19, 1983
 Charles Coken — telephone interview September 28, 1983
 Natalie Crovitz — letter dated October 11, 1983
 Claire Ernstoff — interviews on August 1, 1983 and September 23, 1983
 Ruth Fink — telephone interview September 27, 1983 and pictures and reminiscences which she shared in October 1983
 Leo Greene — telephone interview July 24, 1983
 Bella Goldenberg Halpert — telephone interview August 25, 1983
 Rabbi Jacob Handler — interview October 4, 1983
 Laura Leichter Katzman — interview September 23, 1983
 Fred I. Kelman - for donation of pictures
 Tillie Saunders Kenner — interview July 20, 1983
 Jacob Leichter — interview September 25, 1983
 Jacob Licht — telephone interview August 25, 1983
 Evelyn Nussenfeld of Temple Torat Yisrael -- for obtaining many of the written records of Temple Beth-Israel
 Jeannette Shoham Resnik — interview August 23, 1983
 Frieda Rosenberg — interview September 23, 1983
 Harry Schlossberg — telephone interview September 19, 1983
 Mary Schussheim — letters dated August 3, 1983 and October 7, 1983
 Miriam Bell Smith — interview September 15, 1983

APPENDIX I

Temple members' comments:

We were a young Congregation. The steep stairs, an obstacle during the latter part of the Temple's existence, caused no hardship. I think of the young men, all members of Orthodox synagogues, who, because their wives and children could not sit with them, started this Conservative Temple. We were a homogeneous Congregation, all from the same area, and we could walk to services.³³

* * *

It was a feeling that it was *our* Temple — there was so much devotion, and many times when I worked there I would get upset and think of leaving; and then, when I thought of them individually, all those wonderful, devoted members — I stayed on.³⁴

* * *

We had many good businessmen as members, and it was their foresight and ambition, as well as the hard work of the Sisterhood, that raised the money to keep our Temple going.³⁵

* * *

Yes, there were many misgivings about fixing up the Temple after the last fire. Some thought it was too much money. Others did not want to merge, for they thought we would lose our prestige and identity.³⁶

* * *

I wonder if you realize, when you speak of writing about Temple Beth-Israel, that, as far as I am concerned, one cannot separate Temple Beth-Israel from Rabbi Schusheim. To me, they are synonymous.³⁷

* * *

We were a "Temple of love". When we had 300 families, everyone knew everyone else. There was a continuity of generations through bar mitzvahs, confirmations, weddings, and funerals. We always raised money with dignity. There was a warmth, a closeness. We ended with much love and much sadness.³⁸

We had a feeling of belonging — like a fraternity. We had a number of marriages among the congregants, making for more intimacy. There was always good cooperation except for the division at the end, with uncertainty about whether to merge with another synagogue or relocate. I would say it was a happy sort of departure, yet emotional with tears, a party attended by the leaders of the other congregations. We maintained our identity to the end.³⁹

* * *

I remember the good years of the Temple when all was running smoothly; families were close; Temple was buzzing with social groups, such as bandage rolling groups; the school rang with the voices of children. And then came the “other” years, when the Temple was not in the “right place” and when members, said, I can’t let my child walk there or I can’t drive there. The break-ins commenced. The classes became smaller, and many members moved into other neighborhoods. There was no alternative to the one taken by the Congregation. It is sad. Everyone remembers his or her “first” Conservative home, whether spiritual or family.⁴⁰

* * *

I would say that while we struggled with financial problems and occasional intrusions into our personal life through the years at Temple Beth-Israel, and there were often frustrations and difficult times with individuals, my husband and I loved the Congregation as a whole. We also, in fairness, would say that we had many happy and satisfying experiences. There were a number of individuals in the Congregation and in the community with whom very strong bonds were established and who were made to feel part of our family as we felt part of theirs.

I believe that Rabbi Schusheim’s association with the membership of his Congregation was on an unusually personal and intimate basis. As you know, he was a very spiritual person and very much concerned with the welfare of his congregants, his community, and the world around him. He tried to be helpful to all. He gave of himself unsparingly to any person or cause when called upon.⁴¹

APPENDIX II

PRESIDENTS OF TEMPLE BETH-ISRAEL

Benjamin N. Kane	1921-1922
Louis J. Bachman Harry R. Rosen Henry Hassenfeld Dr. Ilie Berger Max Rosen Morris Chusmir Jacob Licht	Served between 1922-1942
Ira Galkin	1942-1950
Coleman Zimmerman	1950-1951
Irving Brodsky	1951-1953
Marshall Marcus	1954-1956
Leo Grossman	1958-1959
Charles Greenstein	1959-1960
Charles Coken	1961-1964
David Yanover	1964-1966
Leonard J. Sholes	1966-1969; 1971-1972
Leo Greene	1969-1971; 1981
Samuel Tippe	1972-1976
Carl Lefkowitz	1977-1980
Solomon Selinker	1980 (1981 shared presidency with Leo Greene)

RABBIS OF TEMPLE BETH-ISRAEL

Rabbi B. Leon Hurwitz	1921-1922
Rabbi Morris Schussheim	1923-1929
Rabbi Jacob Sonderling	1929-1931
Rabbi Maurice Mazur	1931
Rabbi Morris Schussheim	1933-1961 (Retired)
Rabbi Robert Layman	1962
Rabbi Jacob Handler	1964-1981 (merger-retired)

CANTORS OF TEMPLE BETH-ISRAEL

Joseph Schlossberg	1922-1929 and intermittently until 1934
Igor Greenberg (Gorin)	1930
Igor Greenberg (Gorin)	1933
Israel Breitbart	1934
Louis Blumenthal	year or years unknown
Seymour Schwartzkopf	1954-1956
Saul Ragilsky	1957
Irwin Tabitsky	1959-1961
Arthur Yolkoff	1962-1964
Karl Kritz	1964-1975
Raoul Shorr	1976-1977

For several years there were visiting cantors for High Holy Days only.

PRESIDENTS — SISTERHOOD TEMPLE BETH-ISRAEL

Etta Fredberg*	1921-1923
Frances Gershman*	1923-1924
Ida Levinson*	1924-1925
Esther Kane*	1925-1932
Pauline Weiner*	1932-1935
Sophie Singer	1935-1937
Ethel Taber	1937-1940
Nettie Cohen*	1940-1944
Anne Kovitch	1944-1946
Mae Arnoff	1946-1947
Beatrice Katz	1948
Alice Regensteiner	1948-1949
Gertrude Klemer	1949-1951
Bertha Miller	1951-1952
Bessie Bromson	1952-1953
Selma Solomon	1953-1954
Gladys Yanover	1954-1956
Anne Sholes	1956-1958
Rita Richman	1958-1959
Claire Beck	1959-1960
Pauline Poulton*	1960-1962
Celia Bochner	1962-1964
Faye Shachter	1964-1969
Charlotte Goldberg	1969-1971
Ruth Fink	1971- until merger

*Deceased

NOTES

- ¹Rosen, Benton: The Providence Conservative Synagogue — Temple Beth-Israel, *RIJHN* 5:81-99, No. 1, November 1967
- ²Interview with Laura Leichter Katzman, September 18, 1973.
- ³Interview with Frieda Ernstof Rosenberg, September 23, 1983.
- ⁴Rosen, Benton: Temple Beth-Israel finds a Spiritual Leader, *RIJHN* 5:428-435, No. 4, November 1970.
- ⁵35th Anniversary Celebration Program book, November 11, 1956.
- ⁶Interview with Claire Ernstof, August 1, 1983.
- ⁷25th Anniversary Program book, May 12, 1946.
- ⁸Telephone interview with Harry Schlossberg, September 19, 1983.
- ⁹Letter from Paul Sonderling to Benton Rosen, June 2, 1967.
- ¹⁰Interview with Jeannette Shoham Resnik, August 23, 1983.
- ¹¹Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook, Volume LXXV, 1965, Page 158.
- ¹²Interview with Miriam Bell Smith, September 15, 1983.
- ¹³Telephone interview with Belle Goldenberg Halpert, August 25, 1983.
- ¹⁴See No. 10.
- ¹⁵Interview with Claire Ernstof, Laura Katzman, Frieda Rosenberg, September 23, 1983.
- ¹⁶Interview with Tillie Saunders Kenner, July 28, 1963.
- ¹⁷Souvenir Journal Commemorating the Mortgage Burning of Temple Beth-Israel, January 30, 1944.
- ¹⁸*Evening Bulletin*, (Providence) October 13, 1970.
- ¹⁹Letter to Benton Rosen from Morris and Mary Schusheim, September 12, 1967.
- ²⁰See No. 15.
- ²¹See No. 16.
- ²²*Rhode Island Herald*, July 1966.
- ²³*Evening Bulletin*, March 27, 1968.
- ²⁴*Providence Journal*, September 19, 1970.
- ²⁵*Evening Bulletin*, October 30, 1970.
- ²⁶Interview with Rabbi Jacob Handler, October 4, 1983.
- ²⁷*Providence Journal*, November 20, 1975.
- ²⁸*Providence Journal-Bulletin*, December 16, 1972.
- ²⁹*Rhode Island Herald*, February 11, 1977.
- ³⁰See No. 25.
- ³¹*Providence Journal-Bulletin*, February 28, 1981.
- ³²See No. 25.
- ³³See No. 14.
- ³⁴See No. 9.
- ³⁵See No. 15.
- ³⁶Telephone interview with Leo Greene, July 24, 1983.
- ³⁷Letter from Mary Schusheim (Mrs. Morris) re her husband, August 3, 1983.
- ³⁸Telephone interview with Ruth Fink, September 27, 1983.
- ³⁹See No. 25.
- ⁴⁰Letter from Natalie Crovitz dated October 12, 1983.
- ⁴¹Letter from Mary Schusheim dated October 7, 1983.

REDEDICATION
CENTENNIAL

1883



1983

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

MAY 22, 1983 - 10 SIVAN 5743

PROGRAM

INVOCATION

RABBI DR. THEODORE LEWIS *Congregation Jeshuat Israel*

WELCOME

JAMES K. HERSTOFF, M.D. *President*
Congregation Jeshuat Israel

GREETINGS

HIS EXCELLENCY J. JOSEPH GARRAHY *Governor*
State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

GREETINGS

HONORABLE PAUL L. GAINES *Mayor*
City of Newport

GREETINGS

AARON J. SLOM *President*
Society of Friends of Touro Synagogue

REMARKS

BERNARD KUSINITZ *Historian*
Congregation Jeshuat Israel

GUEST SPEAKER

DR. ARTHUR A. CHIEL, RABBI *Congregation B'nai Jacob*

BENEDICTION

RABBI ELY KATZ *Cantor*
Congregation Jeshuat Israel

NEWPORT SYNAGOGUE, A REWARDING LEGACY*

BY RABBI ARTHUR A. CHIEL

"Ve'assu li mikdash, ve'shakhanti be'tokham . . .

And let them make Me a sanctuary, and I shall dwell in their midst."
(Exodus 25:8)

These were the words spoken to our Israelite ancestors some thirty-two hundred years ago. They were then wanderers in the Sinai desert, but they were beginning to take their earliest steps onto the stage of history. A short while earlier they had attained their independence. Indelibly imprinted in their collective consciousness was the remembrance of those harrowing centuries of enslavement in Egypt. Surrounded in the desert by unknown foes, uncertain where their food and water would come from tomorrow, unaware of what dangers lay ahead, they were commanded to build a sanctuary. And they were to set this sanctuary at the very center of their encampment as the symbol of its importance. This sanctuary was to be a perpetual extension of the bond that had been forged, recently, at Sinai Mount, between God and Israel. And from that time three millenia ago to this, wherever Jews have settled they have established a Tabernacle.

Two hundred and twenty years ago, in 1763, this Tabernacle of Congregation Jeshuat Israel was formally dedicated. Designed by Peter Harrison, "the prince of colonial amateur architects," it was a synagogue long in the making, for Jewish settlement here in Newport dates back to 1658, some two decades after the remarkable exponent of religious liberty, Roger Williams, established Rhode Island and Providence Plantations as a colony with an open-door policy for all religions.

We would be derelict if we did not dwell, even if briefly, on the extraordinary pioneering contribution of this man to the religious weal of all of us. Banished in 1635 from Massachusetts for his radical convictions about religious and political freedom, Roger Williams was determined that such liberty be granted in his new place of settlement.

The doyen of American Jewish history, Professor Jacob R. Marcus, has put it well when he writes: "Providence and Boston are scarcely forty miles apart, but that is no measure of the spiritual and political distance between the Rhode Island colony and Puritan-dominated New England. How widely

*Delivered at the Rededication Centennial of Touro Synagogue, Newport, Rhode Island on May 22, 1983, Commemorating the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the modern Congregation Jeshuat Israel. Rabbi Chiel was spiritual leader of Congregation B'nai Jacob of Woodbridge, Connecticut. Rabbi Chiel died suddenly on August 27, 1983 in his 63rd year.

separated in outlook these settlements were is thrown into relief by contrasting their attitudes towards nonconformists.”

During his mission to England in 1644, to negotiate for Rhode Island her first charter, Roger Williams wrote and published his lengthy tract *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause and Conscience*. In this prophet-like work, Williams set forth his principles of liberty of conscience and separation of church and state. In it he asserted explicitly:

I acknowledge that to molest any person, Jew or Gentile, for either professing doctrine, or practicing worship merely religious or spirituall (*sic*), is to persecute him, and such a person (what ever his doctrine or practice be true or false) suffereth persecution for conscience.

Returned to England, in 1652, to have Rhode Island's charter confirmed by the Cromwell government, Roger Williams published a pamphlet *The Hireling Ministry* wherein he opposed a state church and state support of the clergy as “a covenant with Hell.” In this work Williams was equally forthright when he wrote:

I desire not that liberty to my selfe which I could not freely and impartially weigh out to all the consciences of the world beside. And therefore I doe humbly conceive that it is the will of the most high, and the expresse and absolute duty of the civill powers to proclaim an absolute freedom . . . in all the world . . . that each person may freely enjoy what worship their soul desireth.

In response to his fellow Rhode Islanders who charged that his radical ideas were destructive of the colony's civil-peace, Roger Williams countered with his now well known parable of the ship at sea:

It has fallen out sometimes that both Papists and Protestants, Jews and Turks, may be embarked on one ship; upon which supposal I affirm, that all the liberty of conscience, that ever I pleased for, turns upon two hinges — that none of the Papists, Protestants, Jews, or Turks, be forced to come to the ship's prayers or worship, nor be compelled from their own particular prayer or worship, if they practice any . . . notwithstanding this liberty, the commander of this ship ought to command that justice, peace and sobriety be kept and practiced both among the seamen and all the passengers.

Thus did Roger Williams, who died in 1683, prepare the haven of American religious liberty where, for the first time, Jews could enter on the basis of religious equality.

The growth of the colonial Jewish community was slow. Among the few families who came to Newport, worship was conducted in one Jewish home or another. But a cemetery was early acquired. In an archival deed of 1677 there is the stipulation that a fence shall be built around the burial ground and

if it should so Fall out that ye Jews should all Depart the Island Again so as that there shall be none left to keep up and Maintain this Fence as aforesaid then the Said Land shall Return Again to the said Nathaniel Dickens.

Because of the location of the cemetery, the road passing by it came to be known as *Jews' Street* and it is so designated on Mumford's 1712 map of Newport. We shall return to the Newport Cemetery.

At last, in 1758, one century after their arrival on the Newport scene, were there a large enough number of Jews to proceed with the engagement of a full-time clergyman, Hazzan Isaac Touro, and concurrently to move ahead with the construction of a synagogue. Newport, at this time, was at the height of its commercial prosperity.

In June 1759, Jacob Rodriguez Rivera, Moses Levy, and Isaac Hart, acting on behalf of Congregation Jeshuat Israel, acquired from Ebenezer Allen, title to "one certain parcel or lot of land situated, lying and being in the township of Newport." Four years later, in December 1763 at Hanukkah, the Festival of Rededication, was this lovely Georgian structure, designed by the gifted architect Peter Harrison, consecrated.

In his diary entry Friday, December 2, 1763, the Rev. Ezra Stiles, who had been present at the ceremony, wrote

In the afternoon was the dedication of the new synagogue in this town. It began by a handsome procession in which were carried the Books of Law, to be deposited in the Ark. Several portions of Scripture and of their service with a prayer for the royal family were read and finely sung by the priests and the people. There were present many gentlemen and ladies. The order and the decorum, the harmony and the solemnity of the musick, together with a handsome assembly of people, in an edifice the most perfect of the temple kind perhaps in America, and splendidly illuminated, could not but raise in the mind a faint idea of the majesty and grandeur of the ancient Jewish worship mentioned in the Scripture.

From Ezra Stiles's excellent diaries we learn that Newport now attracted learned visiting rabbis from the Holy Land and Europe, six in all, between

1759 and 1775. He established intensive dialogue with each of the rabbis and was impressed by their education. But Stiles developed his strongest affinity for Rabbi Haim Isaac Carigal, with whom he met frequently through April and May 1773.

On the first of the two-day Shavuot services, May 28, 1773, Congregation Jeshuat Israel invited town and colony officials to attend worship that they might hear Rabbi Carigal preach. Ezra Stiles took careful notes of the content and manner of Rabbi Carigal's preaching. The rabbi's sermon ran forty-seven minutes and was delivered in Spanish (Ladino) interspersed with Hebrew. According to Stiles, Carigal's "oratory, elocution and gestures were fine and oriental. It was very animated."

Stiles noted further that it was the intent of the Newport congregation to print the Carigal sermon in English translation. It was indeed published and put on sale on July 18, 1773, three days before Rabbi Carigal sailed for Surinam.

It is the basic theme of the Carigal sermon that, while everywhere on earth humans have busied themselves with work and toil to gain their daily bread, yet humanity cannot live by bread alone.

There are the contemporary thinkers, Carigal asserts, who believe that they can invent new religions better than the old (he has here in mind the Deists of the day). Yet, believes Carigal, the Law of the Lord need not be improved upon for it is perfect, "In the precepts of the Decalogue is exhibited an epitome of the divine Law."

As for the sufferings and calamities that have too often befallen Jewry, these have come about because Israel fell away from the high standards which the Law of God had prescribed for them. But Carigal exhorts them not to despair. Calamities and sufferings were not evidence of being forsaken by God. Adversity and God's judgments were the common lot of all nations mighty and weak alike.

Israel has but to acknowledge that they have erred, to do repentance, and, in turn, God will forgive. For "the justice of God is always united with His mercy and goodness," and He is ever ready to be moved by the contrite heart.

Rabbi Carigal ends his sermon with a short prayer supplicating that Divine favor be granted to "enlighten the eyes of our understanding to dissolve the thick clouds of our ignorance."

The Holy Land rabbi reciprocated Rev. Stiles's attendance at his Shavuot preaching by a visit to Stiles's church on Sunday, June 27, 1773. Carigal

came in the company of two Newport Jewish lay-leaders. As for the content of Stiles's sermon on that occasion, he said:

The seed of Jacob are a favorite people of the most High and the subjects of the peculiar care of Heaven, and of most marvelous Dispensations. That notwithstanding God's chastisements of their Iniquity and Imperfections in Calamities, Captivities and Dispersions; yet God hath not forgotten his Covenant with Abraham and his posterity. . . .

In this synagogue and in Newport was it, then, that there could uniquely take place a coming together of Jew and Christian, Christian and Jew, with a mutuality of regard.

A mere two years later, after this coming together to hear the brotherly preachments of rabbi and minister, Newport's equanimity was shattered by the outbreak of the Revolutionary War in 1775. When the British occupied Newport in December 1776, the majority of the Jewish population, along with several thousand other Newporters, fled their beloved seaport town. Hazzan Isaac Touro, who had served this congregation since 1759, took his sad leave, together with his wife Reyna, their two young sons Abraham and Judah, and their daughter, Rebecca. The Touros went to Kingston, Jamaica, where Hazzan Touro officiated until his death in 1784.

The Newport Jewish community experienced a modest revival following the Revolution. However, it was destined that during this period history should record the ringing and memorable expression on religious liberty and human equality in letters exchanged in 1790 between this congregation's Parnass Moses Seixas and President George Washington: "To bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."

After President Washington's historic visit of 1790 the Jewish community continued to decline. By 1800 the portals of this beautiful sanctuary were closed. The Torah Scrolls and sacred ritual objects were taken to New York for safe-keeping with America's mother synagogue, Congregation Shearith Israel.

As the Newport Jewish community faded out of existence, a kindly Newport Christian, Stephen Gould, and after him his descendants, cared for the synagogue and cemetery. In his journal, Gould wrote on May 5, 1816, "Widow Rivera, aged 96, sailed for New York." In another entry, on October 5, 1822, Gould recorded sadly that "Moses Lopez, the last Jew, left Newport for New York." The Jewish community of 164 years duration had seemingly come to an end.

In the summer of 1852, thirty years after the departure of this community's

“last Jew,” the great American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow came with his family to vacation here in beautiful Newport. On the third day after his arrival, he came upon the Jewish cemetery. As he relates it in his journal for July 9, 1852:

Went this morning into the Jewish Burying Ground, with Mr. Gould the Tailor, a polite old gentleman, who keeps the key. There are but a few graves; nearly all low tomb-stone of marble; with Hebrew inscriptions and a few words added in English or Portuguese.

On leaving Newport in early autumn 1852, and at Longfellow's return to his Cambridge home, the thought of its Jewish cemetery continued to haunt the poet. Longfellow's working journal reveals that he wrote his first lines of “The Jewish Cemetery at Newport” on November 6, 1852. As a biographer of Longfellow points out “it was one of the poems over which Longfellow had labored longest in revision.”

The wide divergence between the final poem (which appeared in print July 1854 in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*) and the four manuscript drafts which have remained among the Longfellow papers reveal the poet's perplexity regarding the ultimate destiny of the Jew. His final and published version concludes on too pessimistic a note:

But ah! what once has been shall be no more!
The groaning earth in travail and pain
Brings forth its races, but does not restore,
And the dead nations never rise again.

Longfellow's prophecy about the Hebrews as now “a Legend of the Dead” was premature, if not exaggerated.

In the very same year that Longfellow's elegy on Jewry appeared, Judah Touro in far-off New Orleans left a trust to pay for the upkeep of Newport synagogue and cemetery and also “for the purpose of paying for the salary of a Reader or Minister to officiate in the Jewish synagogue of Newport . . .” Touro proved right; Longfellow proved wrong.

Newport's synagogue was soon to reopen for services during the summers of the late 1850s and into the 1860s for Jews who came from other American cities to vacation here.

And then there began the mass exodus of East European Jewry in the 1870s and early 1880s. These were the men, women, and children who fled the Czarist pogroms. Newport synagogue was there for their religious renewal. Congregation Shearith Israel returned to the Newport synagogue its Torah Scrolls, and the Reverend Abraham Pereira Mendes was appointed the rabbi

of the resurrected congregation. On Friday, May 25, 1883, the Touro Synagogue was reconsecrated with a service like unto that of this historic day.

If license can be taken, Longfellow's epitaphal sixth stanza of "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport" should, today, be emended to read:

Open are the portals of their Synagogue,
Anew Psalms of David now the silence break,
Again a Rabbi reads the ancient Decalogue,
In the grand dialect the Prophets spake.

PETER HARRISON AND THE NEW HAVEN
CONNECTION

BY RABBI ARTHUR A. CHIEL*

Peter Harrison is the unsung architect of the historic Newport Synagogue and other houses of worship of the Colonial period. Through this column we offer our tribute to him. He died in New Haven in 1775.

“In the afternoon was the dedication of the new Synagogue in this town,” reported the *Newport Mercury* on Monday, December 5, 1763, three days after the impressive, religious exercises had taken place. “The Order and Decorum,” continued the report, “the Harmony and Solemnity of the Musick, together with a Handsome Assembly of People, in an Edifice the most perfect of the Temple kind perhaps in America, and splendidly illuminated, could not but raise in the Mind a Faint idea of the Majesty and Grandeur of the Ancient Jewish Worship mentioned in the Scripture.”

The Rev. Ezra Stiles, minister of Newport’s Second Congregationalist Church, carefully copied the *Mercury* notice in his diary. Taken with the charm of structure, Stiles proceeded to describe the synagogue’s interior in fine detail. He drew, too, a sketch of the Holy Ark, showing the tablets of the Decalogue enframed above it.

Oddly, neither the *Newport Mercury* in its report, nor Stiles in his diary entry, made mention of the architect of the new house of worship. For that matter, nowhere in the remaining contemporary records does Peter Harrison’s name appear. And were it not for the Travels volume published in London in 1775 by a British clergyman, the synagogue’s identity might have passed into oblivion.

In 1759-60 the Rev. Andrew Burnaby, a minister from Greenwich, England, during his travels in North America, visited bustling Newport. Burnaby observed the synagogue under construction at that time. Burnaby reported on the architectural character of Newport’s public buildings,

*Rabbi Chiel, until his untimely death (see footnote, page 69), was spiritual leader of Congregation B’nai Jacob in Woodbridge, Connecticut, a suburb of New Haven. Through his scholarly endeavors, he had become an expert on Ezra Stiles, whose extensive diaries are preserved in the Yale University Library. Stiles, before becoming president of Yale University, had been a minister in Newport, Rhode Island. His diaries have been an invaluable source of knowledge concerning the Jews of Colonial Newport and Touro Synagogue. That both Ezra Stiles and Peter Harrison started their careers in Newport and spent their last days in New Haven appears to have been a source of fascination to Rabbi Chiel. He sent us a copy of this essay a few weeks before his death, together with the manuscript of the preceding paper. The above essay first appeared in *The New Haven Jewish Ledger* of March 17 and 24, 1983. We reprint it here in tribute to Rabbi Chiel with the kind permission of the publishers.

indicating that few of these were “worth notice.” Only the “Jews’ synagogue,” when completed, promised to be “worth looking at.”

Here, Reverend Burnaby proceeds to reveal the identity of the synagogue’s architect. “This building,” writes Burnaby, “was designed, as indeed were several of the others, by a Mr. Harrison, an ingenious English gentleman who lives here. It will be extremely elegant within when completed. . . .” To this clergyman traveler from abroad are we indebted for revealing the identity of Newport Synagogue’s architect.

For nearly a century and a half, Peter Harrison’s name went unmentioned. At last, in 1916, on the occasion of his 200th birthday, Harrison was remembered in articles in two New England historical society journals. Then, in 1949, there appeared Carl Bridenbaugh’s definitive “Peter Harrison, First American Architect.”

HIS EARLY YEARS IN NEWPORT

Born June 14, 1716, Peter Harrison was the son of a Quaker couple of York, England. From childhood and through the rest of his life, Peter Harrison had close affection and association with his brother, Joseph, seven years Peter’s senior. Joseph became involved in trade with the American colonies, and Peter followed suit.

By 1738, Joseph Harrison was in charge of a ship fitted out by London merchants for trade with Newport across the Atlantic. The younger brother, Peter, was a member of the 10-man crew. Sailing from England in March 1738, with the cargo-laden *Sheffield*, they reached Newport harbor after eight weeks on the rough North Atlantic. Having successfully discharged their first overseas mission, the Harrison brothers returned to England in early Fall, 1738.

By 1740, at age 24, Peter had returned to Newport, where he was engaged to supervise the construction and outfitting of a new ship, the *Leathley*. In December 1740, the now Captain Peter Harrison took the *Leathley* in his charge, and in February 1741, the ship arrived safely in London.

After several years on the high seas, Peter Harrison decided to settle in Newport. Peter Harrison’s talents were quickly recognized, and in 1745 a committee of the General Assembly of Rhode Island appointed him to draw up plans for the development of Newport’s harbor.

That same year, Peter Harrison married the wealthy Elizabeth Pelham, a genteel beautiful woman of 22. Peter Harrison moved from Quakerism to the Episcopalian church of his wife and her family.

In 1746, the brothers, Joseph and Peter Harrison, formed a partnership in

Newport as sea-merchants. Peter Harrison, the younger of the two, took on the nautical responsibilities of the firm. As captain of a merchant vessel, he would be on the high seas for the better part of 1747 through 1749, a long separation from his wife, Elizabeth, and their daughter, Hermione.

It would appear that Peter Harrison's avocational interest in architecture was sparked during this period, while on business in England. It was the era in which English architectural taste was shifting from the baroque to Palladianism.

The Palladian style of building took its cue from the classical tradition of Rome, as interpreted by Andrea Palladio of Vicenza, Italy, during the 16th century. In England, Palladio's designs were taken up by Inigo Jones in the 17th century. English architects, who were largely gentlemen dilettantes, were inspired by "The Designs of Inigo Jones," published in 1727. Other works in Palladian architecture followed.

Peter Harrison acquired these various treatises in building design and studied them, on his own, with enthusiasm and pleasure. In London, he acquired what was to become the best architectural collection in the American colonies.

GENTLEMAN ARCHITECT

Upon his return to Newport from England, the first opportunity to apply his architectural skill presented itself to Harrison. Abraham Redwood had presented a handsome gift of 500 pounds sterling for the purchase of books for a library in Newport. A committee undertook the construction of a library structure. Peter Harrison was invited to execute its design.

Amidst his commercial and family responsibilities, after his nearly two years' absence, Peter Harrison took on the assignment to plan and oversee the construction of the Redwood Library. In its style, it would be a 'first' in that all other civil structures of colonial America until then had been planned in the tradition which came to be known as the Georgian or Colonial style.

Redwood Library was of Palladian character. This attractive, diminutive structure was the first building in America to have a classic temple-like design; it presaged the classical revival in this country.

Upon its completion in 1750, the Redwood Library became one of Newport's showplaces. Visitors, taken with its beauty and proportions, mentioned it in their travel journals.

Peter Harrison's next opportunity for creative architecture came from a Boston Anglican congregation. It requested of him "a Draught of a

handsome Church.” He graciously accepted this invitation to design Boston’s Kings Chapel. No remuneration was offered, nor, apparently, did Harrison expect such. He was a gentlemen-architect. It was his creative avocation and purely a labor of love.

In September 1749, Harrison completed his plans for King’s Chapel. Five years followed before the actual construction work was accomplished. It was opened for religious services in August 1754.

Reports of Peter Harrison’s success with Redwood Library and King’s Chapel spread beyond New England. Charles Town in South Carolina now turned to him for the design of a church for the parish of St. Michael. Again, Harrison responded to this 1751 request. St. Michael’s was opened for worship in 1761.

In the meanwhile, Peter Harrison carried on in the mercantile field as an importer-exporter. His success as an entrepreneur had its ups and downs. The sea trade was a high risk enterprise. But, though his fortunes varied in the overseas trade, Harrison lived the life of a gentleman with his wife and children in cosmopolitan Newport.

Harrison had a burst of architectural creativity in 1759-60, during which period he completed plans for the Synagogue, the Freemason’s Hall, and Brick Market, all in Newport, and for Christ Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

COMMISSION TO DESIGN THE JEWS’ SYNAGOGUE

The small Newport Jewish community of some 15 families purchased a “suitable Lot of Land, whereon we design to Build a Synagogue.” Two members of the building committee were Jacob Rodriquez Rivera and Moses Levy.

Both these men had contributed toward the building of Redwood Library nearly a decade earlier. Rivera and Levy turned to Peter Harrison for their prospective synagogue’s design, and he responded favorably to their invitation.

This project, on which Harrison worked beginning in early 1759, the construction of which was to get under way in August of that year, was a most unusual challenge. Committed to the Palladian style, he set to designing a structure along classical lines, at the same time suited to the spirit of Judaism in its faith and ritual.

Meeting with the Rev. Isaac Touro, the young Hazzan (Cantor) recently arrived from Holland, Harrison consulted with him regarding the interior layout of Amsterdam’s Sephardic Synagogue. Harrison, whose personal

library of architectural works was considerable, may have been guided, too, by reproductions of the interior of that house of worship.

A strong likelihood, too, is that he had seen the London and New York synagogues, which were all of similar layout in their interiors. Thus informed, Harrison proceeded with his creative assignment.

Harrison asserted his classical taste and originality in the final plans for Newport's synagogue. Particularly was this manifest in his design of the Ark, which, in the earlier Sephardic synagogues, were baroque.

The Ark was his largest challenge, for it had no parallel in the Christian church or pagan temple. The Ark designed by Harrison proved to be an original creation of elegant simplicity.

Upon its completion in 1763, the Newport Synagogue's interior and exterior were combined with an excellent sense of harmony and proportion. And all of this was done by Harrison without fee.

REMOVAL TO NEW HAVEN

In 1766, Peter Harrison was appointed to succeed his brother Joseph as the Collector of Customs at the port of New Haven. Joseph Harrison had held that assignment since 1769 and was now promoted to the much larger port of Boston. These appointments came the Harrison brothers' way as reward for their Tory loyalties.

New Haven was, by that time, a prosperous and growing town with a population of about 7,000. Its growth had been due to the increasing importance of its harbor. And, while it had neither the cultural milieu nor the cosmopolitanism of Newport, Peter Harrison found it a pleasant place for his family and himself to live.

The Harrisons might have lived out their lives in their genteel circumstances had not personal tragedy and political turbulence engulfed them. Six years after arrival in New Haven, in 1772, their only son, 23-year-old Thomas, who inclined to art and architecture, died suddenly. Death struck again in the family, in 1774, with the sudden passing of their daughter, Isabelle, at the age of 22.

Peter Harrison, at 58, had become an ill and depressed man. His health impaired, he was utterly shattered by the Connecticut political situation. Being a Tory in his loyalties, a royal official, and an aristocrat, the popular uprising against British rule was terrifying to him and his family.

During 1774 and 1775, there were mob attacks at New Haven's waterfront. Peter Harrison was abused by the rebels. News of the battles at

Lexington and Concord hastened Harrison's demise. He died of a stroke on April 30, 1775, and was buried at Trinity Church on New Haven Green.

Soon thereafter, further uprisings took place in New Haven, and Harrison's house was vandalized by an unruly mob. Harrison's personal papers and his elegant library of several hundred books and architectural drawings were destroyed.

His two surviving daughters married at Newport and New York. Widow Harrison stayed on in New Haven, an impoverished woman, in the home where once she was the aristocratic lady, mistress of a lively household. She died in 1784.

Peter Harrison's name and reputation as the pioneer-architect was deliberately overlooked by American chroniclers and historians for nearly one and a half centuries because of his Tory inclination.

Only in 1916 was his architectural reputation "rehabilitated," when on the occasion of his 200th birthday the articles about the long-neglected Harrison were published in the two New England historical journals.

In assaying Harrison's contribution to American architecture, his biographer, Carl Bridenaugh, writes: "The tragedy of Peter Harrison is that he achieved success in the colonies 20 years too late. As he arrived at the top of the colonial ladder, the Revolution began to shake down the structure he had climbed with such effort. Temperament and environment combined to make him a Loyalist; he could not have been otherwise. Although he had chosen the wrong course, there were moderate men, even in the Patriot ranks, who thought only of his integrity and his contribution in introducing Palladian architecture in America."

The Newport Synagogue stands as testimony to Peter Harrison's creativity. In it, and in the other structures that remain standing today, are to be seen the pioneering contribution which he made to the "fine art of architecture."

HOW TOURO SYNAGOGUE GOT ITS NAME

BY BERNARD KUSINITZ, M.A.

Through the years almost all of us have had occasion either to read accounts of or hear speakers on the subject of Touro Synagogue. When the question of how the Synagogue acquired its name is raised, one of two explanations is usually offered.

Despite the obscure origin of the name, the view most commonly expressed in recent decades is that the Synagogue was named in deference to the first Rabbi of the Congregation Jeshuat Israel, Isaac Touro. The name of the house of worship is Touro Synagogue; the name of its first Rabbi was Isaac Touro. Therefore, there was a connection between the two, and the one was named after the other. This belief is almost invariably stated without equivocation, always with the utmost nonchalance, and always without any explanation whatsoever, as if there were no doubt about it at all.

Yet, notwithstanding this cavalier attitude and the popularity of the story in recent times, a careful examination of the history of the Synagogue and its times reveals that there is absolutely no historical justification whatsoever for assuming that the Synagogue was named for Isaac Touro simply because he was its first rabbi, or for any other reason for that matter. The facts demonstrate it to be an assumption *sans* merit, *sans* factual verification, *sans* reasonable hypothesis.

How many of us can name the first rabbi of any other synagogue, or know how many synagogues have been named for that elusive first rabbi? It would seem, therefore, that being a first rabbi of a synagogue, *ipso facto*, has never been sufficient cause for such a singular honor. And as capable a rabbi and teacher as he may have been, Isaac Touro, a Tory to the end, kept no diary, wrote no monographs, printed no sermons, and wrote no enlightening letters that we know about. In short, he made no contribution whatsoever to our knowledge of the Newport Colonial Jews, the Congregation, or the Synagogue. We believe, therefore, that his name would have been lost to posterity had it not been for the charity of his sons, Abraham and Judah, and the pen of Ezra Stiles, the noted Newport Colonial diarist and clergyman.

Permit us to offer just one case in point, even if it be almost parenthetical in nature, to demonstrate the validity of our claim, shocking as it may seem to those who have assumed the Synagogue was indeed named for the elder Touro and have often repeated it as if it were proven fact.

Delivered May 22, 1983 on the occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Reconsecration of the Synagogue, May 25, 1983, and adapted for publication.

It seems that when the Jews of Congregation Ohabel Shalom of Boston, Massachusetts wished to honor the son Judah in 1852 because of the sum of money he had bequeathed them in his celebrated will, they chose to do so by inscribing his name in Hebrew on a plaque to be placed in their synagogue.

Whereas in English a person's name consists of his first and last names, in Hebrew it consists of his and his father's first names only.¹ In the case of Judah, his name in English was "Judah Touro"; in Hebrew, it was "Judah, son of Issac."

Unfortunately, however, because no one in Boston knew his father's name, they were forced to write to an historian in Newport for that information. That letter has only recently been acquired and placed in the archives of the Newport Historical Society. This action taken by the Boston Jews must be considered very significant, because Boston was the city to which Issac Touro's sister and his brother-in-law, Moses Michael Hayes, had moved and was the city in which they raised Issac's sons, Abraham and Judah, after he had died.

If the good citizens of Boston had no reason to remember the name of the father, as seems to have been the case also in Newport, then who should we assume should remember it? Sentimentality is satisfying, as is wishful thinking, but neither is a substitute for facts. Lest we be misunderstood, however, we are not advocating that we honor the father less; but rather that we honor the sons more!

The second, and older explanation for the derivation of the name "Touro Synagogue" has it that the name gradually evolved from the possibility that the Touro Funds² had something to do with it. What that "something" is, once again, is never explained. This is unfortunate, because, as it turns out, this explanation is partially true and has much validity. However, it does not begin to explain what really happened.

Our purpose then is to tell the story of what actually happened, a story that is begging to be told. It closes yet another gap in the saga of the Jews of America. It is the story of a decision that we greatly appreciate, yet take for granted. We shall attempt to explain the historical process that saw the Synagogue's "name" change in response to conditions prevailing at various times, culminating in a fateful decision made by the right man, in the right place, at the right time.

To begin with, the synagogue never really had a name in the accepted sense of the word until the late nineteenth century. It was merely referred to as the "Jews' Synagogue" in the eighteenth century. As abrasive as that sounds to twentieth century ears, no antisemitic or uncouth connotation should be

ascribed to those who spoke the words. This was the manner of speech of the day, and nothing more should be read into it. We must not judge one generation by the mores and speech of another.

The congregants themselves had no special name for it. They generally referred to it as "The Synagogue", there being no need for any further designation when speaking among themselves. Depending upon other circumstances, references were made to "our public place of worship" or even to the "Newport Synagogue" in some documents. Actually, there was no need for further identification, because for many decades the Synagogue at Newport was the only one in New England and hence there was no cause for confusion.³

In the nineteenth century down to the 1880s, it was mostly referred to as the "Jewish Synagogue." Indeed, for many years a sign affixed to the exterior of the building by unknown hands in 1903 bore the legend "Jewish Synagogue". Because habit dies hard, the sign remained there, largely ignored until the restoration of the 1950s, when it was removed. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, of course, and down to this very day it has borne the proud name of "Touro Synagogue".

An intriguing idea immediately comes to mind. If there were virtually no Jews living in Newport during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century (excepting summer residents and an occasional year-round one), as indeed seems to have been the case, who was it then who referred to the building as the "Jewish Synagogue"?⁴

There is a two-fold answer. In the first place, those who used that phrase comprised just about everybody who had anything at all to do with the Synagogue. This would include the City Fathers of Newport as well as the legislators at the State House in Providence, both of which collectively have administered the "Touro Jewish Synagogue Fund." In addition, there were the reporters of the local press, who described events that took place occasionally in the Synagogue, travel guide writers who described the building as a tourist attraction, professional photographers who took commercial pictures of the building, and even the caretakers, especially the Gould family, who took care of the building over a long period of time and knew more of its history than anyone else.

In the second place, in retrospect perhaps, they all appear to have been non-Jews, there being no one else in Newport. And all used the phrase "Jewish Synagogue." Even as late as 1881, when an infrequent Saturday morning service was held in the Synagogue, and was considered newsworthy enough to appear in the *Newport Mercury*, it was designated as the "Jewish Synagogue".

Proving that God and history both move in strange ways, an apparent detour in our search for the right combination of events that produced the noble name "Touro Synagogue" is now in order.

This most illustrious building, almost always referred to as an outstanding example of Colonial architecture and a dramatic symbol of religious freedom in America, is located, as is well known, on Touro Street. Like the building itself, the street, too, had undergone a name change. Now, in order to understand how the Synagogue was given its name, we must understand, first, how the street received its name. This, in contrast to the naming of the Synagogue, invokes no controversy. Plainly and simply, the street was named by resolution of the Newport Town Council. It was an action taken in recognition of the will of Abraham Touro, which, in addition to giving money for the preservation and maintenance of the Synagogue, also allocated funds for the repair and preservation of the street on which it stood. The resolution was adopted at the Town Meeting held in the State House in Newport on Tuesday, August 31, 1834, with William Ennis, Esquire, acting as Moderator. Written legibly in the "Minute Book Amended April 10, 1821-June, 1834," it read as follows:

Whereas Abraham Touro a Native of this Town and late of Boston in the State of Massachusetts deceased in his last Will and Testament devised to the Municipal Authority of this Town a very ample fund for the purpose of repairing and preserving the street leading from the Jews burying ground to the Main Street, we therefore voted and resolved in testimony of gratitude and esteem for the memory of the said Abraham Touro that the street from Spring Street easterly heretofore called Griffin Street be hereafter known and called by the name of Touro Street.

A question immediately comes to mind. If the street acquired its name by resolution, could not the Synagogue have received its name the same way? The answer could be "yes", but it has to be "no". There is no record of any resolution by any group anywhere at any time, or a record of a dedication or ceremony sponsored by anyone naming the building "Touro Synagogue" except that referred to below. And, even then, the naming of the Synagogue appears to have been incidental to the main purpose of the ceremony described.

While there is no connection between the names of Isaac Touro and Touro Synagogue, there *is* a direct connection between the names of Touro Street and Touro Synagogue. Two factors are important to a more complete understanding of what happened. The story is more complicated than would first appear to be the case.

The first of the two factors involves an analysis of the phrase “Jewish Synagogue”. The phrase “Jewish Synagogue” is in fact redundant as the word “Jewish” before “Synagogue” is superfluous. There is no such thing as a synagogue that is not Jewish. Other terms such as church, temple, and minister, for example, do require an adjective for proper identification. No Jew is likely to use the expression “Jewish Synagogue”. One says “synagogue”, and no more!

Who in Newport used the expression “Jewish Synagogue”? They were, of necessity, non-Jews. There were no permanent Jewish residents during this entire period. The non-Jews were seemingly unaware of the redundancy of the expression.

The second factor in the historical analysis had its beginning in the 1870s, when Jews returned to Newport to sink roots there for the first time since colonial days. Whether it was to escape persecution once again, or to search for “The *Goldena Medina*”, the golden land of opportunity, or for a combination of the two, or whether there were unknown undocumented personal reasons for which Newport in particular was sought out, are all beside the point.⁵ The fact is that Newport once again became the permanent home of people seeking freedom and a better way of life. More directly related to our story is the fact that within a few years after coming to Newport they decided they had sufficient numbers and motivation to organize. This may have been a premature decision, but organize they did. They received permission from the owners to use the Synagogue,⁶ to use the two Touro Funds, and to hire a rabbi. Thus the stage was set for the historic naming of Touro Synagogue.

Up to this point, we have been dealing with incontrovertible facts. Let us now engage in a little flight of fancy.

First imagine that you, the reader, are the new rabbi in town, just hired. After being here for a couple of weeks, you decide on an “affair” to be held in the Synagogue, complete with a printed program which you indeed do prepare. As part of the program, you have to indicate where the affair is being held. Keeping in mind that every synagogue has a name and that there is no reason why this beautiful old edifice shouldn’t have one also, you determine to finish the job and designate a name for the venerable house of worship. Being a rabbi, you are Jewish and you are educated. Further, you were born on an English-speaking island; you were brought up in English-speaking schools; and as an adult you have enjoyed a career in education and the ministry both in your home country and in England. With this sort of background could you possibly invite people to a place called the “Jewish Synagogue”? Hardly!

Reflect, furthermore, that in England and in other parts of Europe, as well as in the United States, many synagogues are named after the streets upon which they are located. While we could offer examples *ad infinitum*, let us offer just one, and let us offer it in honor of the incumbent Rabbi of Touro Synagogue, Rabbi Theodore Lewis. The synagogue near his home in Ireland bears the intriguing, delightfully Irish, if dubiously Jewish name of “The St. Kevin Parade Synagogue”. Resisting the temptation to stray further, let us revert to Newport. On what street is the synagogue in question located? On Touro Street, of course. And after what Touro was it named — not Isaac, the father, but, as we have seen, Abraham the son.

Consider, also, that this synagogue in which you are officiating has been restored and maintained by the *Touro* Jewish Synagogue Fund for the last fifty years or so and that you are being paid by the *Touro* Ministerial Fund. Now what could be more natural, almost inevitable, than that you call this building — what? Why Touro Synagogue, of course!

The evidence indicates that we are *not* dealing with a coincidence. If there is any logic to our fantasy, this must be the way it happened — a pragmatic decision with no abstract deference to a shadowy religious figure of the past, to whom there was absolutely no reference once he left Newport. Besides — “Touro Synagogue” — it has a nice ring to it!

If we were to wax poetical or deal in abstraction, we would say that the atmosphere of the synagogue was heavy with essence of Touro — several parts Abraham and one part Judah! In this atmosphere and considering the flow of events, a rational and pragmatic choice by an educated English Jew could not have been otherwise.

We must now interject a very serious fact, which deserves much repetition. If it had not been for Abraham Touro and his bequest, almost certainly there would be no Touro Synagogue as we see it today, and almost assuredly none at all.⁷ As for the name itself, once the terms of the will were put into effect, not only was the building saved from physical destruction, but its fate was inextricably bound up with the name “Touro”. The “Touro Mystique” began, was nurtured through the years, and still lives on today. All that was needed was the right combination of circumstances — the right man at the right time in the right place.

But because even a mystique such as the “Touro Mystique” must have a basis in reality, a return to the facts is in order. Our flight of fancy has, we hope, served its purpose. Our suppositions regarding the new rabbi in town, as some may have surmised, were not hypothetical at all.

The new rabbi in town was actually the Rev. Abraham Pereira Mendes. He was born in Kingston, Jamaica, an English-speaking colony in the

Caribbean. He was the first and one of the best of a long series of rabbis to serve the reborn Jewish community of Newport.

Between Jamaica and England he held a variety of positions; he organized more than one school or college; he published many kinds of books, translations, and articles both in England and in Newport. He was called from England to the reorganized community in Newport in 1883. Of the many works he authored, we shall single out but one work because of its relevance to Newport Jewish history. This was in the form of a translation of the inscriptions on the tombstones in the congregation's colonial cemetery. (This is one of three translations now extant.) He read this as a paper before the Newport Historical Society, which also printed it in Volume VI of its publication.

With that kind of background, could he refer to the synagogue as the "Jewish Synagogue"? Not likely!

The address from which this paper is adapted was delivered on May 22, 1983, the centennial of "The Reopening of the Touro Synagogue." This occurred on May 25, 1883, 100 years ago almost to the day. The ceremony of the reopening was reenacted on that occasion. The program prepared by Rabbi Mendes did indeed use the phrase "Touro Synagogue" and is the first document that weds that historic designation to our internationally recognized symbol of religious freedom. In fact if this were a court of law, we would submit the program as one of several "exhibits," designated A through G.⁸

Nonetheless, if there is truth to the thesis that we have submitted, let us ask one final question. Do these several exhibits comprise contemporary evidence that confirms the validity of our claim beyond what has already been discussed? The answer is yes:

1. When the synagogue was reopened for services after a suspension of about sixty years for the summer season of 1850, and because the rabbi who officiated at the first service, the Rev. Morris J. Raphall, felt that he had a large enough audience, he offered a series of six lectures. They were given over a two week period on the "Poetry of the Hebrews as Contained in the Sacred Scriptures." Like A. P. Mendes, who followed him years later, he too was English; he too was highly educated; and he too prepared a written "Syllabus". Moreover, he too had to designate the location of the lectures. Anticipating the Mendes dilemma, he too could not designate the building as the "Jewish Synagogue", nor could he call it the "Touro Synagogue", the name ingeniously

applied some thirty-odd years later. He simply states the location as “Synagogue, Newport”. Incidentally, he is described in the visitors’ book of 1850, our source concerning the reopening service of that year, as “lecturer and preacher to the Congregation B’nai Jeshurun New York”. In his written “Sillabus”, however, he identifies himself rather as “*Rabbi Preacher at the Elm Street Synagogue New York*” (underscoring by the author) — a cogent second example of the street-synagogue name connection.*

2. If A.P. Mendes did indeed create the celebrated “Touro Synagogue”, was it an off-hand forgettable impulse or did he sense it to be what it actually turned out to be — an unforgettable phrase? Did he therefore continue to use it thereafter? The answer appears to be “yes”, since several months after the reconsecration service, in a letter inviting military personnel to the high holiday services to be held in the synagogue, he signed the letter:

Yours faithfully
A.P. Mendes
Minister Touro Syn

3. In the visitors’ book, which covers the period 1850 to 1907, we find that there were far more non-Jews than Jews visiting the Synagogue. Even then, the Synagogue, which existed for many years without an organized congregation, had already captured the imagination of people all over the world and certainly before its designation as a national historic site. It was the Jews who appear to have been more emotionally affected. While most visitors merely signed their names, there are several instances scattered throughout the book where emotional persons wrote in more than their names. In the pre-A.P. Mendes period the writers did not refer to the synagogue as the “Jewish Synagogue”, nor as “Touro Synagogue”, since the phrase hadn’t yet been introduced. Rather they used such expressions as “ancient house of God”, “Sacred Edifice”, “Sacred House”, “Ancient Shrine”, “Holy Tempel” (sic), and “Holy Ground.” Further, from time to time there are references in various publications and documents to the “synagogue in Newport”, or the “Newport Synagogue”. Perhaps surprisingly the latter never caught on as a popular designation.

4. Not until the post-A.P. Mendes period in the late 1890s

*Bevis Marks synagogue in London, named for Bevis Marks’ Lane on which it stands, is perhaps the most significant example of this practice. Home of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews Congregations, it influenced architect Peter Harrison’s designs for Touro Synagogue. Ed.

does "Touro Synagogue" appear in the visitors' book. It is likely that it would take time before the name became common usage, which further supports our thesis.

In summary, we believe that through contemporary evidence we have adequately supported the thesis that no one other than the Rev. A.P. Mendes in this tiny Jewish Community had the educational background or the historical perspective to have introduced the name Touro Synagogue, and that in fact he did so.

NOTES

¹In most if not all, Ashkenazic (west European) congregations only the first names are used. However, the last name is used as well as the first, as in English, in some Sephardic (Spanish-Portuguese) congregations.

²The Touro Funds: When Abraham Touro died in 1822, he gave in his will "\$10,000 to the legislature of Rhode Island in special trust" for the purpose of supporting the Jewish Synagogue in Newport together with the municipal authority of Newport." He also willed \$5,000 for the repairing and preservation of the street upon which the synagogue was located. However, this street fund has long since been mingled with the General Funds of the City of Newport.

When Judah Touro died in 1854, he willed \$10,000 to the City of Newport" for "the purpose of paying the salary of a reader or minister to officiate in the Jewish Synagogue at Newport" and also to help repair and embellish the Jewish cemetery in Newport. His will was implemented by an act of the General Assembly in 1879.

Overall, beginning in 1823 and up to 1979, the terms of the original wills were put into effect, their scope enlarged, and major purchases permitted by the enactment of various laws and amendments. So now the funds engendered by the original trusts support not only the synagogue and the colonial cemetery, but also the community building owned by the Congregation Jeshuat Israel. The capital of the funds has increased tremendously, especially the Abraham Touro Fund, into the six figure category and now accounts for as much as one third of the annual budget of Congregation Jeshuat Israel.

The principal source for the above information is the 1969 Reenactment of the General Laws of Rhode Island 1956, Volume 6, and the 1980 Cumulative Pocket Supplement General Laws of Rhode Island 2956, Reenactment of 1969, Volume 6.

³The fourteen oldest congregations in the United States are as follows (with the exception of Congregation Jeshuat Israel in Newport, none are in New England):

<i>Congregation</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Founding Year</i>
Shearith Israel	New York, NY	1654
Jeshuat Israel	Newport, RI	1658
Mikveh Israel	Savannah, GA	1733
Mikveh Israel	Philadelphia, PA	1740
Beth Elohim	Charleston, SC	1750
Beth Ahabah	Richmond, VA	1789
Rodeph Shalom	Philadelphia, PA	1800
Baltimore Hebrew Congregation	Baltimore, MD	1823
K.K. Bene Israel	Cincinnati, Ohio	1824
B'nai Jeshurun	New York, NY	1828
Touro Synagoguc	New Orleans, LA	1828
Adath Israel	Louisville, KY	1836
Sharre Zedek	New York, NY	1837
Beth Emeth	Albany, NY	1838

⁴Unique in the annals of the Jewish Diaspora was the experience of the Newport Colonial Jews. Unlike the Jews of "civilized" Europe, exposed to periodic persecutions and expulsions based upon the religious and political whims of those in power, the Jews left Newport, not for those familiar reasons, but for economic reasons only. What a startling and new privilege! The economic basis of Newport had been destroyed by the British during the War for Independence, leaving the Jewish merchants, who made up virtually the entire Jewish community, no cause to remain. The last of the Colonial Jews left Newport in 1822. However, Jews returned in the latter part of the nineteenth century. This was in sharp contrast to the Jewish experience after, for example, the expulsion from Spain in 1492. Before Jews would come back to Spain in any numbers, approximately three hundred and fifty years would pass. Will Jews ever return to Auschwitz, Belsen, Treblinka, and other sites of the Holocaust horror all over Europe? Time alone will tell. The free atmosphere and reputation of Newport, Rhode Island, on the other hand, was never questioned, and another generation of freedom-loving Jews never hesitated to begin the Newport experience all over again and after an absence of only some fifty-odd years!

⁵There are three categories of reasons why Jews came back to Newport. The first, applying to all those who settled anywhere in America, are not pertinent exclusively to Newport and require no discussion. The second derives from the historical background of the Newport exodus contrasting with the bitter European experience. The fact that the now world-famous Touro Synagogue had survived and was available to Jews from small European *shtetls* (villages) who were used to having a small synagogue nearby to pray in was a plus factor. The good name that the Colonial Jews had willed to posterity was a psychological factor not to be ignored. And for those looking for a religious sanctuary, it could be said that the "Holy *Schechinah*," or Holy Spirit of God, operating through all the above factors and more was still present in Newport.

Ironically, the third category of reasons as to why the first of these later immigrants came to Newport, is the most difficult to determine. Unfortunately, they left no written documentation or oral tradition to be handed down from generation to generation. Their children and grandchildren seem to be completely unaware of the reasons why the first generation came to Newport. Not a single interview has proved fruitful. However, once the process got underway, family attracted family, and friend attracted friend. Even job opportunities in certain lines, such as tailoring, served to attract varying numbers; but, alas, documentation does not exist.

⁶In Colonial Rhode Island there was no such thing as a non-profit charitable corporation, a legal device not created until many decades later. A religious group, therefore, could not legally incorporate *per se*. Instead, individuals would be appointed to act for the group. So it was that three members of Congregation Jeshuat Israel bought land and constructed a synagogue in their own names; but for all practical purposes they acted not for themselves, but for the group. However, no one anticipated the destruction of the City of Newport as a major seaport. More pertinent to our story is the fact that, together with the city, its Jewish community consisting primarily of merchants was also destroyed. Likewise, no one anticipated the legal consequences arising out of the differences between legal ownership and "everyday ownership" or possession of the Synagogue. Thus, when the Seixas family, who had become the last legal heirs to the Synagogue, moved to New York and became members of Congregation Shearith Israel, the latter assumed *de facto* ownership of the synagogue in Newport. Later on, the heirs turned over their legal rights to the trustees of Shearith Israel, who then became the *de jure* owners. In the interim, the new Jewish residents of the City of Newport asked for and received permission to use both the Synagogue and the funds.

⁷It would stretch the imagination to believe that a group of absentee landlords, no matter how conscientious and devoted they might be by virtue of inheritance, would maintain possession of a building in a distant city, invest thousands and thousands of dollars to restore and maintain that building, which was in a state of ruinous disrepair when they first took possession of it, for the possible use of co-religionists who might or might not one day in the distant indefinite future come back to that city and ask for the use of the facility. Indeed, in a letter to Newport, Moses Lopez, the last Jew to leave Newport in 1822, who then became a resident of New York and member of Congregation Shearith Israel, reveals the conservative attitude of that congregation, which had just assumed de facto ownership of the synagogue in Newport, in the following words: "I think they (the work to be done) are inclined to be at more expense than we dare to attempt ourselves if we did the work. . ." Who could fault succeeding generations of heirs from having less and less desire to keep ownership any longer than necessary with the passage of decade after decade, if this is the way they would come to feel? Certainly, what survived would have been less than what we see, had it not been for the Touro Funds, which in the last analysis made New York ownership of the synagogue both possible and desirable.

⁸The exhibits A through G are as follows:

- A. The 1824 resolution of the Newport Town Council renaming Griffin Street Touro Street
- B. A xeroxed copy of Rabbi Raphall's "Sillabus" of 1850
- C. A xeroxed copy of the letter from Congregation Ohabel Shalom requesting the name of Judah Touro's father
- D. Complete text of the letter written by Rabbi A.P. Mendes which he signed as "Minister Touro Syn."
- E. A brief biography of Rabbi A.P. Mendes summarizing his educational and ministerial background
- F. A picture of Touro Synagogue taken between 1868 and 1878 bearing the legend "Jewish Synagogue in Newport"
- G. A copy of the 1883 "Order of Service" for the Reopening of Touro Synagogue reproduced in "The Story of the Jews of Newport" by Rabbi Morris A. Gutstein.

HISTORY AND MYSTERY ON FAREWELL STREET AND WYATT
ROAD — THE JEWISH CEMETERIES OF NEWPORT COUNTY,
RHODE ISLAND

1894-1982

BY BERNARD KUSINITZ, M.A.

The uniqueness of the Newport Jewish community and its world-famous synagogue have been written about, and discussed on radio and television and wherever religious freedom and its symbols have been the topic of conversation. This essay, however, is the story of another facet of religious freedom and the Newport Jewish community — the establishment of consecrated cemeteries. The establishment of a cemetery has much greater significance than one would ordinarily suspect. History, mystery, religious freedom, drama, tragedy, the whole gamut of human experience are there for the readers, but historical perspective is required for full appreciation.

The Newport Jewish community has had a unique history. Most communities, with the passage of time, differ greatly from what they were in their early years. These differences are usually the result of a natural and steady evolution. Not so with the Newport Jewish community.

Few communities have had to make *two* beginnings. The histories of the two Newport Jewish communities are alike in some respects, but differ in others.

The American Revolution and the War for Independence, which ruined Newport as a major commercial seaport, also in the process ruined its Jewish community, which had been an integral part of its commercial life. The War of 1812 finished off the small remnant of the Jewish community, the last Jews leaving shortly thereafter. During the next sixty-odd years there were very few, or no Jews at all in Newport, except for summer visitors and transients. There were some burials of former residents.

For the Colonial Jews the challenge for survival was a philosophic one, because the promise of true religious freedom had not been truly tested. For nineteenth and twentieth century Jews the challenge was primarily an economic one, for the religious issue was already legally if not socially settled.

The Colonial Jews found that in America the right to live as one chose also included the right to die as one chose (an apparent truism not necessarily a fact in all societies at all times). When the second community sought to establish itself, the Touro Synagogue was already in existence, and they obtained the right from the Synagogue's New York trustees to make use of its facilities. Their first move after organizing, therefore, was, *not* to

build a synagogue, but to establish a cemetery. This was essential, for it had apparently already been perceived that the original cemetery at the head of Touro Street was an historic site and in any case not large enough for the new community.

For the Colonial Jews, then, the establishment of a cemetery had a great religious significance, while for the newcomers the religious aspect was no longer an issue. It was primarily a decision based on economic and practical geographic needs.

How did the new community resolve the matter of a new cemetery? There is both history and mystery involved! That generation of Jews generally knew what to do, but their methods at times defied logic. Their propensity to leave few records, or none at all, has greatly complicated our efforts to record their history and to build on their early efforts. What follows represents an attempt to describe their activities in the period from 1895 to the present to establish cemeteries and honor their dead. The climax of the story is the three contemporary cemeteries and burial groups, the origins of which are summarized below. Of necessity, some details will be omitted for the sake of continuity.

The Jewish community in the 1890s consisted of some two dozen permanent families and many more individuals who stayed a year or two or even less. Not all joined the newly formed Congregation Jeshuat Israel in 1894. Nevertheless, the Congregation obtained a charter, received permission to use Touro Synagogue, established a Hebrew School, and then took another step toward settling its roots in Newport on a permanent basis. In 1895 it established a cemetery fund, but did not actually buy a burial ground. So, between 1895 and 1899 two distinct and separate movements to that end were made by the community.

Because not all of the community were members of the Congregation and because the Congregation had not actually made a purchase, a new society, the Goel Zedeick* Society, was incorporated by several members of the community. The group included ex-members, members, and non-members of Congregation Jeshuat Israel and was chartered for "charitable and benevolent purposes". By the end of 1896 they had purchased from the City of Newport six small lots, enough for thirty to thirty-six grave sites, in the city's burying ground on Farewell Street just below Van Zandt Avenue. Some of the lots were then resold to individuals. However, there were only three interments there. Because the Society itself was dissolved in 1923 and because the third and last interment was in 1944, the Newport Jewish community in time had completely erased from memory recollections of the

*Merciful Redeemer

Goel Zedeick Society. Its key members had again become involved in congregation affairs and its cemeteries as well.

The Society and its brief history came to light as a part of the study of Jeshuat Israel and also in relation to research into the cemetery merger movement. An error in one of the deeds complicated the story.

In 1898 the Congregation called a solemn meeting upon the occasion of the death of the wife of an ex-vice president. As recorded in the minutes, it was "necessitated to purchase a burial ground, which it was the sentiment of the entire congregation not to take our dead in a neighboring city for burial." Roots were indeed sunk deep! The Congregation contracted that very day to buy ten lots from the Braman Cemetery Company on Farewell Street, just south of the City burying ground. Two others, were purchased between 1899 and 1905. Together, the lots, each some 197 square feet in area, comprise the original Congregation Jeshuat Israel cemetery, now referred to as Section III, and are located in Section A of the Braman Cemetery. They, along with all the other lots in all sections were of uniform size. Four more lots were purchased later. This area was called Section 2 and is contained in Section II. None of this information is recorded in the Land Evidence Records in City Hall, but can be found wherever the records of the Braman Cemetery Company are stored at any given time.

One of the mysteries concerning the story of Congregation Jeshuat Israel Cemeteries involved the location of the records. A further mystery had to do with the fact that interments were dated *before* the purchase of the involved lots. One of these deserves mention. The son of an ex-member who had been an incorporator of the Goel Zedeick died suddenly in 1896. He was interred, not in the area bought by the latter group later that year, but in the area bought by his former congregation three years later. One wonders how this was arranged. No documents which would indicate any relevant transaction or transactions which would have made this possible have been discovered.

The story of the Congregation Jeshuat Israel Cemetery was revealed through research relating to the later movement, which will be described below.

The community now consisted of many more elements than Congregation Jeshuat Israel alone. Since its cemeteries were reserved for its members, and since the Goel Zedeick area was strictly limited in size and quite possibly restricted to its members, other groups in town felt a need for their own burying ground. This led to the creation of another Jewish cemetery area, located south of that of Congregation Jeshuat Israel, thus becoming another part of the Jewish cemetery system on Farewell Street. It was placed in Section F of the Braman Cemetery system and is now Section II of the Jewish Cemetery system. This complex consists of twenty lots purchased

and resold between 1906 and 1935. The deplorable condition of parts of this area led this writer on behalf of the Congregation Jeshuat Israel and the Jewish Planning Council of Newport to investigate the whole matter of the cemeteries on Farewell Street.

They discovered, for example, that in a few cases perpetual care had been Contracted for at the time of death, but not necessarily performed; in some cases money had been left in wills for that purpose. In other cases fees were collected on an annual basis for services performed. Some families brought in lawnmowers and did the work themselves. But alas, in most cases nothing at all was being done! Consequently, those areas or graves which were being serviced were at a disadvantage because they were surrounded by a majority of plots which were neglected. All in all, it was a deplorable chaotic situation that Jews, proud of their heritage, could not countenance once they were aware of the facts.

These investigations, upon recommendation of the Planning Council, culminated in the creation of the Jewish Cemetery Unification Association, Inc. It acted to create a group that would provide the necessary missing ingredient — a system of uniform perpetual care under the direction of one association for the entire area.

The Planning Council discovered after much confusion and investigation that there were no less than five separate groups involved in Section II, two of which had been defunct or inactive for years. Their areas were vitually abandoned, which was one reason for the deplorable conditions. Thus, Section II, consisted of separate areas owned by the Cheva Kadisha*, since conveyed to the Jewish Cemetery Unification Association, Inc., and one each by Congregation Jeshuat Israel, the Israel J. Josephson Lodge No. 294 of B'rith Abraham, and the City of Newport Lodge No. 255 of B'rith Shalom, the latter two being the ones that were abandoned. It was especially confusing that non-Jewish areas were found, not only on both sides (north and south) of the Jewish areas, but also interspersed among the Jewish areas on the western interior side of the cemetery.

Further inquiries, which were begun by Congregation Jeshuat Israel and continued by the Jewish Planning Council, led to the merger. The problem was compounded by the lack of cooperation of some groups, the fact that the two defunct groups were remembered by only a handful of people, and those who knew about one group did not know about the other. Records were either incomplete, sketchy, or non-existent. Perseverance resulted in the consolidation of the five groups into Section II with complete documentation for the record.

*Sometimes rendered with a hyphen between Cheva and Kadisha. The words are from the Hebrew, meaning "Holy brotherhood."



Views of Farewell Street cemetery showing tombstones with Hebrew inscriptions -- 1977.
Photos by ED CONNELLY

The last Jewish section on Farewell Street to have been created by the Jews of Newport was that one referred to as Section I. Located in Section L of the Braman Cemetery Company, it was purchased mostly, but not exclusively by the members of Congregation Ahavas Achim. However, they acted not in its name, but as individuals. This occurred between 1925 and 1927 with some of the plots being resold as late as 1935. This area consists of eight lots, four of which were bought by individual families and four by sixteen men acting in concert. The latter four were then subdivided into sixteen quarter plots of three gravesites each.

Section I proved to be a researcher's nightmare. To begin with, the Bramans did not use a uniform system in numbering the lots under their jurisdiction. Some went from right to left, others ran from left to right, while still others began in the middle! The sections differed in the number of lots they contained. For example, Section L consisted of sixteen lots of which numbers 5 to 12 comprised the Jewish area. To complicate matters further, the Bramans numbered the sixteen subdivisions of 5 to 12 as 1a through 16a with at least two subdivisions being marked with the small letter "b". Next, they introduced a third system identifying the subdivisions by the name of the buyer or occupant. They then entered the subdivision number plus names on the company's map, using a system that placed the names in the wrong place. A final obstacle was the map itself. It was brownish in color, torn to shreds, and almost illegible. This information is all verifiable and is now available in the records of the new association.

The fences on Farewell Street are a silent reminder of the "greenhorns" of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as those on Kay Street and Bellevue Avenue recall the pioneers of the eighteenth century. Both shelter the mortal remains of generations of Jews, who lived and died as Jews, each in his own fashion. Now a new generation takes up the burden of responsibility.

When the members of Congregations Jeshuat Israel and Ahavas Achim realized that time was taking its toll and that space on Farewell Street was getting ever scarcer, they had the foresight to purchase another burial ground, even though there were (and still are) some plots available at that site. On this occasion, however, they acted together, buying one large area in one transaction, rather than piecemeal as had their forebears. But, alas, this wise transaction has also been veiled in mystery and confusion. What they intended to do and what everyone concerned thought they had done was in fact different from what they actually did. Fortunately, everything appears to have worked out for the best.

On May 19, 1945 eight men, four from Congregation Jeshuat Israel and four from Congregation Ahavis Achim each put up \$1,200 and jointly purchased, for \$9,500 an eight acre estate on Wyatt Road in Middletown,

Rhode Island from Judge and Mrs. Robert Franklin. This land had once been the Agriculture Fair Grounds. Confusion arose many years later as to who actually did what, but the following is the true sequence of events.

When no action had been taken for three years, the eight men urgently requested that the congregations repay their \$9,600 and keep the land for a cemetery. If not, they would sell the land to recover their money. This galvanized the congregations to action. It was decided to form a corporation to operate the proposed cemetery. In short order eight men, seven of whom were from the original group, incorporated as the Jewish Community Cemetery Association of Newport, Inc., on May 26, 1949. The popular name for the organization is the Beth Olam,* the name given to the cemetery itself. One month later the original eight men conveyed the land to the new corporation. In July the new corporation obtained from the Savings Bank of Newport a loan of \$8,000, the amount necessary to finish payment to the original eight. At about the same time Congregation Jeshuat Israel had passed a resolution to do the very same thing. In 1953 the corporation amended its charter to allow it to buy land for a funeral chapel. In the same year it sold slightly less than half of its holdings on Wyatt Road to the Town of Middletown for \$10,000 (a sum higher than the original purchase price for the entire estate), leaving room in the remainder for well over three thousand graves, which the members felt would be sufficient for generations to come.

In 1972 an action was taken by the Beth Olam group which precipitated a debate on the exact nature of the relationship between it and the two congregations. All of the legal transactions described above were carried out directly between eight individuals and the new corporation, not between the eight and the congregations.

The act which precipitated the debate came in the form of an amendment to the corporation's bylaws which stated that anyone becoming a member of either of the two congregations after January 1, 1972 would no longer be entitled to a free grave in Beth Olam, a privilege enjoyed up to that time. The affairs of the cemetery association had been conducted by its cemetery commission, which now reported that the amendment was simply a matter of economic necessity. Because of the high cost of cemetery maintenance, it was economically impossible to allocate graves without charge.

In December of 1972 a joint meeting was held at which all of the parties involved were present. The crucial point at issue was who was the "ultimate authority" in cemetery affairs, the congregations or the Cemetery Association. After reviewing the whole situation from the beginning, it was

*Hebrew for "Everlasting House", euphemism or cemetery.

decided that the Association was indeed an independent corporation, having been structured that way, and could therefore act independently as it saw fit. Congregation Ahavas Achim had already accepted the situation, leaving Jeshuat Israel very little choice.

At the outset there seemed to be no doubt that the "ultimate authority" in cemetery affairs belonged to the congregations which had formed the corporation to take over the land and run the cemetery. Indeed the Association asked for and received financial aid from Congregation Jeshuat Israel to help meet its obligations. In the ensuing years there were regular reports from the Association to the Congregation. However, once its affairs had become stabilized and its plans implemented, committee reports became less and less frequent.

This assumption of ultimate authority was perpetuated in Congregation Jeshuat Israel's financial reports by listing under stocks and bonds a \$5,000 50 per cent interest in the Jewish Cemetery Association of Newport, the other 50 per cent presumably belonging to Congregation Ahavis Achim. There appears to be no legal documentation to support this claim.

Finally, regardless of intent, there is no language in its charter that states that the Association is acting for any group or groups other than itself. In other words, while not realizing it, the congregations legally and actually had set up an independent group which in the course of time began to act without direct control of the congregations. In their complacency they did not realize what they had done. The only legal connection between them and the Association was the fact that the eight men who were to comprise the new commission were to be appointed for life, four from each congregation. When once appointed, the commission members were to act for the benefit of the community as a whole, rather than as parochial representatives with a narrow interest.

Once the confusion was dispelled and the amendment described above was accepted, a harmonious relationship was resumed. The cemetery commission, acting for the Association, continues to act in turn for the community as a whole, carrying out its stated mission efficiently and in cooperation with the city's Jewish burial society, the Chevra Kadisha Society of Newport, Inc.

Burial of the dead has since ancient times been considered by Jews to be an important religious duty. The existence of burial societies dates back according to European sources to approximately the seventeenth century. Whether or not the Jews of Colonial Newport brought such societies with them, they succeeded somehow in handling matters of life and death. The present-day Chevra Kadisha appears to date back to 1913, when its name first appeared in contemporary documents.

Not much is known of the Society in the first decades of its existence. Like other organizations, it had a membership, officers, dues, meetings, and annual dinners. It performed its mission of taking care of the dead in the proper ritual and religious manner, as it has continued to do to the present time.

When in 1921, as described above, the Society decided to go into the "cemetery business", it purchased two lots from the Braman Cemetery Company and in 1935 four more from Brith Abraham. In 1937 it reorganized as the Chevra Kadisha Society of Newport, Rhode Island, Inc. to perform its traditional duties "in accordance with the rites of the Jewish faith". The charter was forfeited in 1944, but the "forfeiture was vacated" in 1951. The biennial report required of non-business corporations was filed in 1978 by the present officers, who have kept up with all legal requirements to the present time.

The current story is yet another example of how in cities like Newport, when new leaders were desperately needed, their older members having been decimated by age, sickness, and death, a new group emerged to assume responsibility for this ancient merciful, but thankless religious obligation. Unlike its earlier brethren who dealt with a homogeneous religious community, the present leadership is faced with a community of multiple beliefs. It continues nevertheless to perform its duties for all in the same spirit of compassion and dignity under Jewish law with the cooperation of the resident clergy.

Through the years, the feeling had gradually developed that a funeral chapel was an absolute necessity. Such a building was needed because there were no facilities other than the homes of the deceased in which to prepare the required rituals. Something more practical, dignified, and humane was needed. To this end the Chevra Kadisha Society in 1947 purchased land on Fowler Avenue in Newport.

It then appointed a committee known as the Jewish Chapel Committee of the City of Newport to raise money and build the chapel. Teams of solicitors canvassed the Jewish community family by family. In 1951 Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Hoffman made a major donation to the Chapel Fund, enabling it to reach its goal. An agreement, therefore, was made to name the chapel "The Hoffman Jewish Memorial Chapel of Newport" in memory of Hoffman's parents. The cornerstone was laid in 1953. The building was completed in 1955, and the dedication took place in 1956.

The Beth Olam had worked very closely with the Chevra Kadisha on the chapel project and, in fact, managed the financial aspects of the construction of the chapel for the Society. As we have seen, in 1953 it amended the

Articles of Association to enable it to assume control of the Chapel. One month later the Chevra Kadisha Society did indeed convey its title to the chapel to the Beth Olam.

For a variety of reasons the composition of the Chevra Kadisha Society changed from a membership organization (reportedly a membership of seventy-five at the time of the construction of the Chapel) to a committee type organization, consisting only of its four officers, its present composition.

Although it has always been the wish of Congregation Jeshuat Israel that all Jewish cemeteries of Newport County be united under one organization, its plans were never implemented. Too many people felt that the situation on Farewell Street was insoluble, and nothing was ever done. The *status quo* remained until the Jewish Planning Council of Newport County undertook a feasibility study. After an exhaustive inquiry, it reported that the situation was not insoluble, even though some individuals had tried to do something on their own, but had failed. As a result, approximately twenty persons from the community at large were called to a special meeting. A unanimous decision to proceed was reached, and thus the Jewish Cemetery Unification Association, Inc. was formed in 1976. Within a few months a viable organization was created, a charter was obtained, and bylaws were written. A carefully worded letter was sent to the entire Jewish community. A goal of \$50,000 was set. Maps were drawn, records were kept, and a filing system was instituted. It was the purpose of the group to provide a uniform system of perpetual care and maintenance within Jewish religious law requirements for all of the Jewish cemeteries on Farewell Street and to consolidate the administration of all cemeteries under one cemetery organization.

The new association's appeal for funds was met with very positive response by the families of the deceased, as well as by both Congregation Jeshuat Israel and the Chevra Kadisha Society. It formulated an agreement with the Congregation to provide the same system of perpetual care as it was providing the individual families, thus relieving the Congregation of this obligation. It received from the Society title to its cemeteries in Section II. It was able to keep all of its promises without delay. It immediately began a program of general restoration and perpetual care. By the end of the first season it had fenced in all of the unfenced sections of the Jewish cemeteries, in keeping with Jewish law. In succeeding years the perpetual care committee instituted special projects in addition to the routine perpetual care. These included such needed projects as setting up of old capsized stones, filling in sunken sites, leveling off of irregular terrain, reseeding where needed, replacing old dilapidated fence sections, and pointing stone fence posts. All of this was accomplished as monies became available.

Although the \$50,000 goal had not been reached at the time of the actual merger, the capital fund was sufficient that the interest earned by it had been adequate to perform all of the required tasks. The result has been that the cemeteries on Farewell Street have been in better condition than ever before and are now acceptable to the Jewish community of Newport County.

A partial list of the names of the dedicated individuals involved from the beginning in 1895 to the present appears in the Appendix. The fund-raising committee for perpetual care for the Jewish Cemetery Unification Association in its successful campaign was headed by Joseph Schmelzer, aided by Dr. Irving Nemtsov, Mrs. Jack Werner, and Bernard Kusnitz.

The final chapter of the story of the Jewish Cemeteries of Newport County climaxed with the merger of the three existing organizations — the Chevra Kadisha Society of Newport, Inc., the Jewish Community Association of Newport, Inc., and the Jewish Cemetery Unification Association, Inc.

The chief obstacle to Congregation Jeshuat Israel's dream of unifying the Jewish cemeteries in Newport County under one organization had been removed. The creation of the Jewish Cemetery Unification Association, Inc., and its goal of removing on a permanent basis the blight and deplorable conditions on Farewell Street had been accomplished through proper organization and dedicated leadership. It was further discovered that, although it had not been planned that way, the same individuals were involved in all three groups. Although the source of each group's membership differed, all of the members of the Chevra Kadisha belonged to the Beth Olam, and in turn all members of Beth Olam had joined the Unification Association. Another fifteen persons, including several women, initially constituted the total membership of the Unification group. The merger created one strong financial structure which could meet the needs of all involved in an efficient manner.

The fear of the older Newport families that in future years there would be no one left sufficiently interested to care for the older cemeteries had been removed.

Once the basic decision to merge had been made informally, the following steps were taken formally in rapid succession beginning in late 1980:

1. Each group officially agreed in principle to a merger.
2. Each group officially agreed that the name of the new association would be the Chevra Kadisha Association of Newport County, Inc., as recommended by a joint meeting of the officers of the three groups.
3. Zalman Newman, Esq. agreed to serve as attorney for the merger, as recommended by a special committee.

4. Bernard Kusinitz was appointed as liaison officer between the groups and the attorney as coordinator of the merger.

5. Title searching and research was conducted by the coordinator, resulting in a dossier of over fifty deeds and documents. These papers collectively document the entire story, including discovery of the Goel Zedeick and its cemetery ground.

6. A list of descendants of those interred on Farewell Street and Wyatt Road has been completed and filed. All but a very few persons have been located and notified of the merger.

7. A dedicated Bylaws Committee has written and unanimously approved a set of bylaws with three objectives in mind:

(a) To provide a framework within which the new association can function with dignity and efficiency.

(b) To create an association that will protect the sanctity of all its cemeteries.

(c) To create an association that can service the entire Jewish population of Newport County within the framework of Jewish law under rabbinic supervision.

In solving some of the problems, both philosophic and organizational inherent in establishing the new organization and in writing the bylaws, the committee received full cooperation of the three resident Rabbis, Theodore Lewis, Ely Katz, and Marc S. Jagolinzer.

8. On Sunday afternoon, January 10, 1982 the three groups met individually to adopt the proposed bylaws, which they did unanimously. These meetings were followed by a widely publicized public meeting in order to allow interested members of the Jewish community to air their views and ask questions.

The final steps in the creation of the new association were its incorporation, the merger of all assets, assuming custody of all abandoned areas, and carrying out of all legal steps necessary to complete the merger. The target date was mid-1982.*

Thus, what the Jews of Newport County began almost ninety years ago has now evolved into a viable unified cemetery and burial association, dedicated to the honoring of its dead in accordance with Judaic principles.

It is hoped that for future generations of Newport Jews there will be less

*The actual filing date of the charter with the Secretary of State of Rhode Island was September 10, 1982.

mystery and more history. The Chevra Kadisha Association of Newport County, Inc. will have made that possible.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OR SOURCES

1. Primary

Minutes of Congregation Jeshuat Israel, 1893-1898
 Minutes of Congregation Jeshuat Israel, 1949-1962
 Minutes of Joint Meeting of Cemetery Commission of Jewish Community Cemetery Association, Inc. and Congregation Jeshuat Israel, December 28, 1972
 Records of Braman Cemetery Company — Deeds of Farewell Street Cemeteries, 1899-1935
 City Cemetery Book Volume I — re Goel Zedaick, 1896
 The charters of the three involved corporations
Newport Daily News, issue of June 27, 1957
 Land Evidence Office — City of Newport, Such pertinent deeds as were filed
 Newport City Directories, 1878-1900
 Minutes of the Israel J. Josephson Lodge No. 294 of Brith Abraham, 1927-1935
 Records of the Chevra Kadisha Society of Newport, Rhode Island, 1949-1981
 Minutes and records of the Jewish Cemetery Unification Association of Newport Inc., 1976-1981
 Report of the Cemetery Unification Study Committee of the Jewish Planning Council of Newport County, February, 1979

2. Secondary

Unpublished manuscripts and notes of work in progress by Bernard Kusinitz on the history of Touro Synagogue and Congregation Jeshua Israel.

APPENDIX

KEY COMMITTEES

1937-1981

1. Membership of the three groups at the time of the merger.

BETH OLAM-Wyatt Road

Benjamin Helfner (Pres)
Ralph Jaffee (Vice-Pres)
Charles Waterman (Secty)
Joseph Schmelzer (Treas)
Abraham Hoffman
Leon Silechnik
Irving Tobak

CHEVRA KADISHA SOCIETY

Leon Silechnik (Pres)
Abraham Hoffman (Vice-Pres)
Benjamin Helfner (Secty)
Joseph Schmelzer (Treas)

UNIFICATION ASS. — Farewell Street

Bernard Kusnitz (Pres)
Dr. Irving Nemtzow (Vice-Pres)
Mrs. Elizabeth Cohen (Secty)
Joseph Schmelzer (Treas)
Mrs. Jack Werner
Mrs. Samuel Gillson
Mrs. Max Meierowitz
Benjamin Helfner
Charles Waterman
Leon Silechnik
Irving Tobak
Oscar Kanarek
Samuel Friedman
Ralph Jaffe

2. Original purchasers of Beth Olam.

Max Adelson
Dr. Samuel Adelson
Samuel Gold
Morris Friedman

Harry Hochman
Hyman Katzman
Abe G. Smith
Charles Tobak

3. First membership and officers of Beth Olam

Nathan Ball (Pres)
John J. Dannin (Vice-Pres)
Max Adelson
Dr. Gerald Feinberg

Samuel Rubin (Secty)
Abe G. Smith (Treas)
Harry Hochman
Charles Tobak

4. Chevra Kadisha Incorporated 1937

Harry Novick
Samuel Nevelson
Everett I. Hess

Morris A. Gutstein
Nathan Ball
Hyman Desotnek

5. Officers of Chevra Kadisha at time of chapel construction

Herman Levin (Pres) - Had just succeeded Harry Hochman
Abraham Hoffman (Vice-Pres)
Samuel Levin (Fin. Secty)

Hyman Katzman (Secty)
Samuel Kravetz (Rec. Secty)

6. Cemetery Unification Study Committee of Jewish Planning Council of Newport County, 1975-1976

Charles Waterman (Chairman)
Samuel Friedman

Dr. Irving Nemptzow
Joseph Schmelzer

Bernard Kusinitz, ex-officio

7. Key committees of the Farewell Street Association which indirectly laid the ground work for the merger:

Fund Raising

Joseph Schmelzer
Dr. Irving Nemptzow
Mrs. Jack Werner
Bernard Kusinitz

Perpetual Care

Joseph Schmelzer
Benjamin Helfner
Abraham Hoffman

Records and Descendants

Mrs. Jack Werner
Mrs. Max Meierowitz
Samuel Friedman
Bernard Kusinitz

Maps and Grave Registration

Benjamin Helfner
Mrs. Jack Werner
Bernard Kusinitz

8. Merger Committee

Zalman Newman, Esq., Attorney
Bernard Kusinitz, Coordinator

Descendants

Mrs. Jack Werner
Ralph Jaffe
Bernard Kusinitz

By-Laws

Dr. Irving Nemptzow
Benjamin Helfner
Leo Siletchnik
Ralph Jaffe
Mrs. Elizabeth Cohen
Bernard Kusinitz, ex-officio

Records and Title Searching

Charles Waterman
Bernard Kusinitz

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

BY SEEBERT J. GOLDOWSKY, M.D.

Recent acquisitions in the Library of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association containing items of Rhode Island interest and a listing of these items:

1. *Know Rhode Island*, Facts concerning the Land of Roger Williams. Compiled and distributed by the Office of the Secretary of State, Sixth Edition, State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 1936. 64 pages, paperback.
 - Page 31. Photo of Old Stone Mill in Touro Park, Newport.
 - Page 32. Excerpt from Longfellow's poem on the Jewish Cemetery.
 - Page 34. Lists the Jewish Synagogue, the Jewish Cemetery, and Touro Park, in Newport.
2. *Around and About Rhode Island With Children*. A guide to Children's Activities in Rhode Island, written and compiled by Sheila Alexander, Judith Braden, Barbara Feldstein, Ellen Mactas, and Elizabeth Samuels for the benefit of the Jewish Community Center Nursery School, Providence, Rhode Island. Ed. by Elizabeth Kaplan, cover design and illustrations by Jill Thaler, 1979, 114 pages, paperback.
 - Page 12. Entry on Jewish Community Center of Rhode Island.
 - Page 39. Entry on Hasbro Industries toy manufacturers of Pawtucket, R.I.
 - Page 65. Entry on Touro Synagogue, Newport.
 - Page 74. Notes swimming available at Jewish Community Center of R.I.
3. *Highroads and Byroads of Providence*. By John Hutchins Cady. Drawings by Helen Mason Gross. Providence, Rhode Island, The Akerman Standard Press, 1958. 69 pages, paperback.
 - Page 25. Notes Temple Beth-El at Broad and Glenham Streets in Providence.
4. *History of the Jews in America*, by Deborah Pessin. Illustrations by Ruth Gikow. Pub. by the United Synagogue Commission on Jewish Education, New York, 1957.
 - Pages 54-65. Story of the Jews in Colonial Newport.
 - Pages 57, 58, 59, 63, 92, 106. Aaron Lopez mentioned.
 - Pages 56, 100, 105, 106. Roger Williams mentioned.
 - Pages 98, 99. Religious freedom in Rhode Island. Washington's letter to the congregation in Newport.
 - Pages 106, 107. Religious tolerance at Brown University.
 - Page 107. Peter Harrison, architect of Touro Synagogue in Newport.
 - Page 240. Ezra Stiles and the Jews of Newport, and his friendship with Rabbi Isaac Hayyim Karigal, a visiting preacher at the Synagogue.
5. *Half a Century with the Providence Journal*, being a record of the events and associates connected with the past fifty years of the life of Henry R. Davis, secretary of the company. Compiled and issued by The Journal Company, Providence, 1904. 235 pages, hard covers.
 - Opp. Page 88. Photo of John J. Rosenfeld, listed as a former writer and city editor.
6. *The Eternal Light*. by Morton Wishengrad, with a foreword by Louis Finkelstein, President, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Crown Publishers New York 1947. Twenty-six radio plays from *The Eternal Light* program. 412 pages, hard covers.
 - Pages 110-121. Dramatic sketch about the Jews of Colonial Newport.

7. *Rhode Island History*, Volume 42, Number 43, August 1983. Publication of the Rhode Island Historical Society.

Page 88. An article titled "Impoverished Politics. The New Deal's Impact on City Government in Providence, Rhode Island", by David L. Davies (starting on page 87) discusses efforts by the city and state to cope with the destitution produced by the Great Depression. The following item appears involving a prominent Jewish politician: "City politicians also joined in other voluntary schemes to provide for unfortunates. The City Council (Providence) formed a Special Milk Fund Football Committee to oversee a benefit game between Providence College and Rhode Island State College (now U.R.I.) at Brown Stadium. Reporting that tickets were selling well, Sol Bromson, a Republican Alderman from affluent Ward 2, encouraged fans to 'attend the game -- Root for your favorite and thus make sure that the needy and unemployed of Providence will have food and fuel during the dark days of winter.' "
8. *Rhode Island — An Historical Guide*, by Sheila Steinberg and Cathleen McGuigan. Drawings by Barry Moser. Published by Rhode Island Bicentennial Foundation, Providence, R.I. 1976. 284 pages, paperback.

Pages 183, 216-218. Historical background and description of Touro Synagogue, Newport.

Page 219. Jewish Cemetery in Newport. Brief description.

Pages 68, 186, 189, 216, 217, 219. Mention of Jews in several communities in Rhode Island.
9. *Rhode Island Folklore Resources*. American Folklore Center, prepared by Peter T. Bartis, with the assistance of the Rhode Island Folklife Project in cooperation with the Rhode Island Heritage Commission, The Rhode Island Council for the Arts, and the Rhode Island Historical Society. The American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 1983. 63 pages, paperback.

Page 40. Listing of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association describes the Association and lists its activities and holdings.
10. *Guide To Jewish Archives*, Ed. by Aryeh Segall, World Council on Jewish Archives, Jerusalem, New York, 1981.

Pages 60-61. Listing of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association. Describes the Association and lists its activities and holdings.
11. *American Jewish History*. Published quarterly by the American Jewish Historical Society. Vol. 72, No. 2, December 1982.

Page 261. Lists "Population and Redistribution Among American Jews", by Sidney Goldstein of Brown University, in *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 24, No. 1, June 1982. Study indicates greater residential dispersion among Jews, perhaps a greater challenge to the organized Jewish community than intermarriage or low fertility.
12. *Idem*. Vol. 72, No. 3, March 1983.

Pages 293-305. "The Coordinated use of Data Sources in Research on the Demographic Characteristics and Behavior of Jewish Immigrants to the United States," by Alice Goldstein of Brown University, mentions Providence, R.I. on pp. 305-306.

Pages 369-394. "Beyond New York: The Occupation of Russian Jewish Immigrants in Providence, R.I. and in Other Small Jewish Communities, 1900-1915, by Joel Perlmann. He states: "The Providence occupational pattern is especially important because it refines, or places in a wider context, the common generalization concerning the economic adjustment of grants to the United States."

13. *American Jewish Year Book* 1982. Volume 82. Editors Milton Himmelfarb and David Singer. Published by the American Jewish Committee, New York, and The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia. 453 pages, hardcovers.
pages 3-98. "A Century of Jewish History, 1881-1981: The View from America", by Lucy S. Dawidowic. page 13: mentions the George Washington letter read in Newport, R.I. in 1790.
Page 60. A listing of the *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*.
14. *Idem* 1983. Volume 83. Same editors and publishers.
page 131. Gives the estimated Jewish population of Rhode Island as 22,000, or 2.3 per cent of 953,000.
Page 350. A listing of *The Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*.

RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
TWENTY-NINTH ANNUAL MEETING

May 1, 1983

The Twenty-ninth Annual Meeting of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association was convened at 2:45 P.M. on Sunday, May 1, 1983 by the president, Dr. Seebert J. Goldowsky. It was moved, seconded and passed that the reading of the minutes of the twenty-eighth annual meeting of April 25, 1982 and the intermin meeting of February 13, 1983 be waived. The treasurer, Bertha Kasper, presented a report for the year 1982 as follows: income \$10,851.87; expenditures \$9,659.58. Balance on hand as of December 21, 1982: Fleet National Bank NOW account \$5,553.81; Fidelity Cash Reserves account \$4,000.00; total \$9,553.81.

Louis I. Sweet, budget chairman, then presented his report. He projected a balanced budget for the year at \$9,000. As a result of a successful membership campaign, the Association exceeded its goal of 500 members, reaching 515. It is hoped that a new goal of 600 will be attained. Membership chairman, Melvin L. Zurier, read his report, listing new members, including life members.

Eleanor Horvitz, librarian, explained the historical exhibit set up for the meeting. She also enumerated the kinds of material acquired during the past year.

Professor Albert C. Salzberg, editor of the *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, reported a delay in the publication of the current issue. He noted that the issue will include an index for the completed volume 8. It will contain papers on the Jewish Community Center, the Providence Hebrew Day School, and the concluding installment of Rabbi William G. Braude's memoir.

Dr. Goldowsky advised of a change in the bylaws passed at the midwinter meeting of the Association, whereby all past presidents would be life-time active members of the Executive Committee, while the number of members-at-large would remain at twelve to serve rotating two-year terms. He called upon Jerome B. Spunt, chairman of both the bylaws and nominating committees, who reviewed the change in the process of electing the Executive Committee, whereby a nominating committee would present a complete slate, including at-large members of the Executive Committee, which would be elected at the annual meeting. The slate for election for the ensuing year was then read. Five present members of the Executive Committee would be re-elected for one year. Three present members and two new members were then nominated to the Executive Committee to serve

NECROLOGY

FAIN, IRVING I., born in Providence, R.I., the son of Ida and Barnet Fain. He was a principal in Fain's, Inc., the first floor-covering specialty store in New England, founded by his parents in 1884. He was also a former owner of E.A. Adams and Son, Inc. of Pawtucket, one of the nation's oldest and largest jewelry findings manufacturers.

Mr. Fain's chief interest for years was his work with the Jewish Home for the Aged. The new library at the Home was dedicated in his honor this year. He was one of a small group initially involved in establishment of the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island and the relocation of The Miriam Hospital from Parade Street to Summit Avenue in Providence. He was also very active in Jewish Family Service, Hebrew Free Loan Association, and Temple Emanuel.

Died September 23, 1983 in Providence, Rhode Island at the age of 83.

FISHMAN, LEROY, DR., born in Providence, R.I., the son of Sarah and Dr. Abraham P. Fishman. A graduate of Providence College and Tufts University Dental School, class of 1937, Dr. Fishman was a lieutenant commander in the Naval Dental Corps during World War II.

He was on the staffs of The Miriam and Rhode Island Hospitals, and was a member of Touro Fraternal Association.

Died May 25, 1983 in Providence, Rhode Island at the age of 70.

KAPSTEIN, ISRAEL J., PROFESSOR, born in Fall River, Massachusetts, the son of Bernard and Fannie (Silver) Kapstein, he grew up in Providence, graduated from Classical High School, and from Brown University in 1926. He completed his doctorate at Brown University in 1933. His first position was as an editorial assistant at the A.A. Knopf publishing house. He next accepted an assistant professorship in English at Brown University, became an associate professor in 1943, and a full professor in 1951. Professor Kapstein was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1944. He retired from the faculty of Brown University in 1969.

He wrote poetry, translated Hebrew, wrote scholarly articles, and published fiction, including *Something of a Hero*, a novel. In 1982 one of his former students established a permanent professorship in his name. In 1976 he was awarded the 1976 National Jewish Book Award for his English translation (with Rabbi William G. Braude) of the classical Hebrew and Aramaic work, *Pesikta-de-Rab Kahana*.

Professor Kapstein served the Providence community on a number of civic and religious boards and committees. He was one of the founding members of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association in 1951.

Died August 5, 1983 in Providence, Rhode Island at the age of 80.

NATHANS, JEANNETTE S., born in Bessarabia, Romania, daughter of Edward and Sonya Shain, she lived in Westerly for 45 years. With her husband, the late Dr. Samuel Nathans, she was owner of the Watch Hill Road Nursing Home for many years.

A former president of the Westerly Hospital Aid Association, she was also a member of Congregation Shareh Zedeck and B'nai B'rith Lodge, and sponsored programs for the Hillel Foundation at the University of Rhode Island.

Died July 3, 1983 in Westerly, Rhode Island at the age of 75.

PULVER, HAROLD L. of West Palm Beach, Florida and Providence, R.I. He was a graduate of Brown University, class of 1921. Mr Pulver was founder and former president of the C. Ray Randall Co., North Attleboro for 50 years before retiring. He was a member of B'nai B'rith, the Ledgemont Country Club, Temple Beth-El, and the Boy Scouts of America.

Died on May 21, 1983 in West Palm Beach, Florida at the age of 83.

ADDENDA
RECOLLECTIONS OF A SEPTUAGENARIAN PART II
BY RABBI WILLIAM G. BRUADE

RIJHN Volume 8, Number 4, November 1982

Page 405, Line 1: After “Maryland Estes”, add superscript³ and the following footnote:

*Before coming to Beth-El, she served as librarian at the Rhode Island College of Pharmacy, where Beryl Segal, himself a pharmacist, came to know her. Through the years whenever faced with serious problems, I would turn to Beryl Segal, whose presence and words were a source of strength to me.

Page 408, Paragraph 3. After “. . . who wear *tefillin*”, insert the following two new paragraphs.

In 1932 when I came to Providence, children were generally not allowed by their kin to attend funerals. Before the funeral there were “calling hours” at the mortuary during which the casket was kept open, and visitors were invited to view the remains — remains which were “prettified” by a cosmetician’s skill. The funeral was held on the third day following decease. I began to say that viewing “prettified” remains and holding a funeral on the third day were Christian folk practices based on the belief that Jesus came back to life on the third day, and that by making the deceased appear to be alive, Christians may have been expressing their belief that, like Jesus, their own kin were also resurrected on the third day. Since we Jews, I pleaded, did not share the Christians’ belief in Jesus’s resurrection, viewing the remains and delaying a funeral for three days was improper. I also pleaded that it was wrong to keep children away from funerals. Children should be allowed to share in all of a family’s experiences — in joy and in sorrow alike. However, people would reply: “The child is too young to be at the funeral, or even at the house with all the sorrow.”

A great change has come about in subsequent years: The three days’ delay for a funeral is no longer a must. The casket is no longer open for viewing the remains. Finally, people have realized that children can stand grief and sadness, and at a time of death should remain fully part of the family.*

*Joshua Liebman’s “grief’s slow wisdom” in *Peace of Mind* (New York, 1946, pages 105-133) is pertinent. According to my friend, Monsignor Arthur T. Geoghegan, monks and nuns do not allow having themselves “prettified” after death, and more Catholics have begun following the Jewish practice of immediate burial.

Page 415, line 8 After “. . . who came to serve:” insert:

Selig Salkowitz (1929-) was assistant rabbi for two years. During his second year, while I was away on leave in Jerusalem, he, despite his youth, ably administered to the needs of the entire Congregation.

Page 439, line 5, After “Allen Metz (1950-), librarian;” insert:

Esther Kaplan, my former Secretary, and now Rabbi Leslie Gutterman’s Secretary;

ERRATUM

RIJHN Volume 8, number 4, Nov. 1962, p. 524. The Index item reading “Wolfe, Issac, family of”, should read:

Woolf, Issac, family of.

The original reference appeared in *RIJHN* volume 8, number 1, Nov. 1979, p. 47, line 36, reading “Isaac Wolfe family”. This should read:

Isaac Woolf family.

LIFE MEMBERS OF THE RHODE ISLAND
JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

MR. AND MRS. NEWTON B. COHN
MR. AND MRS. DONALD H. DWARES
MR. AND MRS. JOSEPH ENGLE
MR. AND MRS. CARL H. FELDMAN
MR. ARNOLD T. GALKIN
DR. AND MRS. SEEBERT J. GOLDOWSKY
MRS. HAROLD A. GOURSE
MRS. SAMUEL NATHANS
DR. AND MRS. MARVIN PITTERMAN
MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM L. ROBIN
MR. AND MRS. BENTON H. ROSEN
MR. AND MRS. HERBERT L. ROSEN
MR. AND MRS. DONALD SALMANSON
MRS. BERNARD SEGAL
MRS. JOSEPH S. SINCLAIR
MR. AND MRS. ERWIN E. STRASMICH

For information on becoming a Life Member, write to the Association at
130 Sessions Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02906.

BACK COVER

Temple Beth-Israel in March 1981 after the Third Restoration.

