

The background image is a photograph of the interior of a synagogue. It features a high, vaulted ceiling with a large, circular skylight in the center, which is divided into four quadrants and surrounded by a decorative border. The walls are adorned with intricate, colorful murals and stained glass windows. The floor is made of dark wood, and the pews are arranged in rows, facing the front of the sanctuary. A large, ornate chandelier hangs from the ceiling, casting a warm glow. The overall atmosphere is one of grandeur and historical significance.

Laying the Foundation

Shuls That Strengthened
Orthodoxy in the U.S.
A Century Ago

HAMODIA
THE DAILY NEWSPAPER FOR TORAH JEWRY
SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT
SUKKOS 5772/2011

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Laying the Foundation

"Ki b'sukkos hoshavti es Bnei Yisrael..." When we leave our secure, warm homes and enter our flimsy *sukkos*, we rejoice in the knowledge that we are once again ensconced in the protective shelter of the *Ribbono shel Olam*.

Wherever Jews were scattered throughout the millennia of *galus*, the establishment of a shul, a place to gather and serve Hashem as a community, was of the highest priority.

When we undertook to research the history of shuls — not personalities — as the nucleus of *Yiddishkeit* established by the early waves of immigrants before World War I, we anticipated a challenge, but we were not prepared for the depth of the passion, the commitment, the selflessness, the sacrifice, the struggle, the triumph, and sadly, oftentimes, the pain.

We are pleased to present this supplement, the result of dogged research, writing, review by historians and rewriting on the part of two dedicated and talented writers, Mrs. Devora Klein and Mr. Yitzchak Schwartz, whom we publicly applaud. For this edition, we tried to focus on one shul in each state that matched our criteria. In the state of New York, we limited ourselves to Manhattan.

Notwithstanding their best efforts, due to the lack of proper documentation and eyewitnesses, we recognize that there may be omissions, misrepresentations or errors for which we apologize; we also welcome readers' comments and feedback.

What we learned was awesome: some shuls flourished and became pillars of their communities until this very day. Some struggled, triumphed, and served their communities, but ultimately did not survive, due to changing circumstances and demographics which forced congregations to close, move or even sell their buildings—in desperation, sometimes to churches. The dearth of organized Jewish education resulted in the lack of a sense of continuity, and the younger generations, trying to distance themselves from their immigrant roots and, lured by the glitter of American life, often fell prey to assimilation. Unfortunately, despite strong beginnings, some *kehillos* lost direction and became ensnared in the Reform and Conservative movements.

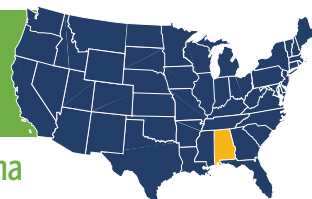
One thing is clear: If not for the *mesirus nefesh* of the early founders, our communities today would not have been able to take root.

In this issue we aimed to provide a taste of the colorful and varied congregations that dotted America's spiritually hostile landscape a century ago; these were the congregations that laid the foundation, planted the seeds, for the fertile, thriving Orthodoxy we are blessed with today.

We hope to revisit this intriguing subject in the future. We welcome readers' leads as well as academic and historical resources for further research.

Congregation Knesseth Israel

Birmingham, Alabama



CONGREGATION KNESSETH ISRAEL was established in 1889 by a group of immigrants from Kovno who were attracted to Birmingham by the area's booming economy.

Birmingham had become a city only 18 years earlier, in 1871, a few years after the Civil War. It had developed from a trading post at the crossroads of two railroads: the Alabama & Chattanooga and the South & North Alabama lines.

On July 5, 1889, the group of devout and aspiring Orthodox immigrants who had been *davening* together since their arrival in Birmingham met to establish a congregation.

Thirteen men were appointed trustees for the new congregation, which took the name Knesseth Israel of Birmingham.

Determined to erect their own building, the group raised funds and located a plot of land that was deemed suitable. By 1903, Birmingham was pulsing with Jewish life, with an active *chevrah Shas* and as many as five kosher butchers. Its Jews could look with pride at their dignified new synagogue, which was completed at a cost of \$15,000.

The community waxed and waned over the years, but Congregation Knesseth Israel continues to serve the Jews of Birmingham.

Hamodia thanks Mrs. Barbara Bonfield for providing information and the photograph.



B'nai Israel Congregation

Sacramento, California

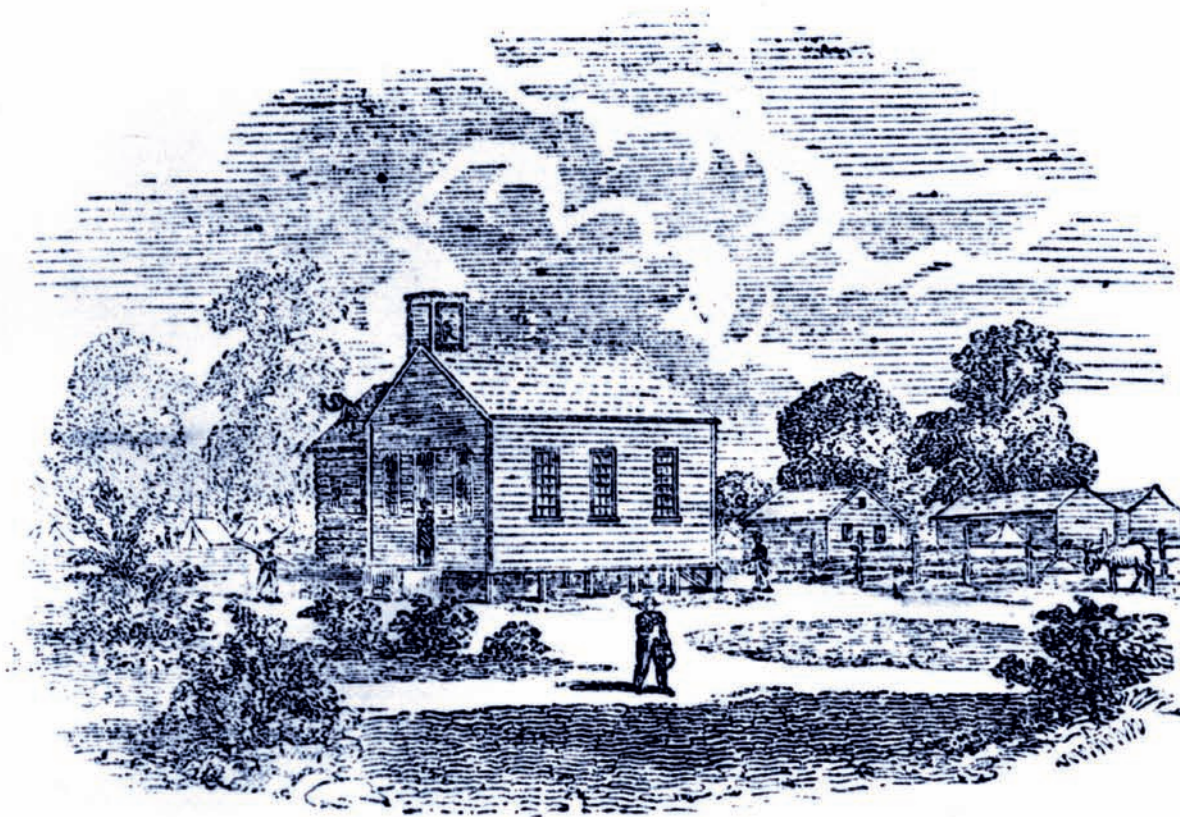
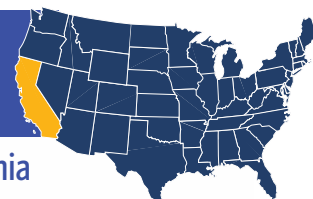


Photo credit: Center for Sacramento History, 1982/005/0289

THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH began on January 24, 1848, when gold was found at Sutter's Mill in Coloma, California. For the next seven years, gold seekers from around the world converged on California, hoping to get rich quick. Jews were not immune to this gold seeking, and several Jewish communities in California trace their roots to those days.

One of the Jewish newcomers was Moshe Hyman, a European Jew who settled in Sacramento, California, which became a supply base and transportation hub for the bustling mining towns in the area. Moshe, who owned a jewelry shop, invited the local Jews to his Front Street home, a building that also housed his store, for *davening* on Rosh Hashanah of 1849. In recognition of his role in organizing the early Jewish community, Hyman became known as both a pioneer of California Judaism and the father of Temple B'nai Israel.

When floods ripped through Sacramento in January 1850, several Jews, including Hyman and another Jewish merchant, Albert Priest, stepped forward to help. Hyman bought land for a Jewish cemetery on a lot south of J Street between 32nd and 33rd Streets to bury the many who died as a result of the floods. There he established the original Home of Peace Cemetery.

Subsequently, in a building purchased from a Methodist Episcopal Congregation, the community established a synagogue

and named it Congregation B'nai Israel. Opened on September 2, 1852, at the corner of 7th and L Streets, B'nai Israel became the first congregational synagogue west of the Mississippi River.

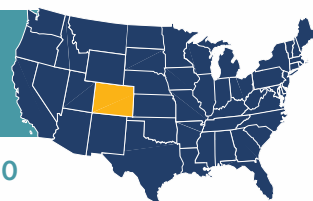
Two months later, a fire swept through Sacramento, destroying the shul as well as 85 percent of the city. When an arbitrator ruled that Congregation B'nai Israel did not own the property on which the shul building stood, the congregation held its services in three homes on 5th Street. Describing the services, the *Sacramento Union* noted: "The females take no part in the exercises, except the repetition of the prayers. They are hidden from view, in the back seats...."

In 1858, Congregation B'nai Israel bought another building from the Methodist Episcopal group at 7th and L Streets, which had been built on the same property as their original building. However, the congregation continued to struggle. In 1861, this second building was destroyed by another fire. Then, during the following winter, flood waters wreaked tragic damage on the gravesites in the Jewish cemetery. Finally, in 1864, the congregation settled in its permanent home, a former concert hall owned by the First Presbyterian Church on 6th Street.

In 1879, when the congregation joined the Reform Movement, those who wanted to remain Orthodox formed the Mosaic Law Synagogue. shul. The Mosaic Law Synagogue shul is Conservative today.

Congregation Zera Avraham

Denver, Colorado



IN 1882, FIFTY RUSSIAN IMMIGRANTS, fleeing economic hardships in Russia, came to Cotopaxi, Colorado to start a farming community; this was part of an experiment to create Jewish agricultural settlements. Within two years, the project had failed, and most of the newcomers relocated from the prairie to urban Denver's west side. Another group of early Jewish settlers to Denver included a number of Trisker Chassidim, followers of Harav Avraham Twersky, the Trisker Maggid, who was a son of Harav Mordechai, the Chernobyler Maggid. This early Jewish community made its home along the Platte River, and soon established Congregation Zera Avraham. The congregation was officially incorporated in 1889, and then re-incorporated in 1898.

Shul-Baer Milstein, Yudel Grimes, and Moshe Yossel Altman were among the founding members of this *kehillah*. Yudel Grimes had been one of the Cotopaxi pioneers. Discouraged by the awful prospects for farming in the area, Grimes later recalled that he made his way to Denver on foot from Cotopaxi in 1883, a distance of about 150 miles. He later served as Congregation Zera Avraham's first president. Shul-Baer Milstein, also disenchanted with the Cotopaxi experiment, departed for Denver and became a peddler, a common starting point for immigrant Jews in that era. Later, he opened his own kosher butcher shop. Moshe Altman was not part of the Cotopaxi colony, but owned a farm outside Denver and provided the community with *chalav Yisrael* milk.

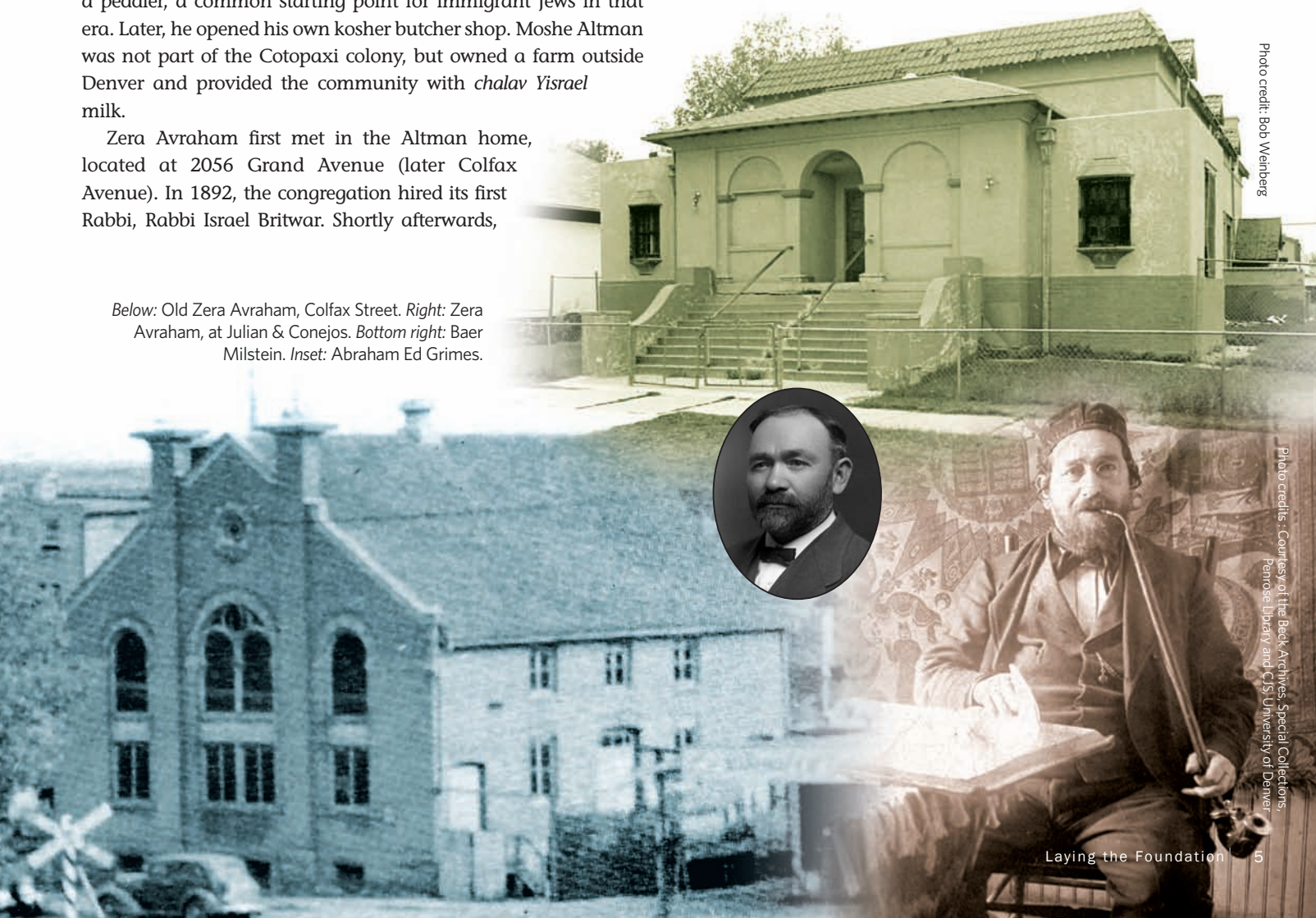
Zera Avraham first met in the Altman home, located at 2056 Grand Avenue (later Colfax Avenue). In 1892, the congregation hired its first Rabbi, Rabbi Israel Britwar. Shortly afterwards,

Rabbi Dovid Rudinsky, a *talmid* of the Kovno Yeshivah in Europe, who had arrived a year earlier to become the Rav of the Mogen Dovid shul in Denver, assumed the *rabbanus* of Zera Avraham as well. Rabbi Rudinsky continued to lead Zera Avraham until 1919, when Rabbi Efraim Zalman Halpern took over leadership of the *kehillah*. Rabbi Halpern was unusual even in this period of multiple rabbinical positions, actually serving as Rabbi for seven congregations in Denver at one time.

In 1901, Zera Avraham built its first synagogue building. In 1938, the *kehillah* moved to the corner of Julian Street and Conejos. Twenty-two years later, in 1960, the congregation built a new structure on Winona Street, from where it continues its service to the Jews of Denver's West Side.

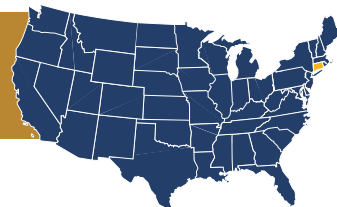
Hamodia thanks the following people for their assistance with this article: Jeanne Abrams, professor at Penrose Library at the University of Denver and longtime director of the Beck Archives and the Rocky Mountain Jewish Historical Society, part of the University of Denver's Center for Judaic Studies; Mr. Sheldon Altman; Mr. Feivel Gallard.

Below: Old Zera Avraham, Colfax Street. Right: Zera Avraham, at Julian & Conejos. Bottom right: Baer Milstein. Inset: Abraham Ed Grimes.



Orchard Street Shul

New Haven, Connecticut



IN 1913, a small group of Orthodox Jews in New Haven rented a storefront building on Asylum Street and converted it into a neighborhood synagogue named Congregation Beth Israel of New Haven.

Immigrants were arriving all over America, and many settled in New Haven, in the vibrant Oak Street-Lafayette Street tenement sections. They wanted to establish a shul devoted to Torah-true *Yiddishkeit*. Thus, the Articles of Association for this *kehillah*, signed on November 24, 1913, stated that its purpose was “to worship G-d in accordance with the Orthodox Hebrew faith” and “to hold services in accordance with that faith.”

By 1915, the pioneer group had outgrown the storefront premises, and moved into a remodeled residence at 147 Orchard Street. The steady growth necessitated a transfer to a larger site, and in July 1923, they purchased land at 232 Orchard Street.

An architect was hired and construction of a majestic building was begun. It was completed in 1926, and soon became known as “The Orchard Street Shul.”

An early Rabbi of the *kehillah* was Rabbi Yehuda Heschel Levenberg, who was actually Chief Rabbi of the entire New Haven area but held his seat at the Orchard Street Shul. Rabbi Levenberg is known for establishing a yeshivah in New Haven, one of the first in the country to focus mainly on Torah study. Rabbi Levenberg remained in New Haven from 1923 until he moved to Cleveland in 1930.

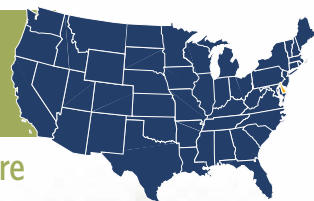
The Orchard Street Shul

was known as the mainstay of Orthodoxy in New Haven for many years; many distinguished Jewish visitors to the city mingled with its members there. The shul underwent a period of decline, beginning in the 1960s, due to changing demographics, but recent efforts to renovate the 1926 building and revitalize the *kehillah* have once again brought the Orchard Street Shul to the forefront of *Yiddishkeit* in New Haven.

Hamodia thanks Mr. Zalman Alpert for photos and information.



Adas Kodesch Shel Emeth



Wilmington, Delaware

IN 1885, A GROUP OF ORTHODOX JEWISH SETTLERS, a number of them from Eastern Europe, settled in Wilmington, Delaware. They found there a community of about 500 Jews, many of whom had already assimilated and become Reform. Unwilling to abandon their traditions, these Orthodox settlers established the Adas Kodesch Congregation and appointed Rabbi Hyman Rezits to serve as the Rav, *chazzan*, *shochet*, and *mohel* for the new congregation. For the next four decades, Rabbi Rezits continued to serve the Jews of Wilmington, until his passing in 1930.

In 1889, the congregation moved to a rented space on the second floor of 211 Market Street. The very next year, the congregation relocated to the second floor of a building located at 3rd and Shipley Streets, and a few years later they moved again, this time to the second floor of 418 Shipley Street.

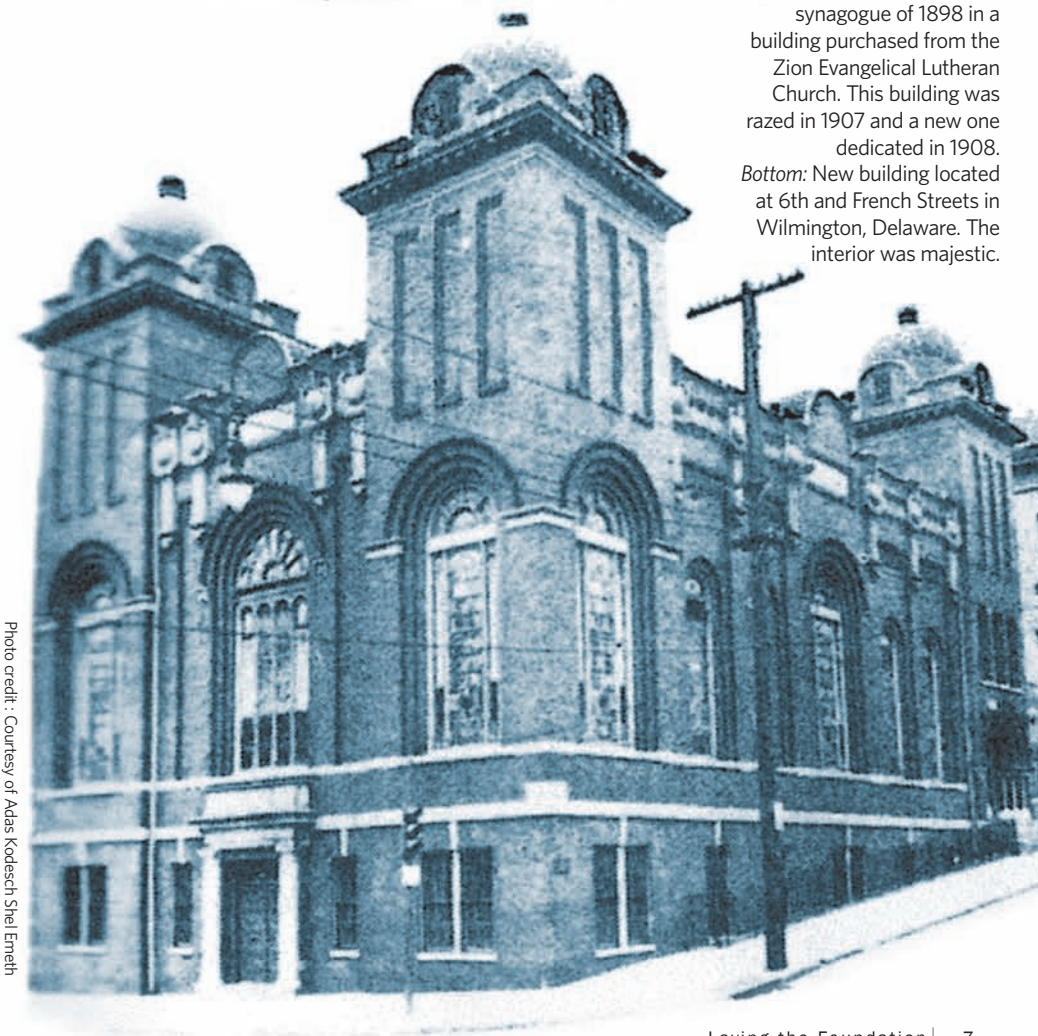
As the community's Jewish population continued to grow, the congregation realized that it needed a building of its own. It purchased the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church at 6th and French Streets for \$5,625 and erected a new synagogue building at the site in 1908.

Around this time, another group of Jews with distinctly different customs established the Chesed Shel Emeth Congregation, under the leadership of Rabbi Goldstein and its president, Morris Chaiken. The group first met at 3rd and Shipley Street and later erected a shul building on Shipley Street, which it occupied until Chesed Shel Emeth merged with Adas Kodesch in 1957 to create Adas Kodesch Shel Emeth. Recently, the shul turned away from Orthodoxy.

Hamodia thanks Barbara S. Keil, historian, Adas Kodesch Shel Emeth, for her assistance with this article.



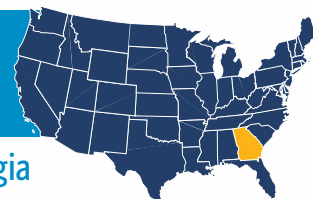
Top: Original Adas Kodesch synagogue of 1898 in a building purchased from the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church. This building was razed in 1907 and a new one dedicated in 1908.



Bottom: New building located at 6th and French Streets in Wilmington, Delaware. The interior was majestic.

Photo credit: Courtesy of Adas Kodesch Shel Emeth

Congregation Bnai Brith Jacob



Savannah, Georgia

CONGREGATION BNAI BRITH JACOB was established around 1860, before the outbreak of the Civil War, by Baruch Mordechai Garfunkel and Yitzchok Isaac Rabhan, who had recently arrived from Europe. Mr. Garfunkel approached the longer-settled members of the Jewish community and, with their permission, started an Orthodox Ashkenazic *minyan*. But there was some hesitation when he raised the idea of building a *mechitzah*. "All right," he replied. "Let's make a temporary *mechitzah*." So the shul was set up with a temporary *mechitzah* planted in the dirt floor. Late one night, when the town was asleep, Baruch Mordechai went to the *shul* and, by the light of a lantern, poured cement around the base of the *mechitzah*. Working quickly in the dark, he then covered the cement with dirt; his work remained unnoticed for some time.

Rabbi Jacob Rosenfeld, an immigrant from Prussia already serving as the Rabbi of Savannah's Sephardic Congregation Mickve Israel, was appointed Rabbi of the new Ashkenazic congregation as well. In 1867, Bnai Brith Jacob erected a frame building. A few years later, a wave of immigration brought many more Jews to Savannah, one of the largest ports of the Southern region. In time, and with growing membership, the Congregation erected a beautiful new building in 1909 at the cost of \$45,000.

The *kehillah* established many community organizations, including a *chevrah kaddisha*, Bnos Chessed Shel Emes (the ladies division of the *chevrah kaddisha*), and the Hebrew Women's Aid Society to assist the poor.

In 1913, Rabbi Charles Blumenthal was installed as Rav of the growing *kehillah*. Rabbi Blumenthal made an indelible impression on the congregants, and especially on the youth of the city. Under his leadership, the Hebrew School reached an all-time-high enrollment of 200 children.

In 1962, under the *rabbanus* of Rabbi A.I. Rosenberg, the *kehillah* built the beautiful modern building that is in use today.

The shul is proud that as the



Reb Baruch Mordechai Garfunkel

third-oldest Orthodox Ashkenazic shul in America, during the past 150 years it has never missed having a *minyan* three times a day; neither wars nor bad weather stopped these devoted Savannah Yidden from gathering in shul for their daily *tefillas*.

To safeguard its authentic traditions, the shul's constitution states that it cannot be changed from an Orthodox shul as long as even one member objects to a change.

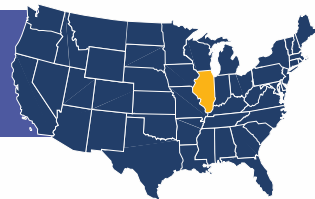
Today, the membership of Congregation Bnai Brith Jacob numbers about 400 families, over 1200 people in all.

Pictures were provided by Isaac Rabhan of Savannah, Georgia.



Anshe Sholom B'nai Israel

Chicago, Illinois



ANSHE SHOLOM CONGREGATION was first formed as Ohave Sholom Mariampol, by Dov Ber Ginsburg and a number of his friends who came to the U.S. from Europe in the summer of 1870. They began meeting for *minyanim* in a house at the corner of Polk and Dearborn Streets.

Shortly thereafter, on October 8, 1871, the Great Chicago Fire broke out and razed about four square miles of Chicago's streets. Many Jews, forced to relocate, settled in the neighborhood near Ohave Sholom, rapidly increasing its membership rolls.

In 1892, Ohave Sholom merged with the Anshe Kalvarier shul. The merged shuls became the Anshe Sholom Congregation.

In 1894, the congregation appointed its first rabbi, Rabbi Avraham Shmuel Braude, who led the *kehillah* until his passing in 1907. Under his leadership the shul became one of the leading congregations in Chicago.

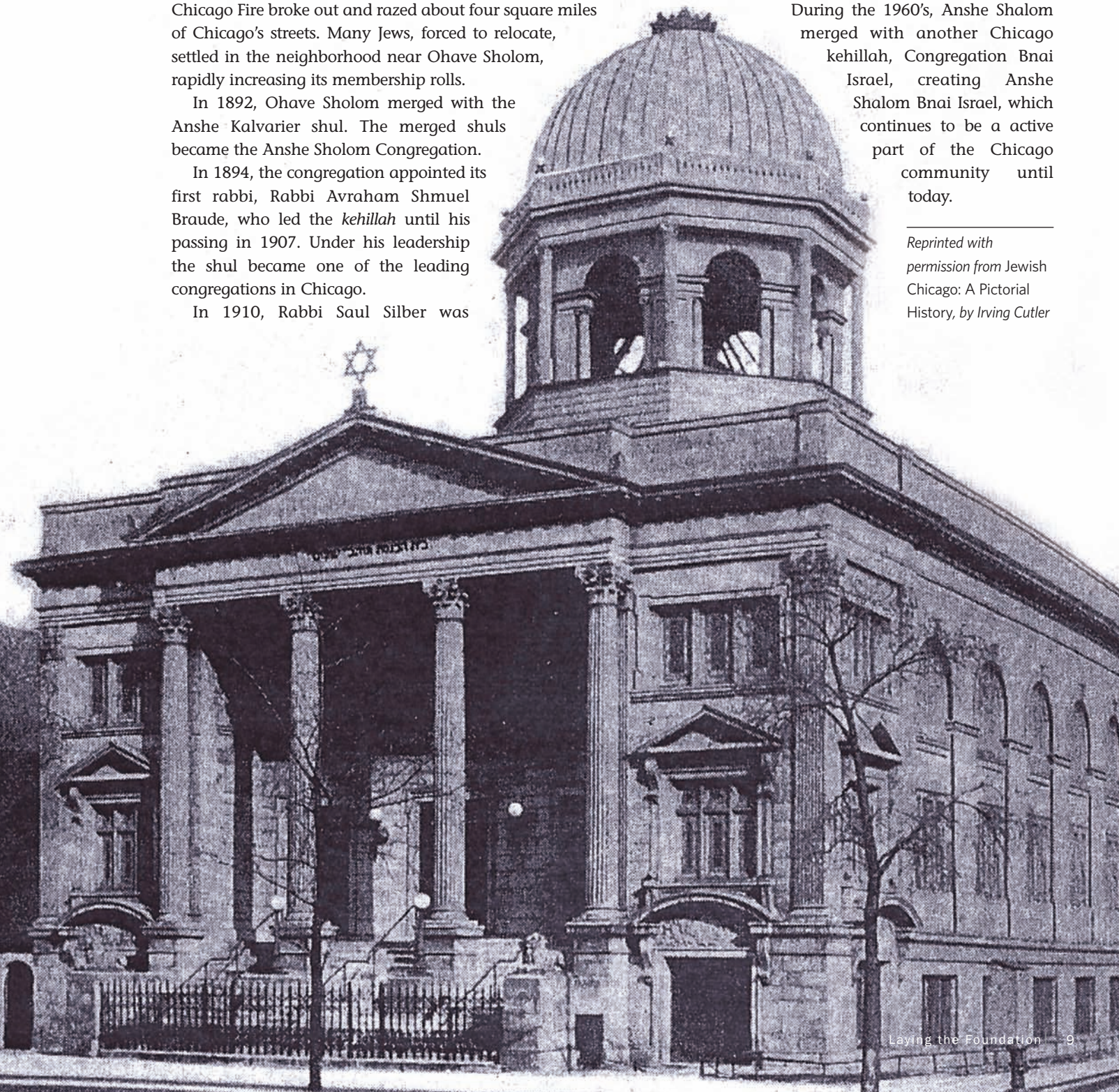
In 1910, Rabbi Saul Silber was

appointed the new Rav. At the same time, the *kehillah* moved to a new building at Polk and Ashland Streets, and with the Jewish community relocating to the West Side of Chicago, they also opened a branch on Homan Avenue.

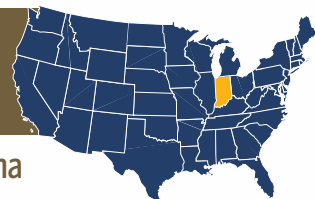
Rabbi Silber continued his gifted leadership of the *kehillah* until he passed away in 1946. These were years of marked growth for the Congregation.

During the 1960's, Anshe Shalom merged with another Chicago *kehillah*, Congregation Bnai Israel, creating Anshe Shalom Bnai Israel, which continues to be a active part of the Chicago community until today.

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permission from Jewish
Chicago: A Pictorial
History, by Irving Cutler



Hebrew Orthodox Congregation



South Bend, Indiana

JEWS HAVE LIVED IN SOUTH BEND since the 1800s, and the Hebrew Orthodox Congregation was first established there in 1887. Between 1900 and 1910, with the influx of many Jewish immigrants escaping oppression in Eastern Europe, a community flourished around Taylor and William Streets. The residents started a *minyan*, and Reverend Louis Feldman, a *shochet*, helped them secure a second-floor room over a meat market on Division Street (now called Western Avenue) for *davening*. Reverend Feldman provided spiritual leadership to the *kehillah* as well.

A South Bend directory from 1906 lists Rabbi M. A. Zimman as the Rabbi of the Hebrew Orthodox Congregation. In 1914, the group hired Rabbi Shlomo Zlattolov for the modest sum of \$50 a year. Rabbi Zlattolov remained the Rav until the late 1920s. Other individuals who served the *kehillah* in various capacities in those early years include Reverend Max Altfeld, Reverend Moses Feiwell, and Dov Ber Liss.

In 1916, the congregation purchased their first building on Taylor Street. In 1922, they moved to a larger, more beautiful building, which became known as the "Taylor Street Shul." That

building was badly damaged by suspected arson in 1970, and a new synagogue building was erected at 3100 High Street. Today, the Hebrew Orthodox Congregation is the oldest continuously functioning Jewish congregation in the area.

Hamodia thanks Mr. Louis Sandock, president of the Hebrew Orthodox Congregation, for his help in preparing this article and providing photographs.

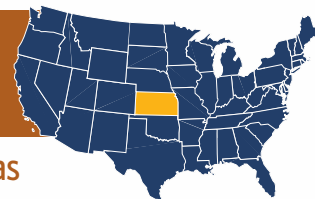
Hebrew Orthodox Congregation, circa 1916



The "Taylor Street Shul," built in 1922



Congregation BIAV (Beth Israel Abraham and Voliner)



Kansas City, Kansas

LIKE SO MANY OTHER CONGREGATIONS that exist today, Congregation BIAV of Kansas City is the final product of a series of consolidations of several shuls that existed over the years in Kansas City.

The first merger took place in 1888, between Congregations Etz Chaim and Ohev Sholom. Eight years later, this Etz Chaim congregation joined with the Kansas City Hebrew Tailors Congregation, taking the name Congregation Tefereth Israel.

Over the passing years, Tefereth Israel merged with Beth Hamidrash Hagadol, Congregation Beth Abraham, and, finally, with Congregation Voliner Anshei Sefard. Combining its constituent names, the shul became known as Congregation Beth Israel

Abraham and Voliner, or BIAV.

The first known rabbi of BIAV was Rabbi Brachiah Mayerovitz. Rabbi



Rabbi Brachiah Mayerovitz

Mayerovitz was born in Kovno and received *semichah* from the Kovno Yeshivah, where he learned under Harav Yitzchak Elchanan Spector. In 1892, he was invited to serve as the Chief Rabbi of all the Orthodox congregations in Kansas City, including Etz Chaim, Keneseth Israel, and Gomel Chesed.

Rabbi Mayerovitz was respected as a great Torah scholar and, in 1895, he published his commentary on *Pirkei Avos*, named *Magen Avoth*. The *sefer* was written in Hebrew, with an English translation. Since there were presumably no Hebrew printing presses available in Kansas City at that time, the *sefer* was printed in Chicago.

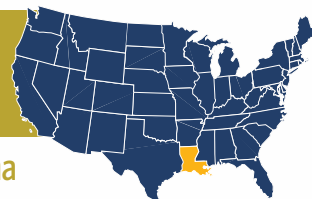
Rabbi Mayerovitz left Kansas City in 1896, and subsequently held positions as a Rav in Dallas, Toledo, Atlanta, Memphis and Oakland, California. BIAV continues to serve the Jews of Kansas City to this day.

Hamodia thanks Mr. Phil Braverman for his research and photos.



Congregation Beth Israel

New Orleans, Louisiana



LOUISIANA HAS A RICH JEWISH HISTORY dating back to the mid-1800s. Its major entrepôt city, New Orleans, attracted many Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe to the area.

One of the notable figures from this period is Harav Yissochar Dov Illowy, a renowned *talmid chacham* who exerted a great influence on American Orthodoxy at the time. Rav Illowy was one of the last *talmidim* of the Chasam Sofer and one of the few major *Poskim* in the United States in those years. He served as a Rav in various communities, including New Orleans' Congregation Shangarai Chasset (Shaare Chesed), where he was Rabbi from 1861 to 1865, during the American Civil War. In 1865, Rav Illowy accepted a position in Cincinnati.

The European immigrants to Louisiana did not bring much in the way of material possessions, but they did bring with them a determination to establish *frum* communities in their new land. The new arrivals settled in the Dryades Street neighborhood and, by the late 1800s, the area had taken on the characteristic color and tone of an immigrant Jewish quarter. The community established several congregations, each according to the *minhagim* of its particular place of origin. According to some estimates, the Jewish population of this area reached 3,500 by the 1920s.

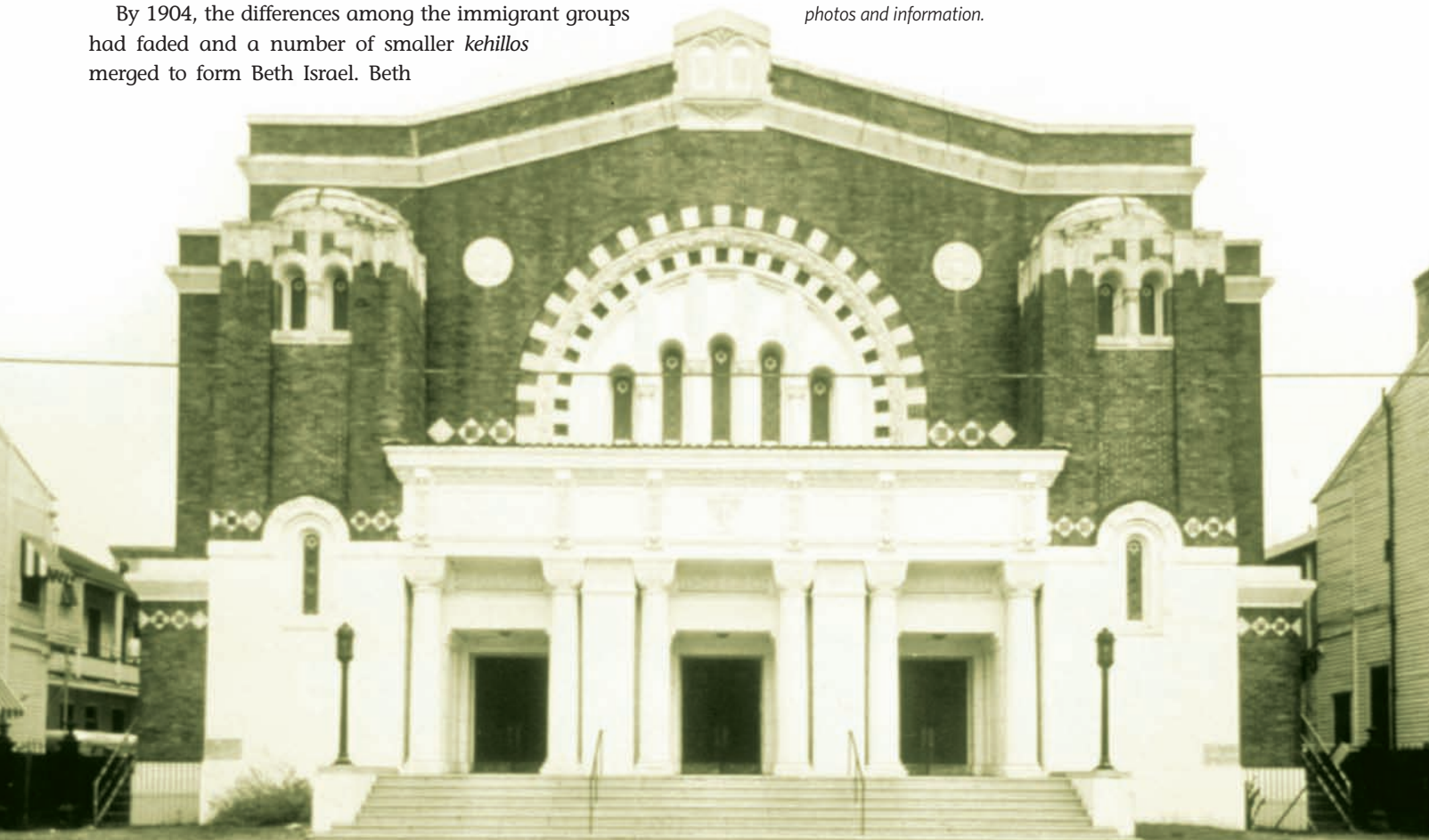
By 1904, the differences among the immigrant groups had faded and a number of smaller *kehillos* merged to form Beth Israel. Beth

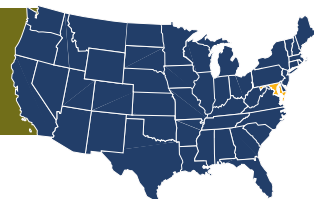
Israel held its first services in a building on Carondelet Street with David Rosenson, an immigrant from Russia, serving as its first president. The *kehillah* soon began raising funds to erect its own building. In January 1905, the new president, I.L. Haskel, published an appeal to the broader Jewish community, stating: "The Orthodox Jewish community of our city is without a suitable place of worship... we appeal to Orthodox and Reform alike... wherefore we all should help us establish an Orthodox synagogue worthy of its name and worthy of the generous community in which we live." Before long, Beth Israel moved into a beautiful plantation home at 1616 Carondelet.

After this move, the congregation grew rapidly. By 1914, it was one of the largest Orthodox congregations in the South, boasting a membership of 250 families.

Today, Beth Israel, along with a few other congregations, continues to serve the Orthodox Jews of the region, despite the challenge of its surroundings: a city that is known for its non-kosher seafood, carefree attitude, and strong Reform presence. During the devastating Hurricane Katrina, the synagogue was flooded and *sifrei Torah* were destroyed, but Beth Israel continues to persevere.

Hamodia thanks the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life for photos and information.





IN 1840, RABBI ABRAHAM RICE, who had studied in the famed Wurzburg Yeshivah and received *semichah* from its Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Abraham Bing, arrived in America from Bavaria. Rabbi Rice was the first ordained Orthodox Rabbi to settle in America.

Rabbi Rice came to be known for his *tzidkus* and fine *middos* and was one of the few rabbis in America at the time who was able to deliver halachic *psak*. Shortly after his arrival in America, Rabbi Rice assumed the *rabbanus* of Baltimore's Congregation Nidchei Yisrael. However, he bridled at the congregation's permissive attitudes and finally resigned his post rather than give *aliyos* to those who were not *shomer Shabbos*.

In 1851, Rabbi Rice and a group of devoted followers founded Congregation Shearith Israel. Shearith Israel was established as a *kehillah* dedicated to *shemiras Shabbos*; commitment to *shemiras Shabbos* was required from those seeking voting privileges in the new *kehillah*. The new congregation became known for its unwavering Orthodoxy and its firm attachment to the German *minhagim*.

In 1862, Nidchei Yisrael, also known as Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, found itself without a Rabbi and convinced Rabbi Rice to return to their congregation. However, that situation did not last long, as Rabbi Rice passed away in October of that year.

In 1879, Shearith Israel merged with another small congregation to create a larger *kehillah* that would be able to summon the resources to combat the trend toward Reform. The newly-formed Shearith Israel acquired a building on the corner of Greene and German Streets — a former Methodist Church — and turned it into a shul.

For many years after Rabbi Rice's tenure, the *kehillah* did not employ a full time Rav. However, in 1892, the board wrote to Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer of Berlin and Rabbi Hillel Klein of New York, seeking the names of appropriate candidates who would strictly uphold both the *Shulchan Aruch* and the German *minhagim*.

Both Rabbi Hildesheimer and Rabbi Klein recommended Rabbi Dr. Schepschel Schaffer, a graduate of Lithuanian yeshivos and German universities, who was just arriving in New York from Germany. Rabbi Schaffer was pleasantly surprised to be greeted with this perfect job opportunity, and just a few weeks after his arrival, the

congregation appointed him Rav. Rabbi Schaffer proved a perfect match for Shearith Israel. He quickly placed his indelible imprint on the *kehillah*, delivering *shiurim*, establishing a Talmud Torah, and laying plans to establish a yeshivah. He remained Rav of the *kehillah* until his retirement nearly 30 years later, in 1928.

In 1903, changing demographics confronted Shearith Israel with a choice to either change its location or abandon its German *minhagim*. Holding fast to its long-held *minhagim*, the *kehillah* erected a beautiful new building on McCulloh Street. During the dedication ceremonies the local press marveled at the shul's intricate design, modern features and fine *mikveh*.

In 1925, the *kehillah* built a branch on the corner of Glen and Park Avenues, from where it continues to serve as a mainstay of Torah and *Yiddishkeit* for the Baltimore community.

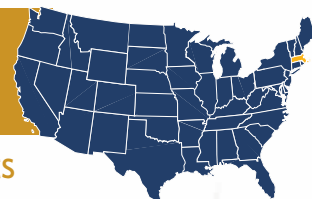


Rabbi Abraham Rice

Shearith Israel on McCulloh Street



Ahavath Achim Synagogue



New Bedford, Massachusetts

AHAVATH ACHIM SYNAGOGUE was established in May 1893 and held its first services in the city's immigrant section on Howland Street in New Bedford's South End. Most of New Bedford's Jews at that time were from White Russia/Lithuania, from towns such as Stukelshok, a suburb of Vilna, and from Bialystok and Brisk.

The *kehillah* brought over Rabbi Zev Genensky, a native of Bialystok and a *talmid* of Rav Shmuel Mohliver and the Mir Yeshivah, to serve as their Rav. Curiously, however, when Rabbi Genensky arrived in New Bedford, he chose to leave the rabbinate. Rabbi Aaron Silverblatt filled the post for a few years, and then, in 1900, Rabbi Genensky helped bring Rabbi Hyman Papkin to New Bedford. Rabbi Papkin was born in Lida and had studied in Volozhin and in the Vilna *kloiz* under Harav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky. Back in Vilna, Rabbi Papkin had begun a lifelong friendship with Rabbi Eliezer Silver, who would later rise to prominence in Cincinnati.

Rabbi Papkin, together with Rabbi Mordechai Zev Margolis, worked hard to improve kashrus standards in the Boston area. They also helped enact exemptions to the "blue laws," which were very important for observant Jews who closed their shops on Shabbos, and would have lost another day of business, Sunday, if not for the exemption. Rabbi Papkin also served as the *Av Beis Din* in New Bedford and was one of the charter members of the Agudath Harabbonim of the U.S.A. and Canada.

Rabbi Papkin led Ahavath Achim until his passing in 1960. The Congregation continued serving the Jews of New Bedford as Ahavath Achim until December 2010, when Rabbi Barry Hartman revived the *kehillah* under a new name, the Orthodox Chavurah Minyan of New Bedford.

Hamodia acknowledges Rabbi Barry Hartman for his assistance with this article.



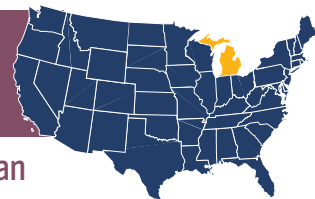
Top: Ahavath Achim, 1892.
Bottom: Chessed Shel Emeth, another shul in New Bedford during the early 1900s.



Photo credits: The Standard-Times/SouthCoast Media Group, New Bedford, MA

Congregation Bnai Israel

Detroit, Michigan



CONGREGATION BNAI ISRAEL was formed in 1871 and conducted its first services in a rented house on Montcalm and Hastings Streets. Rabbi Isaac Weinstein, a foreman at a rags and metals establishment, served as the acting Rabbi. Seven years later, in 1878, the *kehillah* proudly dedicated a stately, free-standing shul, with imposing columns adorning the front of the building, on Macomb Street, between Beaubien and St. Antoine.

In 1889, Rabbi Aaron M. Ashinsky came to Detroit and assumed the rabbinate of three congregations — Bnai Israel, Shaarey Zedek and Beth Jacob. (In those days it was not unusual for one Rav to serve several congregations.) Posters would announce where Rabbi Ashinsky would be in the morning and in the evening as he took turns at the different locations.

Frustrated by the lack of support for his attempts to organize an afternoon school for religious studies, Rabbi Ashinsky left Detroit in 1896 to accept a post in the most prominent Eastern European congregation in Montreal, Canada. He immediately founded a Talmud Torah there.

In 1897, 38-year-old Rabbi Yehudah Leib Levin of New Haven, Connecticut replaced Rabbi Ashinsky at the head of the three congregations. Rabbi Levin had come to the United States from Russia in 1886, and had served as Rav of the community in Rochester, New York, since then.

On December 6, 1891, Bnai Israel dedicated a new building on Mullet Street, between St. Antoine and Hastings.

In 1905, Bnai Israel was the venue for a citywide day of solemn mourning in response to violence against Jews in Russia. On Friday, December 8, the *Jewish American* reported that

“When Rabbi Judah Levin... stepped up... every seat in the synagogue was filled and hundreds were standing in the aisles, while as many more at the doors were turned away. The rabbi told of the terrible atrocities of Odessa, of Kieff [Kiev], and

other Russian cities, and as he alternately recited the tale of horrors of the massacre and prayed for the safety of the living ones, the scene in the synagogue was heartrending. In the gallery were hundreds who have dear ones in Russia, from whom they have not heard for weeks, or at best only tidings of suffering and death.

“At first there was only silent weeping among them, but, as the rabbi, with tears in his own eyes, bemoaned the fate of the victims of the massacre, the weeping became heart-broken wailing.”

In 1914, Rabbi Levin finally succeeded in establishing an afternoon Hebrew school, which grew to become the famed Yeshivas Beth Yehudah of Detroit. Rabbi Levin continued to lead Detroit's Jewish community until his passing in 1926.

Today, Congregation Bnai Israel is located in Oak Park, Michigan and remains an active *kehillah* and a driving force in the Oak Park community.

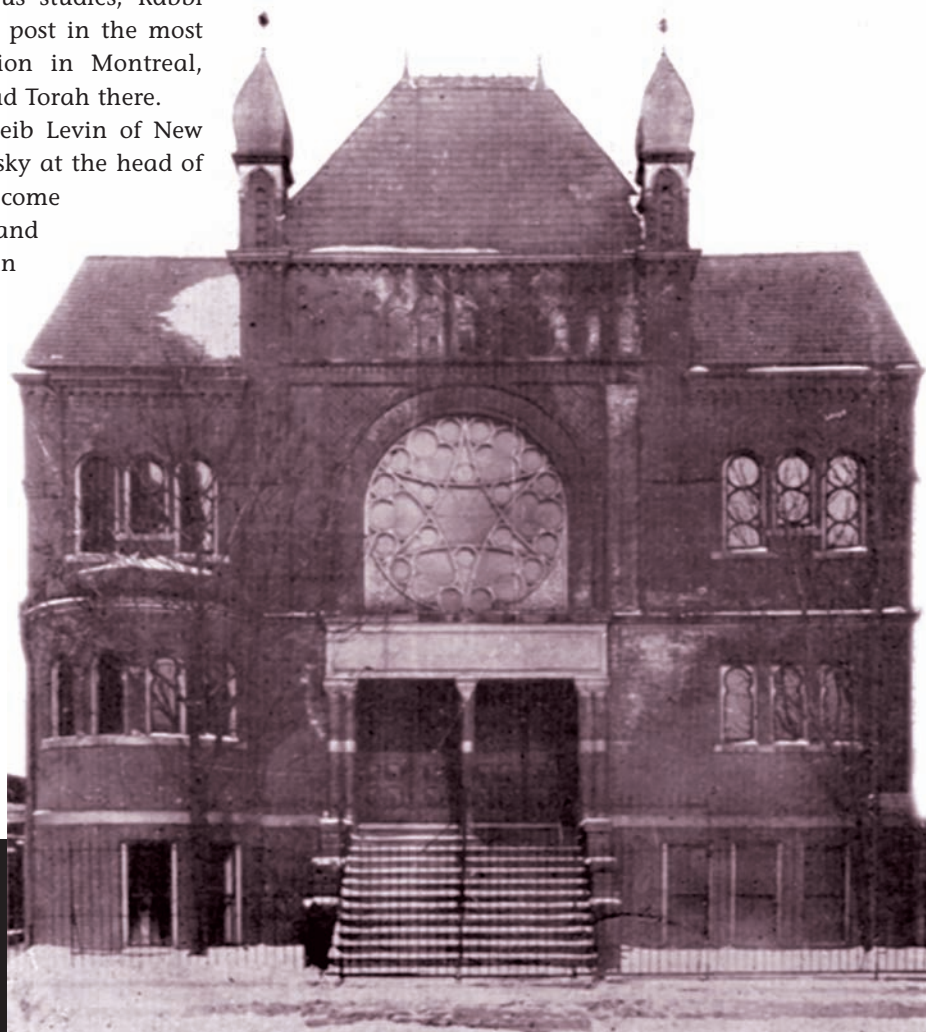
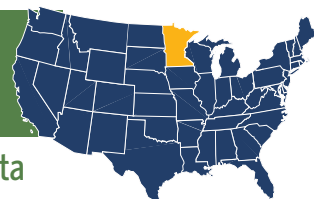


Photo credit: Jewish Community Blue Books, Rabbi Leo M. Franklin Archives, Temple Beth El, Bloomfield Hills, MI

Kenesseth Israel



Minneapolis, Minnesota

KENESSETH ISRAEL, which came to be known as the “Mother of Synagogues,” was first established in 1888 as Beth Hamidrash Hagadol by a small group of men from the Lithuanian section of Czarist Russia who formed the first *minyanim*. Later that year, when they succeeded in forming a permanent congregation, they named it Congregation Ohel Jacob.

Its first location was above a store at 605 Second St. N., in a building owned by Abraham Farsht. In 1891, after a near tragedy when the floor supports almost collapsed, they purchased a lot at 527 and 529 Fourth St. N. and renamed the congregation Chnessis Israel, which was the actual spelling at that time. Later that year, the congregation changed the spelling to its current “Kenesseth Israel.”

In 1894, the growing *kehillah* moved to Lyndale Ave. N.



Rabbi Solomon Silber

between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, erecting what was then reputed to be one of the most beautiful synagogues in existence anywhere.

Early leaders of the *kehillah* included Rabbi I. Jaffa, who served as Rav from 1892 until 1901 and Rabbi Solomon Silber, who served from 1902 until 1925. Rabbi Silber, together with members of the congregation, was instrumental in establishing and funding the Jewish Family Welfare Board and the Jewish Sheltering Home.

In 1948, the city bought the land occupied by Keneseth Israel to build the Olson Memorial Highway and the *kehillah* relocated to Plymouth and Queen Avenues. In the late 1960s, the shul moved to W. 28 Street in St. Louis Park, where it continues to serve the Jews of Minneapolis.

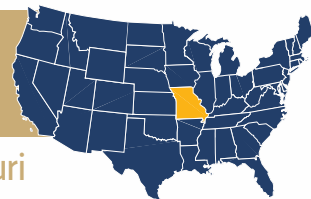
Hamodia thanks Corinne Klatzko for her research.



Lyndale Avenue Shul

Photos courtesy of the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest

Beth Medrash Hagadol



St. Louis, Missouri

CONGREGATION BETH MEDRASH HAGADOL was established in 1883 by a group of Russian immigrants who were committed to maintaining Torah and *mitzvos*, despite the strong forces of assimilation that surrounded them. This goal was reflected clearly in the preamble to the 1890 by-laws, which read in part: “We have immigrated from Russia, from a deeply rooted ghetto life, and have immigrated into free America, into a city where there was not a single sacred place to offer prayers. Many who have come here before us had one objective — namely, money seeking; they assimilated and soon forgot their Jewish extraction to such an extent that it is almost impossible to recognize them as our own... We have undertaken to cleanse the obstructions on the path towards a living Judaism.”

The founders of Beth Medrash Hagadol remained true to their goals, and the shul became known as the only place in the city where Jews pursued Torah learning for its own sake. Around 1893, the members of this *kehillah* established the Moses Montefiore Hebrew School in order to educate the children as well to follow in the ways of the Torah.

One of the early influences on the shul was “Rebe” Eliyahu Olschwanger, whose profound teachings were remembered fondly by many. Another influential figure was Rabbi Dov Ber Abramowitz, who was the Rav of this *kehillah* from 1906 until

1920. His personality unquestionably added to the prestige and exalted atmosphere of the *kehillah*.

The *Golden Jubilee Journal*, printed in 1933, stated: “Many of us remember the unforgettable picture... when several scores of Jews, many of them scholars of note, were sitting around a table absorbed in the profound dissertations of the late ‘Rebe’ Elijah Olschwanger... Who cannot recall those glorious Shabbos afternoons when the late Rabbi Abramowitz delivered his profound orations on the *Ethics of the Fathers* before an overflowing congregation?”

In 1890, the *kehillah* moved into a building on North Eleventh Street. This served the *kehillah* well until 1920, when the building was sold to the Nusach Ari Congregation and Beth Medrash Hagadol moved to a new location on Bartmer Avenue.

Beth Medrash Hagadol served the St. Louis community for many years. In approximately 1960, it moved from Bartmer Avenue to North and South Road in University City. In 2006, Beth Medrash Hagadol merged with Congregation Shaarei Chesed to become Beth Medrash Hagadol-Shaarei Chesed Shul, or the U. City Shul, which continues to be a vibrant force in the St. Louis Jewish community.

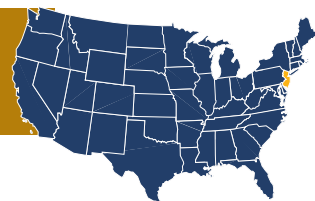


Rabbi Dov Ber
Abramowitz

Hamodia thanks Mr. Avraham Moshe Simon for providing resource material.



Beth Medrash Hagadol
on Bartmer Avenue



DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, Newark, New Jersey constituted one of New York City's many small satellite Jewish communities. These were made up of Jewish peddlers and craftsmen, many of whom became wealthy during the economic boom after the Civil War. When Newark's oldest congregation, B'nai Jeshurun, did not renew Rabbi Isaac Schwartz's contract in 1860 because he criticized certain members for violations of Jewish law, a breakaway group founded Congregation Oheb Shalom. This became an all-too-familiar pattern as many German-American synagogues began to adopt Reform practices in defiance of traditional Rabbis. In B'nai Jeshurun, Rabbi Schwartz, like most American Rabbis during this period, lacked real authority, being subject to the synagogue's board. But Oheb Shalom's members followed his rulings and remained more strictly observant of Shabbos and kashrus.

Even while Rabbi Schwartz served as its Rabbi, Oheb Shalom began to Americanize. In 1865, the shul dedicated a large new building, began to enforce new standards of etiquette and decorum, and cloaked its Rabbis in American-

style clerical garb. In 1885, Rabbi Bernard Drachman was elected Rabbi. Raised Reform in America, he had rebelled and pursued an Orthodox *semichah* (in addition to a Ph.D.) in Germany. Rabbi Drachman was a rare spokesman for Orthodoxy in an American community that by then had gone almost completely over to Reform. But despite all his efforts, in 1889 he was compelled to leave Oheb Shalom after its board voted to institute mixed seating.

Rabbi Drachman moved to New York, where he taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary, which he had helped found in 1886 as a school for rabbinical students. (Within a generation this institution had become the intellectual stronghold of American Jewish Conservatism.) When a new wave of Jewish immigrants came over in large numbers from Eastern Europe, the demand for more traditional religious leaders grew. Rabbi Drachman helped form the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations of America (which became the OU) in 1898, to stem the flow to Reform. The OU played an important part in preserving American Orthodoxy through educational programming and synagogue programs.



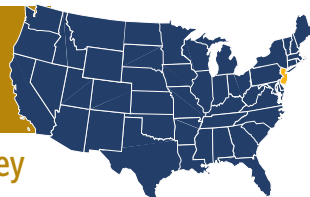
Oheb Shalom's constitution, in German, 19th century

Oheb Shalom's grand buildings on Prince and High Streets, Newark



All images courtesy Congregation Oheb Shalom

Agudath Achim Anshe Woodbine



Woodbine, New Jersey

THE WOODBINE SHUL DATES TO 1892, two years after the establishment of Woodbine, NJ. Woodbine was a Jewish farming colony created by the Baron de Hirsch Fund of New York, a German-Jewish philanthropy that sponsored Jewish immigrant resettlement outside the congested cities. The Fund hoped that by dispersing the immigrants on farms and in smaller settlements, opposition to Jewish immigration would be minimized.

Jewish farmers were often attracted to Woodbine and other agricultural colonies because it was easier to maintain their religious obligations there than in the city. Working on their own farms enabled them to avoid working on Shabbos, and the Fund ensured that there was kosher meat slaughtered by a reliable *shochet*. Several newspapers at the time called Woodbine “the first all-Jewish city since the fall of Jerusalem.” Even in the 1920s, when religious decline was prevalent in cities, Woodbine still closed down on Friday afternoons.

The de Hirsch Fund sponsored an imposing two-story brick building for the shul, which was the tallest structure in the colony. The constitution required that one be *Shomer Shabbos* and speak Yiddish to be a member. Colonists addressed their *she'eilos* to Chief



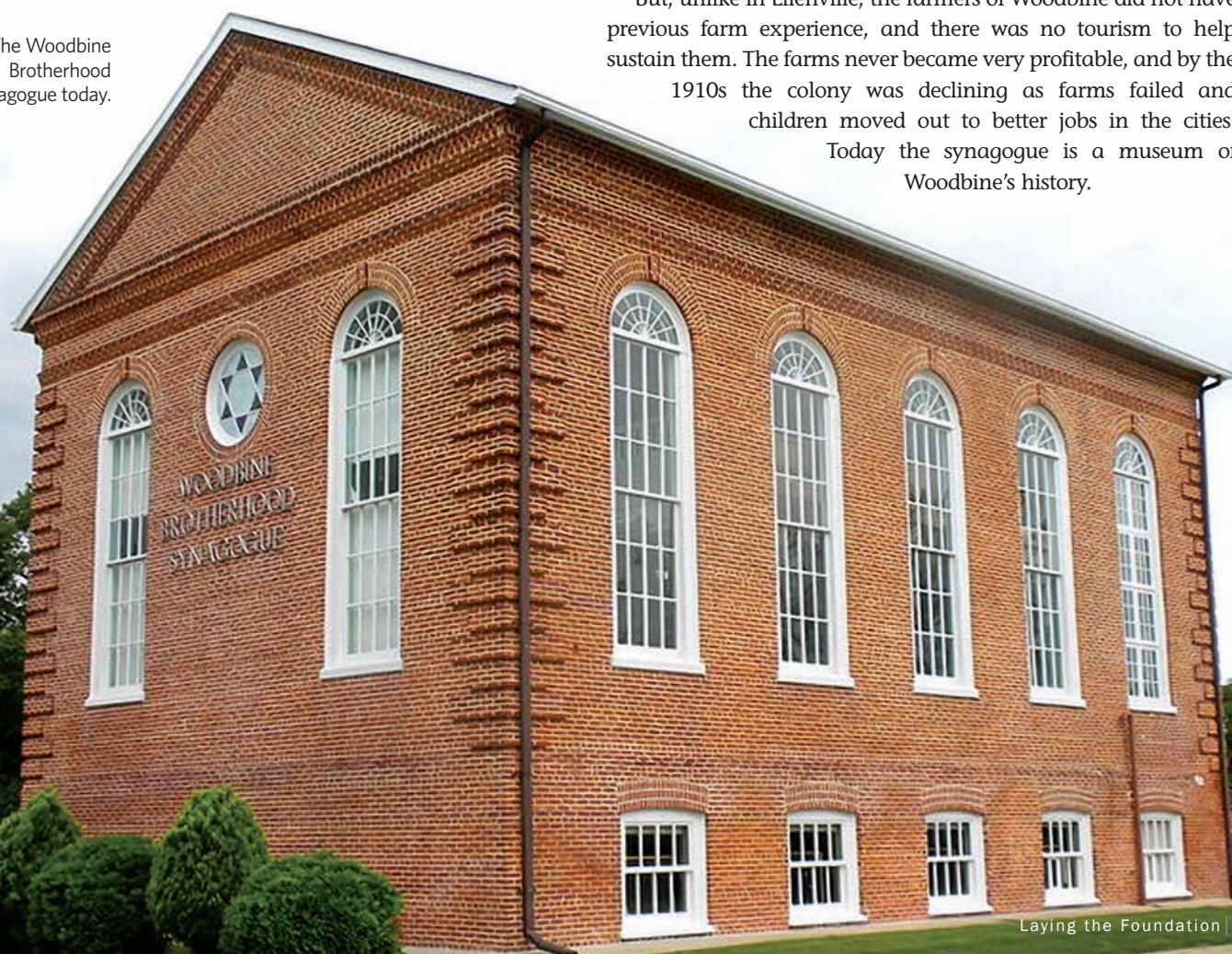
“Rejoicing in the Law” — *Simchas Torah*

Rabbi Bernard Levinthal of Philadelphia, a leader of the Agudath Harabbonim who owned a summer home in Woodbine. A Talmud Torah held classes in the synagogue’s basement, and later in a building next door.

But, unlike in Ellenville, the farmers of Woodbine did not have previous farm experience, and there was no tourism to help sustain them. The farms never became very profitable, and by the 1910s the colony was declining as farms failed and children moved out to better jobs in the cities.

Today the synagogue is a museum of Woodbine’s history.

The Woodbine
Brotherhood
Synagogue today.



Kehillath Ezrath Israel

EZRATH ISRAEL, established in 1907, is the first synagogue formed in New York's Catskills. Its founding members were mostly farmers or owners of businesses that catered to Jewish vacationers in the region. Jews began vacationing in the Catskills during the summers in the 1880s, and when Christian hotels excluded them, they created their own "Jewish area" around Ellenville and Monticello. The first bungalow colonies were created by Jewish farmers in those areas as sources of extra income during the summer months. As more Jews were drawn to the Catskills for the summers, separate colonies sprang up catering to Jews of Polish, Hungarian, Lithuanian, and other nationalities.

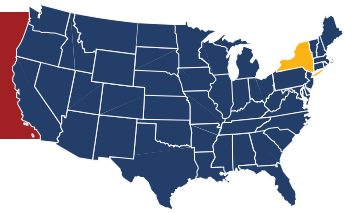
In the 1910s, by some estimates, there were almost 1,500 Jewish farmers in the areas around Monticello, and modest synagogues were founded in many small mountain towns. The Jewish farmers, many of whom never learned English, often had an uneasy relationship with the Christian communities nearby. They created their own Yiddish-speaking culture, with the shul serving as a center for all the Jews of the area, despite their varied levels of observance. Like many of these small synagogues, Ezrath Israel did not have its own Rabbi, but hired a *chazzan-shochet* to lead the prayers and provide kosher meat.

Many Catskills farms failed in their first few years due to the poor soil of the area and the inexperience of the farmers. Some then turned to chicken farming. Nonetheless, the synagogues of the Catskills began to decline after WWII, as no fresh population of observant Jews moved into these areas, except for the summer crowds. However, the Ellenville Synagogue is once again flourishing today, and is home to a yeshivah and year-round congregation.



Courtesy YIVO Archives.





Courtesy YIVO Archives



Clockwise, from top left:
Ezrath Israel's original building
The Ellenville Talmud Torah in
the early 20th Century
The synagogue today

Beis Medrash HaGadol

JEW S FROM POLAND, LITHUANIA AND RUSSIA began to immigrate to the United States during the 1840s. This was in response to the harshly oppressive Cantonist decrees passed by Czar Nicholas I, under which young boys were drafted into long-term army service, virtually guaranteeing that they would be lost to *Yiddishkeit*. In 1852, a group led by Rav Avraham Yosef Ash, a noted *Posek*, founded the first Polish-Lithuanian shul in America on Manhattan's Lower East Side. A few years later, after a dispute in the shul, which was called Beis Medrash, Ash led a group of members who broke away to found Beis Medrash HaGadol. It became the leading shul on the Lower East Side, featuring a large library and daily *shiurim*. In 1885, the synagogue moved to an impressive new building, a former church on Norfolk Street, and renovated it in the Moorish style.

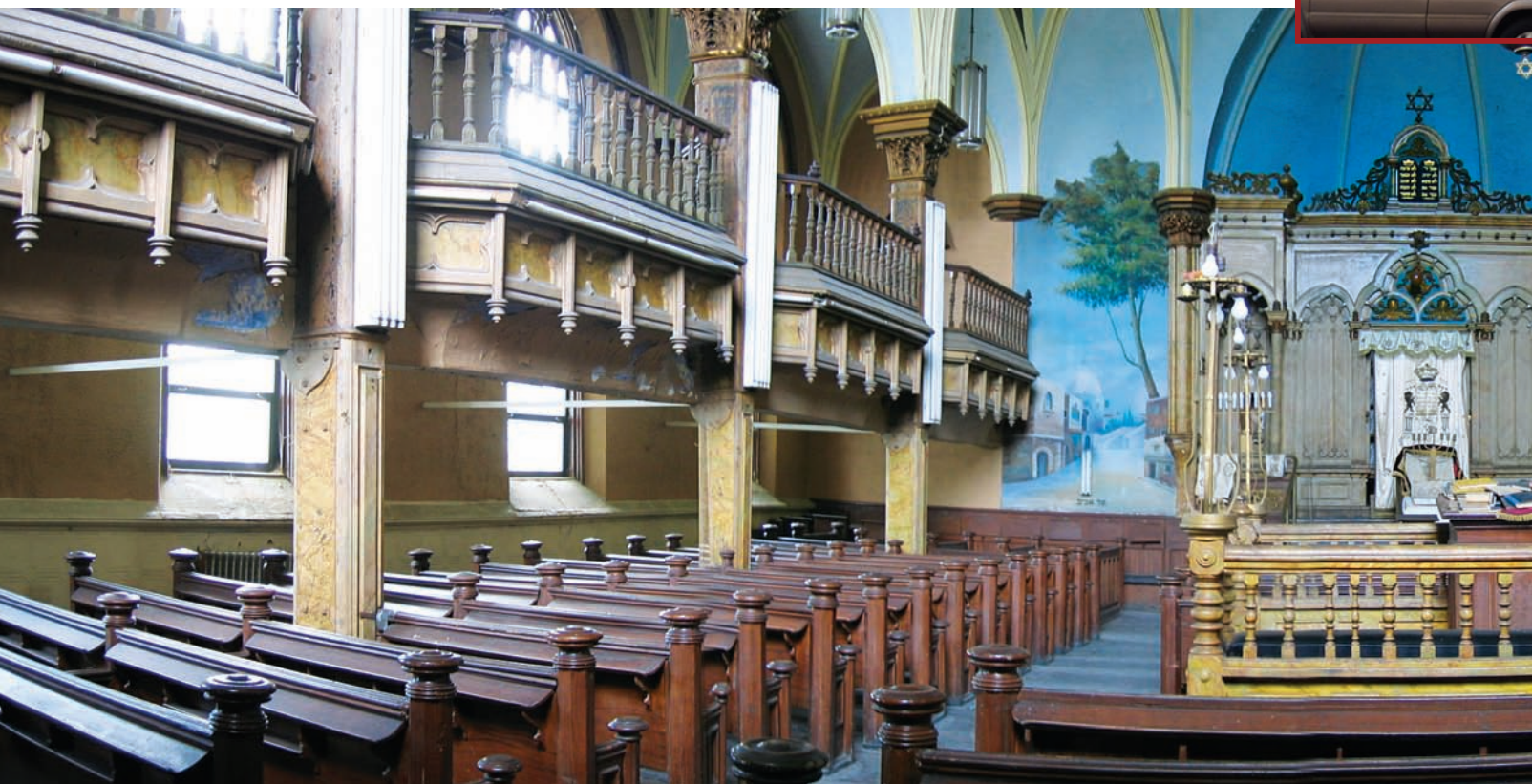
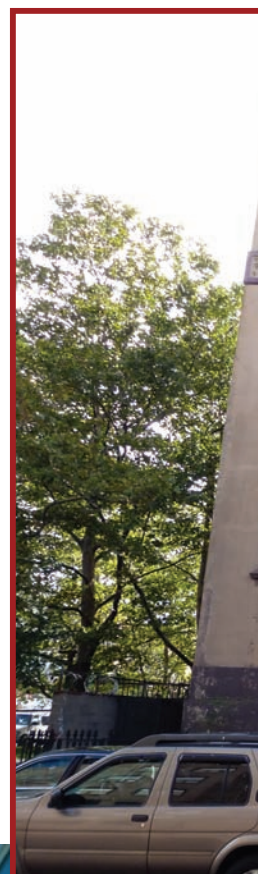
In 1888, Beis Medrash HaGadol led the effort by a group of Lower East Side synagogues to create a united *kehillah* that would control the city's *kashrus*, encourage Shabbos observance, and create a Jewish educational system. They brought the widely respected Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Vilna, a renowned *talmid chacham*, to serve

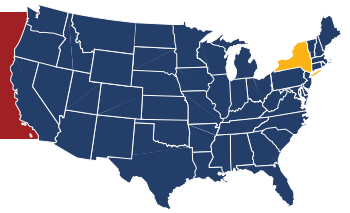


Chief Rabbi
Jacob Joseph

as Chief Rabbi of New York, hoping to further the campaign for *Shemiras Shabbos* and *kashrus*. These two cornerstones of halachic life proved very unstable in the United States, where Jews did not have their own self-contained communities, and congregations lacked the power of enforcement. Many of the factories where newly-arrived immigrants found work would fire anyone who refused to work on Shabbos, and the kosher meat business was rife with unscrupulous businessmen who sold non-kosher meat under false *hashgachos*. On Rabbi Jacob Joseph's first Shabbos in Beis Medrash HaGadol, thousands crowded the streets around the synagogue to hear him speak. But without the power to enforce his policies, or the ability to unite the Orthodox community behind a single banner, he had not accomplished most of his important goals by the time he passed away in 1902.

Beis Medrash HaGadol continued to be the center of Jewish life on the Lower East Side until the 1920s, when the community began to disperse to other neighborhoods. Its magnificent building still stands on Norfolk Street.





Beis Medrash HaGadol in the late 1800s

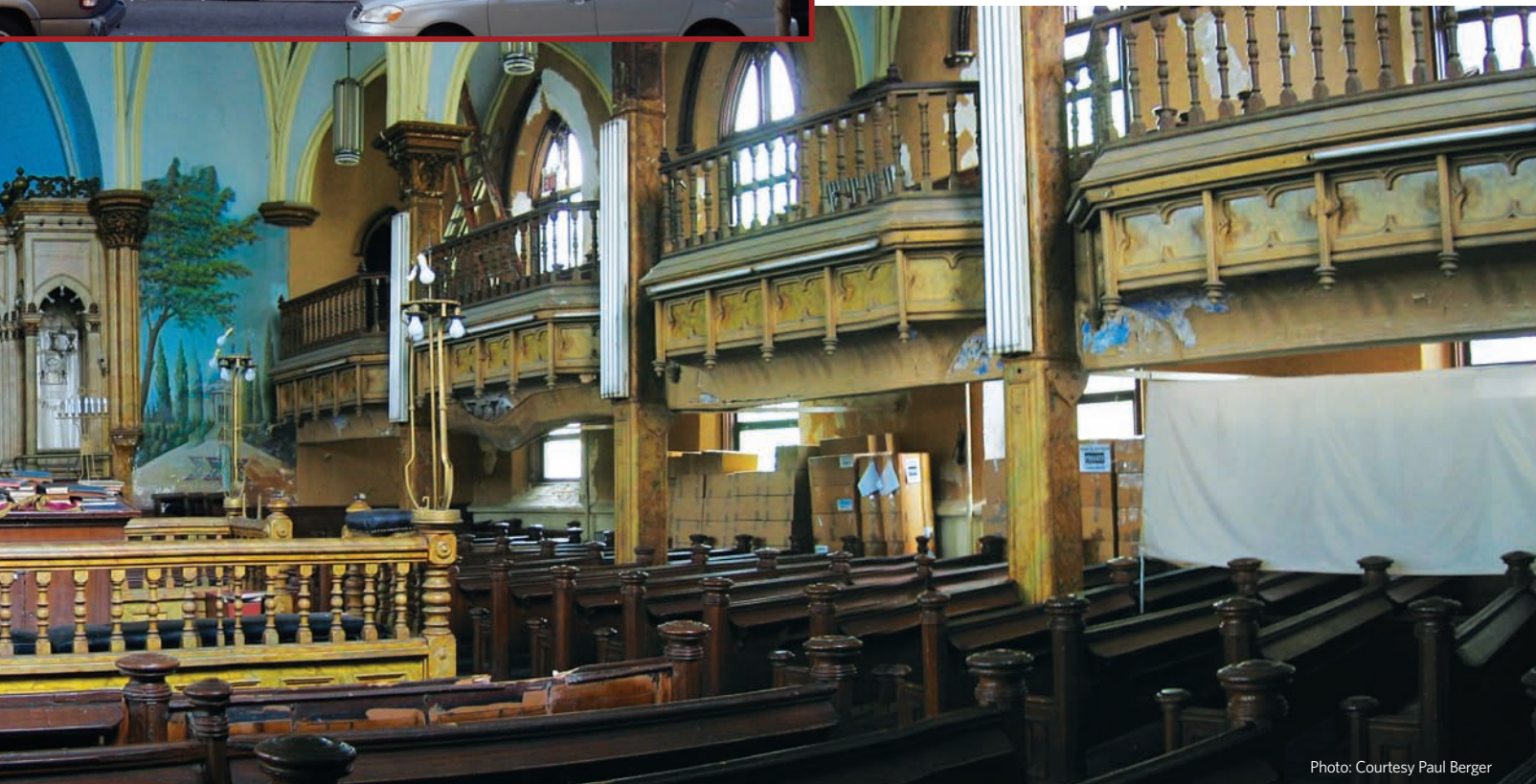


Photo: Courtesy Paul Berger



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Kehal Adath Jeshurun, The Eldridge Street



Photo credit: Kate Milford

KEHAL ADATH JESHURUN, the Eldridge Street Synagogue, is the first synagogue building built by Eastern European Jews in America. When immigrant Jews arrived in American cities, they usually sought out a familiar community in the *landsmannschaften* shuls. As some of them began to grow more wealthy, they erected larger and more imposing synagogues, which blended the traditional *nusach* and *minhagim* of Eastern Europe with the more formal etiquette of American houses of worship. As a mark of their new sophistication, they often hired gifted *chazzanim* and choirs. The Eldridge Street shul was one of the first of these more formal synagogues.

The synagogue was founded in 1872 by the merger of two small *landsmannschaften*. By the 1880s, many of the congregants had become more wealthy, and a commanding new building was commissioned to rival the grand, Moorish-style synagogues of the wealthy German Jews uptown.

In contrast to the relaxed and informal

Yiddish signs and advertisements dominated the narrow streets of the Lower East Side.

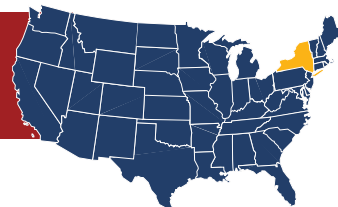


Photo credit: Peter Aaron/Esto



t Synagogue

Lower East Side, New York, NY



atmosphere that Beis Medrash HaGadol was known for, KAJ's leaders sought to maintain decorum during prayers: ushers patrolled the aisles, and members who argued with each other were barred from the shul. When it moved to its new building, the congregation also created a constitution, which it distributed to all the members in little handbooks. The message was clear: In America, even a shul was democratic, run by and for its members.

Many of the Lower East Side shuls used *chazzanim* to attract members, with the larger shuls competing for the best cantors. In 1887, after the completion of its grand new building, KAJ brought Cantor Pinchas Minkowsky and his choir to New York from the Great Synagogue in Odessa. He was paid the then-stunning salary of \$5,000 a year, about \$120,000 today. While choirs could be found in some of the larger cities in Europe, they were unheard of in the small *shtetlach* where most of the synagogue's members had grown up. This represented a strong status statement for the members.

While many synagogues on the Lower East Side secured Rabbis to lead their congregations as soon as they could find enough money to do so, the members of KAJ resisted hiring a Rav. They eventually did hire Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Rivkind, a noted *talmid chacham*, but as a *Maggid* and not a fully functioning Rabbi, to give daily *shiurim*

and a Shabbos sermon. He was not to call himself "Rav" of the shul, nor could he discuss political matters or even issue *Gittin* without permission from the president of the synagogue.

However, though KAJ was, in a sense, a modern synagogue, in many ways it served as a center of traditional Jewish culture on the Lower East Side. On Shabbos, many of the East Side's most famous *Maggidim* would speak at KAJ, drawing hundreds to their *drashos*, filling the cavernous synagogue to capacity. On the High Holidays, when even many of the most secular socialist Jews of the Lower East Side attended services, the Eldridge Street Synagogue held Jews at all levels of observance who bought expensive tickets to pray in its beautiful sanctuary and hear its world-renowned *chazzanim*.

The wealthy members of the shul were also leading donors to Etz Chaim, the only European-style *cheder* in the United States.

Like most Lower East Side synagogues, KAJ declined in the 1920s, as immigration from Europe slowed to a trickle and the second generation moved uptown to wealthier neighborhoods or simply lost interest in attending shul. By the 1950s, the magnificent building had fallen into serious disrepair

and the main sanctuary was almost unrecognizable. In the 1990s, the building was restored and is now open as both a synagogue and museum.



Cantor Pinchas Minkowsky



"This Shabbos, our chazzan davens"



Photographs courtesy of the Museum at Eldridge Street

The formal and orderly synagogue, as depicted in an American magazine article in 1890

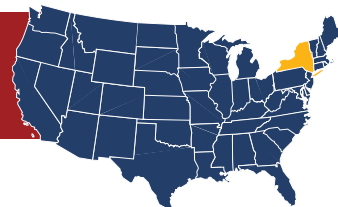
The Bialystoker Shul and Landsmannschaft



Top: The Bialystoker shul today

Bottom: Mazalei Kislev and Teves on either side of Kever Rochel



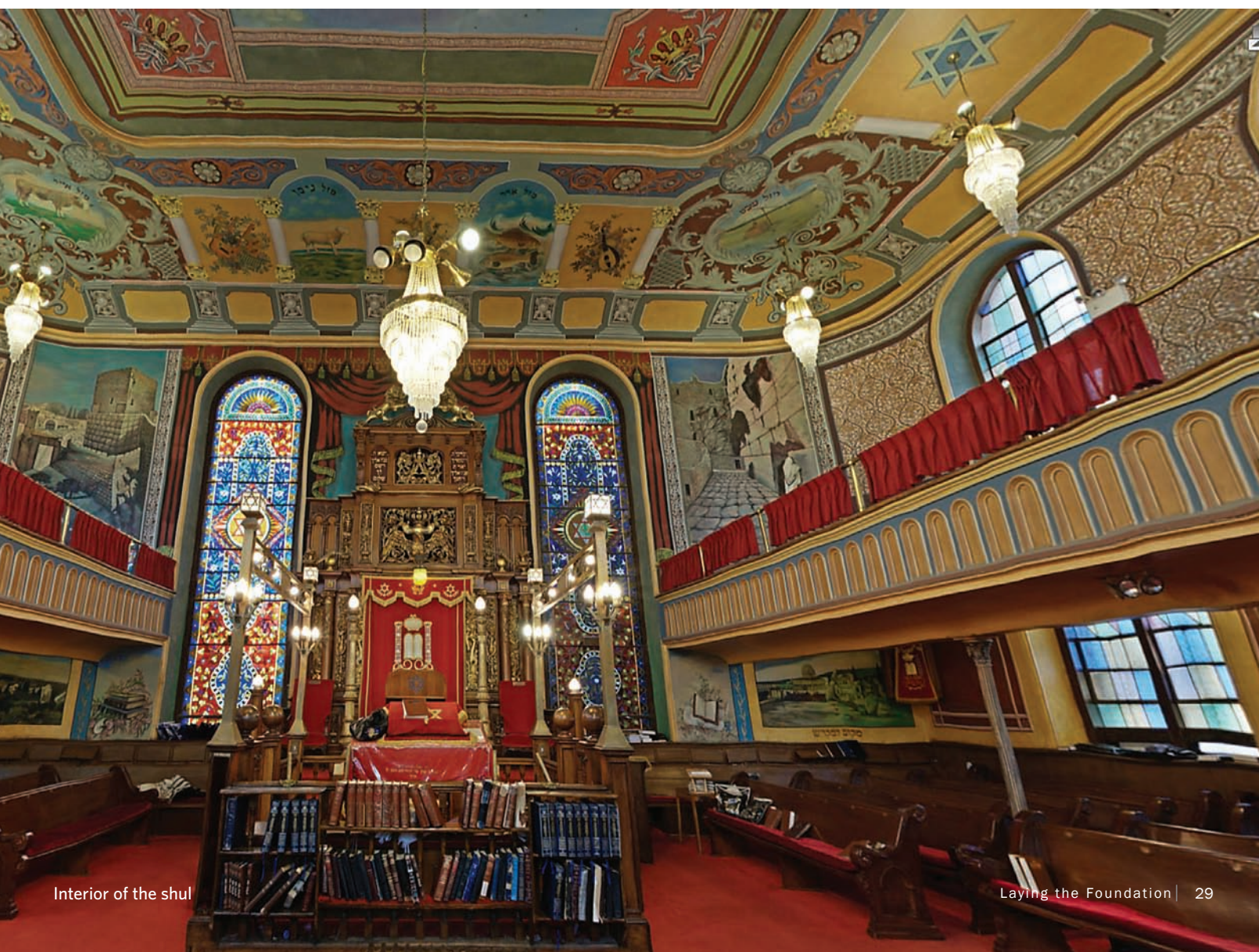


TWO SMALL SHULS OF *LANDSLEIT* from Bialystok merged in 1905 to establish the Bialystoker Synagogue. The *kehillah* bought an old church building and renovated it in accordance with the *minhagim* of Eastern Europe, adding a balcony and covering the shul's walls with scenes of Jerusalem and its ceiling with symbols of the zodiac (*mazalos*). On both sides of the *aron kodesh* were scenes of the Kosel and Migdal David. Eastern European shuls frequently were painted in this style.

The Bialystoker had many notable Rabbis, including Rav Yaakov Eskolsky and Rav Yitzhak Leib Epstein, both of whom wrote important *sefarim*.

In 1880, there were about 45,000–50,000 Eastern European Jews in America, many of them concentrated on the Lower East Side. That year, a series of pogroms in Poland and Ukraine sparked a much larger wave of Jewish immigration which, over

the next three decades, brought more than two million Jews to America's shores. Most started out on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, where they worked in garment factories. American culture — and especially the experience of being in New York, a metropolis the likes of which these *shtetl*-reared Yidden had never experienced in Europe — was very alien to these immigrants. Groups of *landsleit* from the same place in the old country would form *landsmannschaft* synagogues, like the Bialystoker Shul, where they could find comfort in the familiar language, foods, *minhagim* and friends of their old hometowns. *Landsmannschaften* would also dispense charity to members who were out of work or sick, and often had their own *chevrah*-based cemeteries. Most started out in storefronts or tenement attics and, as they grew, erected small buildings, but a few built great synagogues, such as the Bialystoker, Anshei Kalwarie ("The Pike Street Shul") and Chevrah Poel Tzedek Anshei Illia of Forsyth Street.



Interior of the shul

Landsmannschaft Synagogues (Continued)

Landsmannschaft shuls numbered in the hundreds, usually taking the name “Anshe” followed by their city of origin. There were a great variety of *landsmannschaften*, many of them devoted to Chassidic *minhagim*. By 1918, there were over 100 shuls that followed Chassidic customs, with the term “Sfard” usually appearing in their title. There were close to 20 known Chassidic Rebbes in New York, most famously Rav Yehoshua Segal, the Sherpser Rav, who formed his own organization of Chassidic synagogues on the Lower East Side.

By the 1910s, many second-generation Jewish youth began to lose interest in the traditional Eastern European-style *davening* and Yiddish of the *landsmannschaften*. Educated in public schools, many of them drifted towards the Conservative and Reform congregations in Manhattan, which offered more Americanized services led by rabbis who gave stirring English sermons. A group of Orthodox Rabbis in New York, affiliated with the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations (the OU), began to develop programming aimed at keeping these youth in the fold and, in 1913, the Young Israel movement was founded in the Anshei Kalwarie. The Young Israel started as a young people's prayer group that featured lectures on Jewish topics from leading English-speaking Orthodox Rabbis and leaders, such as Rabbis Bernard Drachman and Henry P. Mendes of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue. It played an important part in the birth of the Modern Orthodox movement.



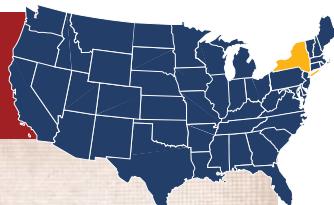
Top left: Anshe Kalwarie in the late 1800s.

Far left: Beth Hamedrash Hagadol Anshe Ungarn in the Lower East Side, as it looks today. Today, it's an apartment house.

Left: Chevra Ahavas Yeshuren-Sharei Torah on the Lower East Side. Today it's a community center.

Above: Adjoining shul at left is the former building Beth Hakneses Belbutover Congregation Anshei Polin. Today, a school. All of them were *landsmannschaften*.

Photo Credits: Mechon Kol Anyeh



IN THE 1820s, a new wave of Jewish immigrants began to arrive in the United States from Germany following the passing of restrictive legislation in the early 1800s. The poorer immigrants, mostly craftsmen and peddlers, felt uncomfortable in the high-status environment of Sephardic Shearith Israel. Moreover, they wanted to pray according to *minhag Ashkenaz*. In 1825, they founded B'nai Jeshurun according to German *minhagim*.

By 1880, there were about 230,000 Jews in the United States, many of them from Germany. As German-American Jews began to advance economically, especially after the Civil War, many synagogue communities began to embrace Reform Judaism. But while B'nai Jeshurun's members did move up the economic ladder, they continued to adhere to *halachah*. In 1849, the congregation brought over Rabbi Morris Raphall from England to serve as its first Rabbi. Following the practice of the new generation of American Rabbis, Raphall gave an English sermon, and like Shearith Israel's Chazzan Seixas, dressed like an American cleric. But he ardently opposed the Reform movement, and debated Reform leaders, arguing that *halachah* must remain central to Judaism even in a changing world. Rabbi Raphall successfully blocked all attempts to introduce reforms into B'nai Jeshurun.

During his tenure, B'nai Jeshurun became the largest synagogue in New York and raised a majestic new building on 34th Street in 1865 (on the land where Macy's stands today). Rabbi Raphall was the first Rabbi to open a meeting of Congress. However, after Rabbi Raphall passed away, the tide towards Reform proved very strong. The congregation began to abbreviate its prayers and soon introduced mixed seating. Today, the Upper West Side's B'nai Jeshurun is a Conservative synagogue.



Courtesy Yeshiva University Libraries



Courtesy Yeshiva University Libraries

Above: 1865, building on 34th Street
Left: 1827, Elm Street Synagogue
Below: Rabbi Morris Raphall



Kehillah Kedoshah Janina



KEHILLAH KEDOSHAH Janina is the only surviving Romaniote synagogue in the Western Hemisphere. It was founded in 1906 by immigrants from Ioannina, Greece, who met in members' houses before building a permanent synagogue in 1927 at 280 Broome Street in the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

In the early 1900s, almost 30,000 Sephardic Jews immigrated to America from Greece and Turkey. Among them was a small group of about 2,000 Romaniote Jews, descended from the Jews who lived in Greece before the arrival of the Sephardim. These Romaniote Jewish immigrants founded the Janina Synagogue. The community followed Talmud Yerushalmi and spoke a unique



Left: The Broome Street Synagogue

Above: A shofar carved in Janina

Top right: The Sefer Torah on the far left is one of the oldest surviving Romaniote sifrei Torah in the world.

Today, the congregation only meets on Shabbosos, but the synagogue is open as a museum of Romaniote Jewish history and life.



All photos courtesy Kehillah Kedoshah Janina

Kehillath Jeshurun



All images courtesy of Congregation Kehillath Jeshurun.

LIKE OHAB ZEDEK, the members of Kehillath Jeshurun, founded on the Lower East Side in 1873, were upwardly mobile, and in 1901 the cornerstone was laid for an ornate synagogue on the Upper East Side.

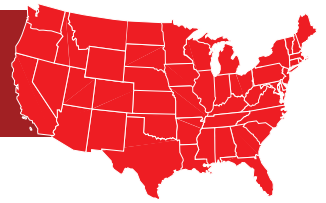
The Eastern European Jews who moved uptown were solidly upper-middle class, but were also only recently arrived from the *shtetl*. They did not want to surrender their traditional *minhagim* and the old-world tone of their services, but they also wanted to show their non-Jewish and German-Reform neighbors that they could maintain a decorous atmosphere of solemn dignity. Thus, while still on the Lower East Side, the congregation hired Rabbi Mordechai

Rabbi Yaakov Dovid Willovsky's *sefer*, *She'eilos u'Teshuvos Ridbaz*



Rabbi Moshe Zevulun Margolies, the Ramaz





Kaplan, a JTS graduate, to give a sermon in English each week to supplement the *drashos* of their European Rabbi, Meyer Peikes.

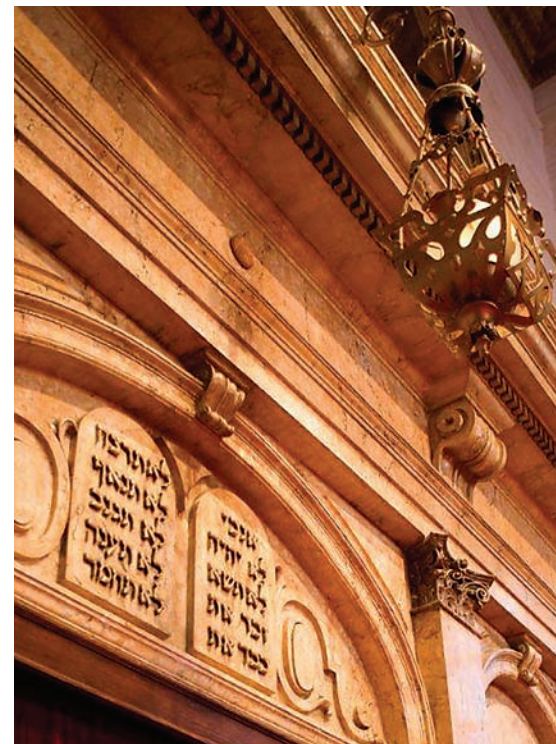
When the congregation opened its new building in 1903, they temporarily appointed Rabbi Yaakov Dovid Willovsky, the *Ridbaz*, as their Rav during the Yamim Nora'im. The *Ridbaz* was a vocal critic of Americanization and only took the job on condition that all the sermons, including Rabbi Kaplan's, would be in Yiddish.

After he left, Rav Moshe Zevulun Margolies, the *Ramaz*, was brought to Kehillath Jeshuran from Slabodka. Even those congregants who looked forward to Rabbi Kaplan's American-style sermons flocked to Rabbi Margolies' *shiurim*. The *Ramaz* became a force in the Agudath Harabbonim, and served for a few



years in the 1910s as *Rosh Yeshivah* of Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan, the first European-style *yeshivah* in America (without secular studies) for boys of high-school age and older. (It eventually added a secular college component and grew into Yeshiva University.)

Kehillath Jeshurun faced a problem that confronted the other uptown Orthodox congregations as well: the serious lack of educational institutions for Jewish children in New York City. Americanized congregants wanted their children to receive superior educations, and would only send their children to the city's best private schools, where many fell away from Orthodoxy. It wasn't until the 1930s that Kehillath Jeshurun founded one of the first yeshivah day schools, named for the *Ramaz*.



The First Hungarian Congregation Ohab Z

OHAB ZEDEK was founded in 1873 in a converted tenement space on the Lower East Side, a *landsmannschaft* for Hungarian Jews. The congregation grew and, in 1886, purchased a commanding building on Norfolk Street, originally built for the German congregation Anshe Chesed in the 1850s. The building had been the largest synagogue in New York when it was originally built, and Ohab Zedek was one of the first Eastern European shuls to pray in such a majestic structure. Western (*Oberländer*) Hungarian Jews usually followed German *minhagim*, and all the shul's business was conducted in that language.

In 1891, Rabbi Phillip Hillel Klein was brought over from Europe to become the congregation's first Rabbi. Rabbi Klein was a *musmach* of the German-Orthodox Hildesheimer Seminary in Berlin, and a grandson-in-law of Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Hirsch. Rabbi Klein was able to use his experience in Germany as well as the clout of his wealthy congregation to serve as an important leader of New York Orthodoxy.

In 1902, he was instrumental in founding the Agudath Harabbonim, an organization of New York's Eastern European Rabbanim, in an effort to control New York's kashrus and encourage *shemiras Shabbos* after the passing of the Chief Rabbi of New York, Rabbi Jacob Joseph. The organization used



Rabbi Phillip Hillel Klein



Rabbi Bernard Drachman

Credit: Cong. Ohab Zedek

Bottom: Ohab Zedek's 116th Street building in Harlem.

Right: Ohab Zedek's current building.

Far right: Interior of Ohab Zedek's current building.



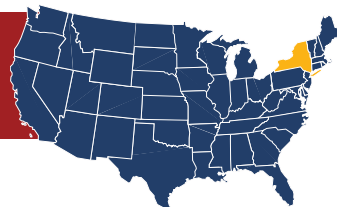


Photo credit: Chaim Steinberger

aggressive methods: it put dishonest butchers in *cherem* and worked with socialist labor unions to bargain for Saturdays off in New York's garment factories. Rabbi Klein was also a strong advocate of yeshivos — especially Etz Chaim, but also of the Rabbi Jacob Joseph School, which taught secular studies in addition to *limudei kodesh*.

Ohab Zedek was one of the first Eastern European synagogues of the Lower East Side to move uptown to the up-and-coming Jewish neighborhood of Harlem, in 1909. Rabbi Klein accommodated many of the Americanizing practices that the shul instituted uptown and agreed to have the congregation hire Rabbi Bernard Drachman, who was serving as Rabbi of another small Orthodox synagogue nearby, to give occasional English sermons. By then, children of the original members often did not understand Yiddish or German and changes were necessary to keep them in the fold.

Rabbi Klein, together with Rabbi Drachman, also founded the Vaad L'Shmiras Shabbos, which educated people about the importance of keeping Shabbos through its "*Shabbos Zhournal*," and helped thousands of immigrants find jobs that allowed them to be *Shomer Shabbos*.

Ohab Zedek was home to a number of great *chazzanim* and, in 1912, the synagogue recruited the famous Yossele Rosenblatt as its cantor.

In 1926, after Harlem's Jewish population had declined precipitously, Ohab Zedek moved to a grand brownstone building on West 95th Street on the Upper West Side, where it still resides today.



Photo credit: David Goldstein

Shearith Israel, “The Spanish and Portuguese

THE OLDEST SYNAGOGUE in the United States, the Spanish-Portuguese Shul traces its origins to 1654, when the first Jews arrived in what was then the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam on Manhattan Island. These 23 men were refugees, fleeing the Inquisition in the colony of Recife, Brazil, which had just been conquered by Portugal. The shul’s cemetery, located in today’s Chinatown, was then in the northernmost neighborhood of the city and dates back to 1682. The community also established a school, where it taught children *Chumash*, Hebrew, and arithmetic and writing.

Shearith Israel was run, as in Sephardic communities in Europe, by a *Mahmad* of community elders led by a *Parnass*. The *Mahmad* supervised the *mikveh*, cemetery, and *kashrus*. All Jews living in the vicinity of the city (then comprising only Manhattan) and as far out as New Jersey and the Catskills were members, and were buried in the community cemetery. Members who violated *halachah* were fined and, in the most severe cases, placed in *cherem*.

Although Shearith Israel remained faithful to *halachah* throughout its history, it did adapt to its new environment. Unlike the larger Sephardic communities of Curacao and Amsterdam, Shearith Israel was never able to afford its own *Chacham*, but after the American Revolution, its *Chazzan*, Gershom Mendes Seixas, took on many of the duties and dress of an American religious leader of the time, giving an English sermon every week, participating in national Thanksgiving celebrations, and using the title “Reverend.” Members also dressed like and socialized with the non-Jews around them.

During the Revolutionary War, Shearith Israel sided with the Patriots, and its members had to flee British-



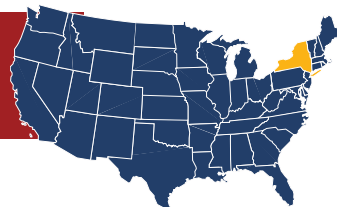
Below: Mill Street Chapel in the West 70th Street Synagogue, furnished with objects from the original seventeenth-century building



A seventeenth-century *menorah* from Holland that is still used today

ese Synagogue"

New York, NY



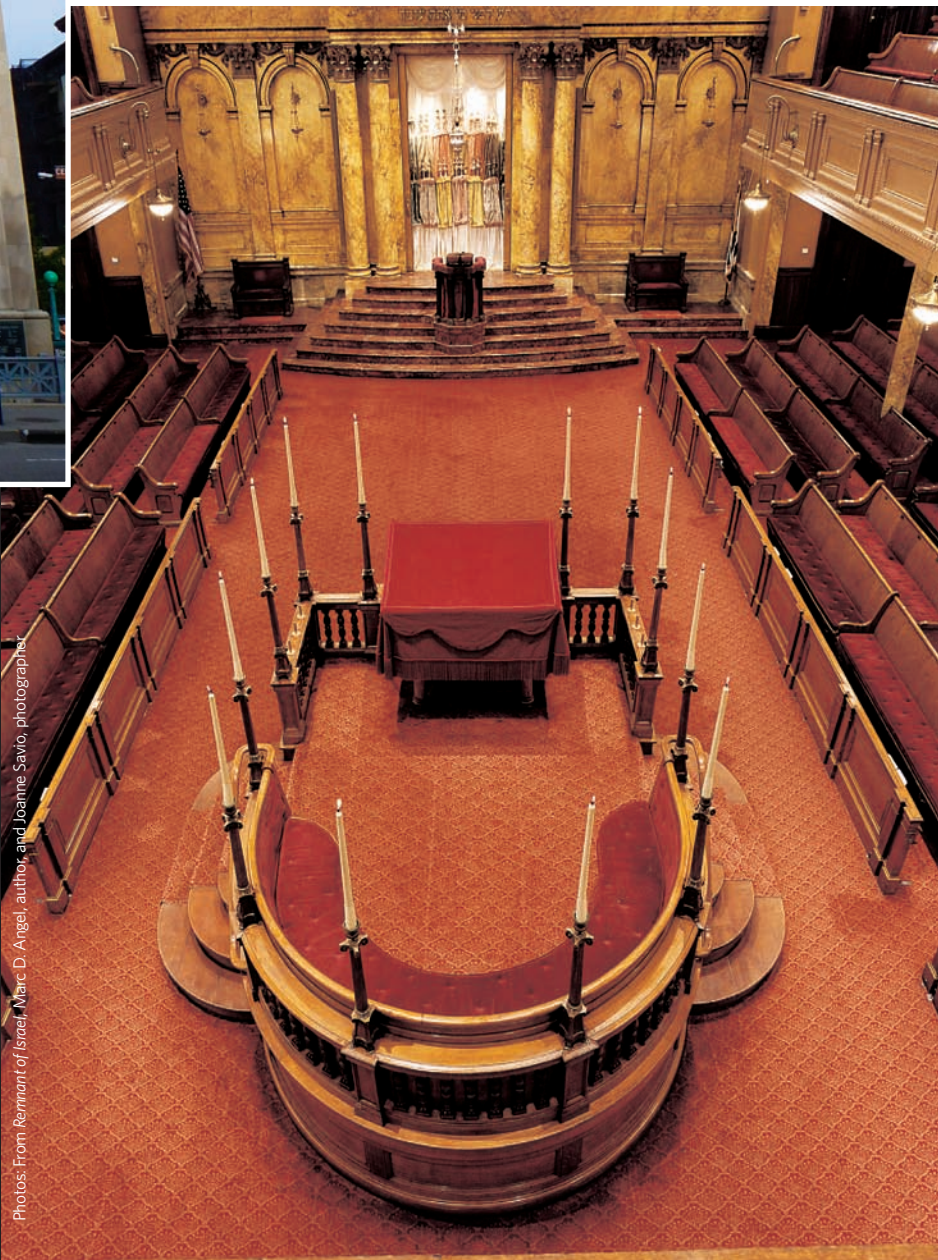
controlled New York for Philadelphia. English soldiers broke into the synagogue and vandalized the building, and slit one of the *Sifrei Torah* with their bayonets. After the war ended, Rev. Seixas was one of the religious leaders invited to speak at the inauguration of George Washington.

As time went on, it proved difficult to maintain the community's religious integrity. Most of the members of Shearith Israel were merchants in New York's thriving shipping industry and had extensive contact with non-Jews in their work and social lives. The community was also very small and lacked strong Jewish education. Abigail Franks, wife of the wealthy colonial merchant Jacob Franks, wrote a series of letters to her son Naphtali in England, warning him to be careful to *daven* every morning and eat only kosher food. However, many of the community's children failed to live by

these principles and assimilated into the Christian culture around them. By the 1810s, all of America's synagogues were on the decline and Shearith Israel's *Mahmad* had given up on fining people for halachic violations.

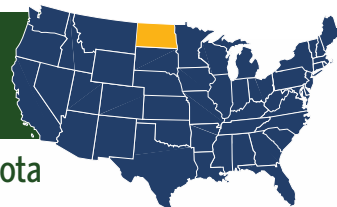
In the later nineteenth century, the *kehillah* was strengthened by the new wave of Jewish immigrants that came to New York from Germany, and even when almost all of New York's synagogues embraced Reform in the 1860s–70s, Shearith Israel remained Orthodox. Its Rabbi, Henry Pereira Mendes, came to be seen as the leader of American Orthodoxy, and founded the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations (the OU) in 1898, as a body of America's traditional synagogues aimed at countering the Reform influence.

The synagogue's commitment to Orthodoxy is also seen in the style of its building: By the late 1800s, it was considered most stylish among Reform synagogues from New York to Berlin to erect their new buildings in the Moorish style. Shearith Israel, however, chose a neoclassical design for its grand new building in 1890, emphasizing its difference from the city's other congregations and its loyalty to tradition.



Photograph by Nimrod Levy

Congregation of the Children of Israel/Bnai Israel



Grand Forks, North Dakota

IN APRIL 1891, after Rabbi Binyamin Papermeister arrived in the town of Grand Forks and offered his services to the community there, the *kehillah* established Congregation of the Children of Israel. Rabbi Papermeister had initially been sent to serve as a Rav in North Dakota by the Chief Rabbi of Kovno, Harav Yitzchak Elchanan Spector, in response to a request from the Jews of Fargo, North Dakota.

However, upon arriving in Fargo, Rabbi Papermeister realized that the community there was too small to support a Rav, and he moved to Grand Forks, where there was a growing community of 60 Jewish families. Rabbi Papermeister arrived in Grand Forks before Pesach and began his community service by leading a *Pesach Seder*. Excited and inspired by his arrival, the community established the shul shortly thereafter with Rabbi Papermeister as their Rav.

The *kehillah* turned next to building a proper home for the fledgling Congregation. Members undertook responsibility for raising the \$3,000 needed for this project. Some people even mortgaged their homes and peddled from wagons to help meet the cost of the

construction. In time for Rosh Hashanah of 1892, the congregation opened the doors to its impressive new shul which boasted a seating capacity of 300.

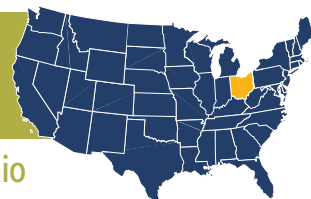
Over the years that followed, the congregation formed a strong, close-knit group and went on to establish a school, provide aid to new immigrants, and served as a beacon for Jews throughout North Dakota.

Rabbi Papermeister led the *kehillah* until his passing in 1934. After this point, the congregation dwindled, yet continued to serve the Jews of North Dakota. In 1937, it was renamed Congregation Bnai Israel. In the early 1990s, Bnai Israel joined the Reform movement.



Congregation Sherith Israel

Cincinnati, Ohio



CINCINNATI'S CONGREGATION SHERITH ISRAEL was founded in 1855 by members who, despite the strong shift to Reform that was taking place in the city, remained deeply committed to Orthodoxy. Rabbi Yissochar Dov Illowy, a disciple of the Chasam Sofer, one of America's outstanding Rabbanim, became its Rav in 1865.

Rav Illowy spent many years of his life combating the growth of Reform in America. After accepting the position in Cincinnati, he wrote to a friend about his great joy at having found a congregation that was strictly Orthodox and held *minyanim* three times a day. However, the many years of struggling and fighting for authentic *Yiddishkeit* throughout America left him physically exhausted and he was forced to retire after a short time. He passed away on his farm outside of Cincinnati in 1871.

The Sherith Israel building is located on Ruth

Lyons Way, near Walnut Street. It is the oldest existing shul building west of the Allegheny Mountains, the fourth-oldest building in downtown Cincinnati, and the seventh-oldest shul building in the United States.

The building was erected in 1860 and was used as an active shul until 1882. Thereafter, it was put to industrial use. The congregation merged with Congregation Ahabeth Achim in 1906.

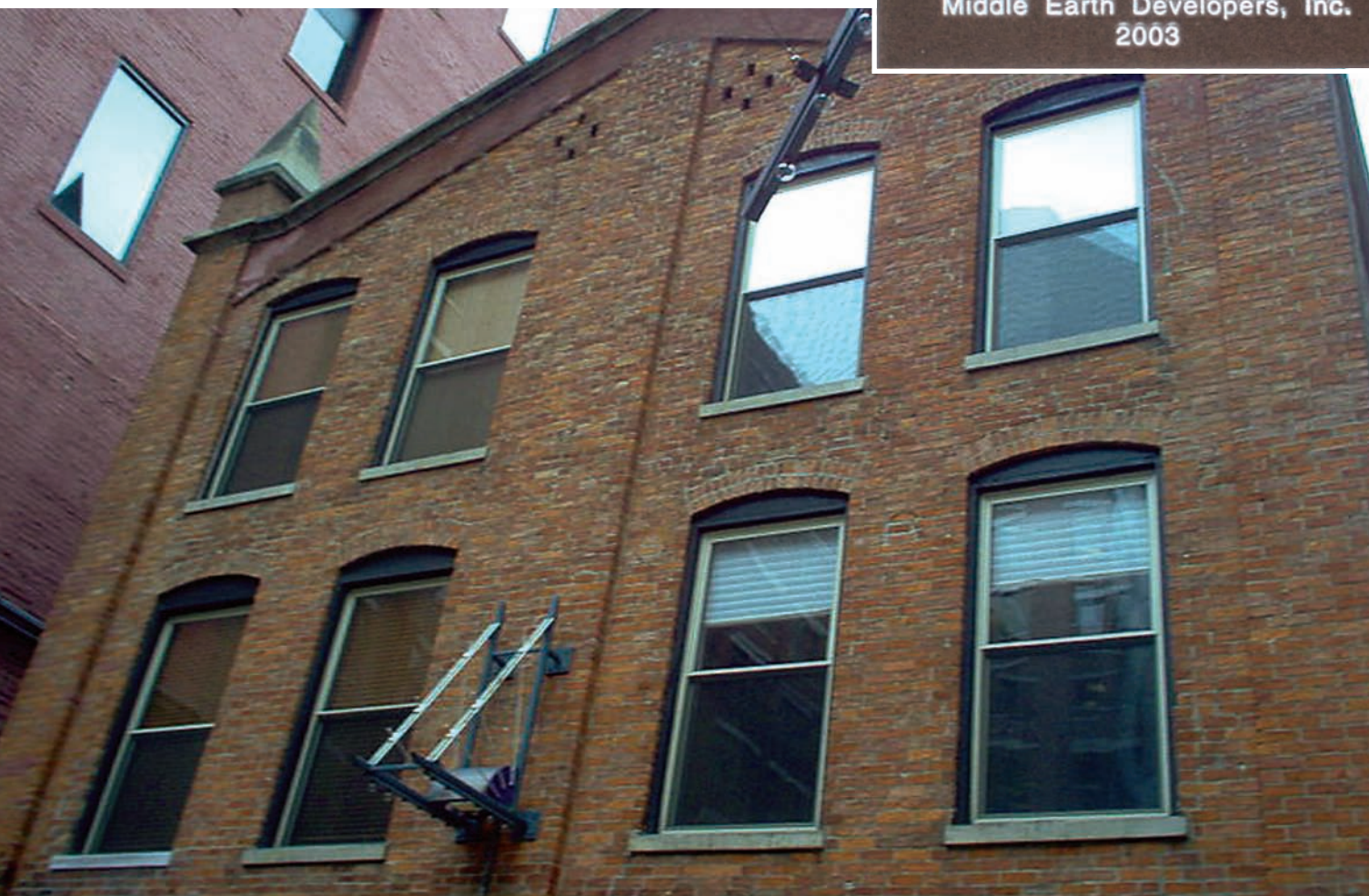


Rabbi Yissochar Dov Illowy

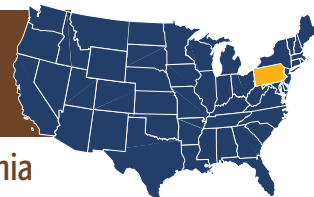
THE SHERITH ISRAEL TEMPLE
Built in 1860.

As a house of worship from 1861 to 1882, this building is believed to be the oldest existing synagogue west of the Allegheny Mountains.

Redeveloped by
Middle Earth Developers, Inc.
2003



Congregation Raim Ahuvim



Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

CONGREGATION RAIMAHUVIM was founded in 1892 in the Society Hill section of Philadelphia.

The founding members listed on the charter (which is displayed in the current shul) were recent immigrants who most likely shared a place of origin in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This would explain why the new shul called itself the "Austro-Hungarian Congregation Raim Ahivim." The fact that "Ahivim" was written with an "i" instead of the more commonly used transliteration of the Hebrew, "u", actually confirms that Hungarian Yiddish was spoken in their area of origin. In addition, with the exception of the vice-president, a Mr. Cohen, all names in the charter are German.

By 1895, about 30,000 Jews lived in South Philadelphia, most of them along the River wards south of Spruce Street. This neighborhood was sometimes called Philadelphia's "Lower East Side." The majority of these immigrants came from Russia and the Ukraine. By this time, no fewer than 45 synagogues of various fraternal *landsmannschaften* had sprung up in Society Hill and South Philadelphia.

At its founding, Congregation Raim Ahuvim was located at Bainbridge and Third Streets. It likely went through several incarnations in this area as a result of its members' economic success. Its last South Philadelphia address was at Gaskill and Fifth Streets. It is interesting to note that the first president of the shul, Samuel Kops, lived in Camden, New Jersey. To *daven* in his shul on Shabbos, he had to cross the Benjamin Franklin Bridge over the Delaware River.

Until today, Congregation Raim Ahuvim never has had a paid

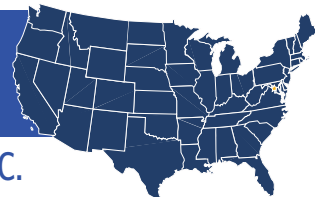
Rabbi; all Rabbis have been learned men who volunteered their services. This fact blends in with the tradition of the shul having been founded by a *chevrah* that banded together not only for the sake of "worshipping the Almighty G-d" but also "for beneficial purposes to its members in case of distress, sickness and death," as declared in its charter. The name "Raim Ahuvim," translated as "Loving Friends," reflects this social purpose perfectly. The name is also an obvious allusion to the city of Philadelphia ("City of Brotherly Love"). In the spirit of mutual care, the *chevrah* purchased an allotment of burial plots in the cemetery of Sharon Hill soon after its founding.

In the late 1920s, as the need for a mutual-support *chevrah* waned and many congregants eagerly fled the area in favor of better economic opportunities, Raim Ahuvim moved to West Philadelphia and attracted new members with diverse backgrounds from various European countries of origin. When this neighborhood underwent demographic changes during the 1950s, the congregation relocated to Wynnefield, a thriving Jewish neighborhood at that time. Raim Ahuvim continues to serve the Jews of Philadelphia today.

Hamodia thanks Rabbi Aryeh Botwinick for his assistance with this article.



Congregation Talmud Torah



Washington, D.C.

I SAAC POLOCK, a grandson of one of the founders of the community in Newport, Rhode Island, was the first Jew on record to settle in Washington, D.C. He settled there in 1795.

By the late 1800s, the influx of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe increased the Jewish population of the area to 4,000. Three Orthodox congregations were formed in the Southwest Washington area to accommodate the growing community. One of these was Congregation Talmud Torah.

Twenty-eight families who conducted daily *minyanim* in the neighborhood, beginning around 1890, constituted the nucleus of Talmud Torah. They first met in Levy's Busy Corner, a clothing store, on 4 ½ Street S.W., using a *sefer Torah* that Morris Garfinkle contributed to the *minyan*. Later, the group convened in various homes on 4 ½ Street, M Street, F Street and School Street. Their last meeting place before they moved to a permanent synagogue at 467 E Street S.W. was in the home of Samuel Kessler.

Chazzan Moshe Yoelson led the services from about 1892 through the 1920s. In 1912, Rabbi Moshe Aaron Horwitz assumed the *rabbanus* and served as Rav for the next 21 years, until his passing. The *kehillah* remained on E Street S.W. until a government redevelopment program forced them to leave this location in the early 1950s.

On July 7, 1958, Congregation Talmud Torah merged with Congregation Ohev Shalom, a *kehillah* that had been founded in 1886 by Russian immigrant Jews who fled the tyrannical rule of Czar Alexander III. After the merger, the Ohev Shalom

Talmud Torah Congregation boasted a membership of 600 families.

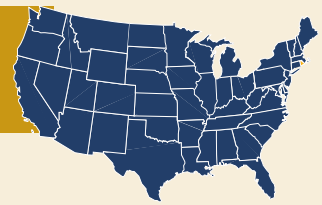
Today, the congregation has two branches, one in Olney, Maryland and one in Washington, D. C., which is known as the National Synagogue.



Photo credit: Washington Star Collection
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Touro Synagogue





Touro Synagogue Highlights

1822

Abraham Touro, son of Reverend Isaac Touro, leaves a fund of \$10,000 upon his death for the care and preservation of the synagogue. This is the earliest known bequest for the purpose of preserving an unoccupied historic building.

1854

Judah Touro, brother of Abraham Touro and son of Reverend Isaac Touro, passes away in New Orleans and is buried in Newport. In his will, Judah leaves \$10,000 to the state of Rhode Island as a trust fund for the care and preservation of the synagogue.

1883

The synagogue is permanently reopened when Jews from Central and Eastern Europe begin arriving in Newport.

1946

In recognition of its architectural and historical significance, Touro Synagogue is made a National Historic Site and part of the National Park System by an Act of Congress. The synagogue is the fourth religious edifice to be designated as a National Historic Site, not federally owned.

2001

The National Trust for Historic Preservation selects Touro Synagogue to become a part of its collection of historic sites.

2005

Touro Synagogue closes to services and regularly scheduled tours for a major restoration of the building.

2006

On January 1, 2006, the last day of Chanukah, members of the congregation join together for the lighting of the *Ner Tamid* (Eternal Light). On May 28, Touro Synagogue is formally rededicated and visitors are once again able to experience the beauty of the synagogue in much the way members of the congregation had over 200 years earlier.

2007

The Touro Synagogue Foundation and Congregation Jeshuat Israel are presented with the 2007 Rhode Island Historic Preservation Project Award.

2009

The Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr. Visitors' Center opens in August 2009.

DURING THE DARK DAYS of the Spanish Inquisition and the subsequent expulsion of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, which began in 1492, many Jews sought refuge in the newly founded colonies of Central America. As the Inquisition followed the settlers, they sought shelter in North America, in places such as New Mexico and southern California.

In 1654, the first recorded group of Jews to settle in what was to become the United States arrived in New Amsterdam from Recife, Brazil. Four years later, in 1658, Roger Williams launched his "Lively Experiment," separating church from state and promising freedom of religious conscience. A group of 15 Sephardic Jews, attracted by this promise of tolerance, settled in Newport and founded Congregation Jeshuat Israel.

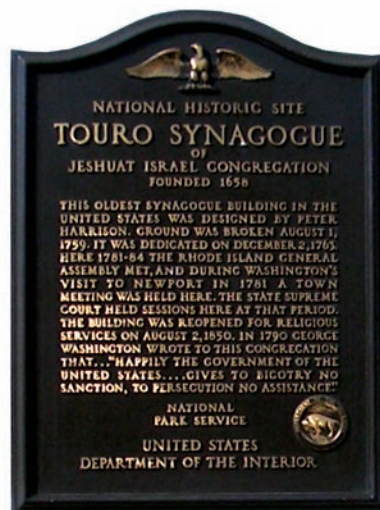
The community in Newport flourished, and in 1758, Isaac Touro, a Dutch Jew, became its first spiritual leader. In 1759, the congregation broke ground for a magnificent building, which was finally completed in 1763.

In 1776, during the American Revolution, the British occupied Newport and destroyed much of the city and its seaport. Most Jews joined the exodus from the crippled city. However, Isaac Touro remained behind and convinced the British to use the building as a hospital, thereby saving the shul from ruin.

In response to a letter from the *kehillah* expressing support for the new government and its first president, President George Washington composed an historic letter of American tolerance, stating that "the Government of the United States... gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance... May the children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid."

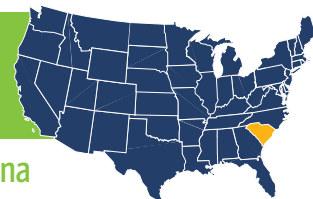
When Isaac Touro's son Abraham passed away in 1822, he left a fund dedicated to preservation and care of the synagogue. As Newport's Jewish population dwindled, the shul was used only intermittently until 1883, when it was reopened due to the influx of Jews from Central and Eastern Europe.

In subsequent years, the synagogue again fell into disuse, except as a historic landmark. In 2006, it was rededicated as a shul, and today it is home to regular *minyanim* once again.



Kahal Kadosh Beth Elokim

Charleston, South Carolina



THE CITY OF CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA was founded in 1670, and there have been references to Jews living there as early as 1695. Jews were attracted to South Carolina by its civil and religious liberties as well as its economic opportunities. In 1749, Charleston's Jews organized a *kehillah*, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elokim (KKBE). Fifteen years later, they established the historic Coming Street Cemetery, the oldest surviving Jewish burial ground in the South.

During its first years, the *kehillah* held services in private homes. In 1775, an improvised shul was established, but by 1792, the community was able to dedicate the largest and most impressive shul ever built in the United States. Newspaper reports written at the time describe the building as "spacious and elegant." Unfortunately, this beautiful synagogue burned to the ground in Charleston's great fire of 1838. Two years later it was replaced by another building on the same site.

One of the most prominent early members of the congregation was Moses Lindo, who helped to develop the cultivation of indigo (colonial South Carolina's second-largest crop), and Joseph Levy, who fought in the Cherokee War of 1760–61 and was probably the first Jewish military officer in America. More than 20 members of the congregation served in the War of Independence, including Francis Salvador, who was

a delegate to the South Carolina Provincial Congresses of 1775 and 1776, and was the first Jew to serve in an American legislature. Tragically, Salvador was killed shortly after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the first Jew known to die in the Revolutionary War.

Charleston's Hebrew Benevolent Society, the nation's oldest Jewish charitable organization, was founded by members of this congregation, in 1784. In addition, members of KKBE founded the Hebrew Orphan Society, the country's oldest orphan society, in 1801. Both of these organizations are still active today. The second-oldest Jewish Sunday school in the United States was organized in KKBE in 1838.

Other congregants pioneered in steamship navigation and introduced illuminating gas to American cities. Four of the eleven founders of the country's Supreme Council of Scottish Rite Masonry were KKBE members.

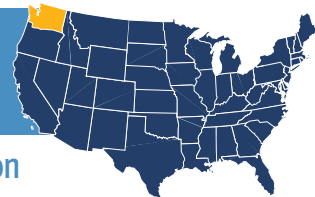
In 1790, President George Washington responded to a letter of congratulations written by the congregation. A replica of this letter can be viewed in the KKBE Museum.

In 1873, KKBE became one of the founders of Reform Judaism in America. Its building, the second-oldest synagogue building in the United States and the oldest in continuous use, was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1980.



Photos courtesy of Congregation Kahal Kadosh Beth Elokim

Sephardic Bikur Holim



Seattle, Washington

IN 1902, TWO YOUNG TURKISH SEPHARDIC JEWS, Solomon Calvo and Jacob Policar, landed in Seattle, Washington. The local Jewish population was composed of Ashkenazim, who found it hard at first to believe that Calvo and Policar were Jewish, in light of the fact that they did not speak Yiddish. Soon enough, though, the newcomers were fully accepted and paved the way for their friends and relatives to join them in Seattle. After worsening conditions in the Ottoman Empire spurred a Levantine exodus, by 1907 there were more than 50 Sephardim living in Seattle.

The Turkish immigrants formed a cultural group that shared memories of their native land and conversed in Ladino, a Judeo-Spanish vernacular for Sephardic Jews. In 1910, they officially incorporated the Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation, a shul that served as a stronghold for their unique culture. The Congregation took on a central importance in their lives; its Rabbis were treated with much honor and deference and the lay leaders executed their responsibilities with distinction. The women formed a vibrant Ladies' Auxiliary that played an active role in communal affairs.

In the early years, the members met on Shabbosos for *davening* in a small room adjacent to the Ashkenazic Bikur Cholim. However, for the Yamim Nora'im, when the number of *mispallelim* increased, they rented rooms in the Washington Hall. On one memorable occasion in 1913, the manager of the hall came in one hour before the end of the Yom Kippur *davening* and informed

the assembled that they needed to leave so that the hall could be prepared for a dance that evening! Immediately thereafter, the community turned to raising funds for a building. When the Ashkenazic Bikur Cholim began erecting its own new shul, the Sephardim purchased the vacated quarters for their sanctuary.

In 1928, they erected a new, larger building on 20th and East Fir Street, and managed to complete the synagogue before Rosh Hashanah 1929, just weeks before the onset of the Great Depression. This building was occupied until 1968.

The Congregation's first Rabbi was Ribi Shelomo Azose, who was brought over from Turkey. He served as *shochet*, *chazzan*, and *mohel*, as well as devoted spiritual leader, until his passing in 1919. He was succeeded by his brother, Rabbi Isaac Azose, who filled the post until 1924. At that point, Rabbi Abraham Maimon, the rabbi of the Tekirdag Sephardim in Turkey, was invited to Seattle. Rabbi Maimon's strong leadership stemmed a growing tide of assimilation and brought many back to Orthodox practice. In 1944, his son, Rabbi Solomon Maimon, became Rav and was instrumental in establishing many of today's Orthodox institutions in Seattle, including the Seattle Hebrew Day School and the Seattle Community Kollel. Rabbi Solomon Maimon faithfully served Sephardic Bikur Holim for over 50 years.

This vibrant *kehillah* continues to follow the traditions and customs brought from Turkey by its founders over 100 years ago.

Hamodia thanks Mr. Eli Genauer for his help.

Sephardic Bikur Holim,
built in 1929



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