

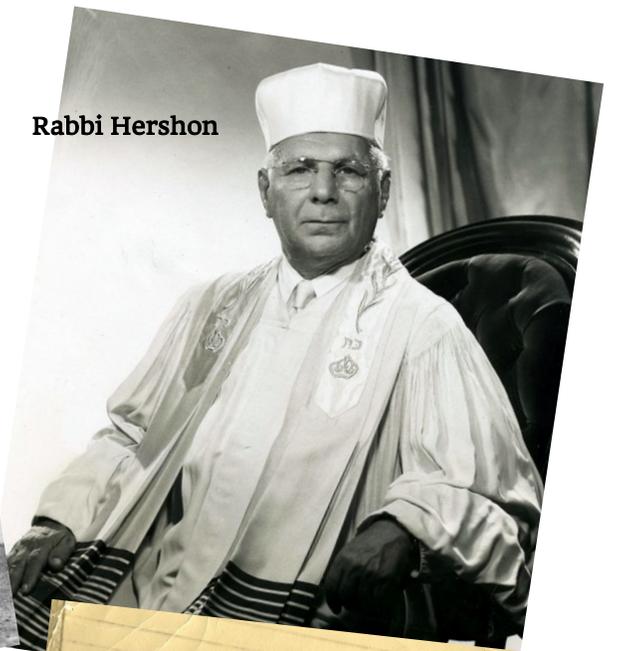


**A HISTORY OF CONGREGATION B'NAI ISRAEL
RUMSON, NEW JERSEY
THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS**

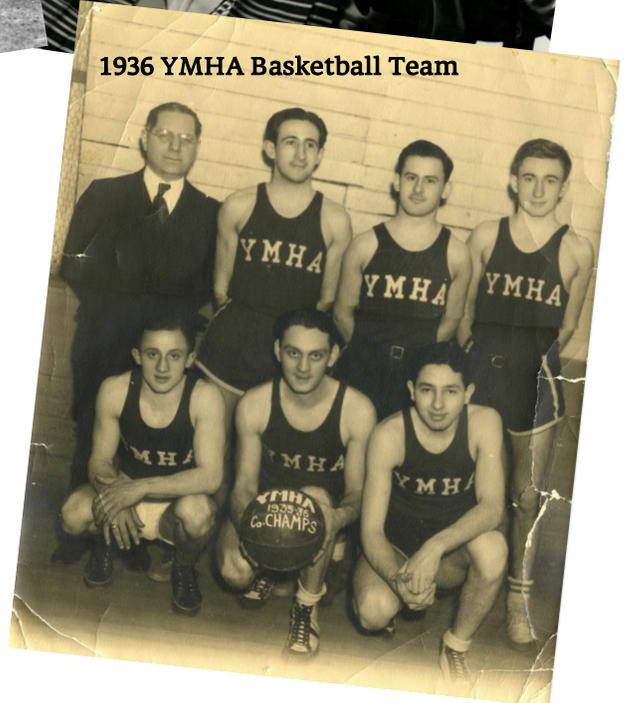
Rabbi Douglas Sagal
Rabbi Emeritus Jack M. Rosoff D.D.
Cantor Emerita Marla J. Barugel
Gabbai Emeritus Colonel George Price z"l
Richard Semaya, Gabbai
Emilie Kovit-Meyer, Executive Director
Barbara Newman Rosen, President



1958 Torah processional leaving Riverside Avenue for Hance Road, Rumson.



Rabbi Hershon



1936 YMHA Basketball Team



2019 Simchat Torah



2019 Chanukah



2020 Wedding



Rabbi's Message

Dear CBI family

On the 5th of January, 1922 a group of Jewish men gathered to officially charter Congregation B'nai Israel. They were observant Jews, and it was likely that they had all heard these words from *parashat Vayiggash* which was read that Thursday morning. “*Vayaasu keyn B'nai Yisrael*” (Gen 45:21). Translation: **And so B'nai Israel did.** Yes, you read that right, the phrase “B'nai Israel” appeared in the very Torah portion read the day of the founding.

Did these men proudly speak that passage from the Torah portion as they signed the charter and celebrated the incredible moment? We don't know.

But what B'nai Israel did that day has reverberated through the decades to this moment. For a century, an entire community has been nurtured, educated, spiritually moved, and uplifted. Countless weddings, b'nai mitzvah, brisses, and moments to remember our departed. **And so B'nai Israel did..**

Now we embark on the next 100 years, and we are the custodians of that future. What we do now will help determine the shape of the Jewish community of the future. We take upon ourselves the holy task of caring for our community; nurturing, educating, lifting up, and accompanying during the most sacred moments of life.

And so we go forward into a wonderful future.

Shalom

Rabbi Doug Sagal



President's Message

Looking Back and Moving Forward...

As we turn the calendar to January, we often reflect on the past and anticipate what lies ahead. It is surely no different this year. Yet, in the history of our Congregation, the year 2022 brings a particular rush of emotion and excitement. Congregation B'nai Israel, founded in 1922, will celebrate its Centennial Anniversary, and we are all so privileged and delighted to share this spectacular moment in time. From our honored Golden Members who remember the sanctuary on Riverside Avenue, to our most welcome newest members who learn of our 40 Founding Families holding services above their Red Bank shops, it is remarkable and humbling to be part of a community and landmark institution founded a century ago!

We walk together in the footsteps of generations of Jewish tradition...Torah, mitzvot, values and culture, tzedakah, and social action. Today our synagogue represents the dedication and commitment of our inspiring legacy of leaders, as well as the enthusiasm, energy, and potential to continue that proud legacy today. We look back in gratitude, and, as a community and family, we move forward to a bright future for our children and grandchildren.

Mark your calendar for our spectacular 100th Anniversary celebration on November 12, 2022; and join the 2nd Century Campaign and events throughout the year as we recognize this milestone in the history of our Congregation. We, too, can leave our mark for future generations to continue to tell our story.

Happy Anniversary and Shalom,
Barbara Newman Rosen, President
January 2022



Message from Al & Robin Zager

Dear Friends,

We feel blessed to serve as Co-Chairs of the Second Century Campaign for our Congregation's Endowment. The history presented in this Special Edition of the Bulletin provides fascinating insight into our Congregation's story. But it is just an overview that would take volumes to tell in detail. The generations who came before us devoted their time, energies and funds to build and expand a spiritual home that our founders could only imagine. We are all the grateful beneficiaries of their efforts.

As we contemplate our Congregation's 100th Anniversary year and look to the future, we are committed to creating a new component of our Endowment Fund. The Second Century Fund is specifically designated to provide annual support for the purpose of **“strengthening our community engagement, investing in the Jewish education of our children, and growing our membership.”** This three-fold mission has been unanimously approved by our Board of Trustees and our Endowment Committee. And, as a demonstration of their personal support, members of these leadership groups, including Rabbi Sagal, have very generously pledged gifts to the Campaign.

We encourage you to view a specially produced 4-minute video about the history of Congregation B'nai Israel and the Second Century Campaign at this [LINK](#). Early in 2022, members of our Steering Committee and other Campaign volunteers will reach out to you to discuss this unique opportunity to lay a foundation for the next 100 years.

We stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us. It is now our turn to secure a strong financial foundation for future generations!

Sincerely,

Robin and Al Zager, Co-Chairs
Second Century Campaign

A History of Congregation B'nai Israel, Rumson, New Jersey

The First Hundred Years

The Embryonic Era:

Between 1905 and 1922, about 40 Jewish families settled in Red Bank, which was becoming a commercial center.

The town's economic growth was largely associated with the legendary Eisner Uniform Factory founded and owned by Sigmund Eisner, a Jewish immigrant from Bohemia, who arrived there in the 1880's. During the Spanish-American War, he was awarded a contract for uniforms for the United States Army. During World War I, his business was recognized as the largest uniform manufacturing company in the world.

The newly arrived Jewish immigrants, many of whom came from Sigmund Eisner's home area, made their living as employees of the Eisner Factory or as tradesmen, craftsmen, and merchants in town. The factory building on Bridge Avenue and West Front Street is still in use today as The Galleria.

To maintain and pass on their cultural and religious traditions, in 1905, the immigrants founded the first Jewish organization in Red Bank, the Hebrew Mutual Society. They purchased land for a cemetery in Tinton Falls as a final resting place for the deceased. They held religious services in the home of Simon Siegfried at the corner of McLaren and William Streets. They also provided financial assistance and charity to needy members.

In 1908 the group's name was changed to Agudas-Achim of Red Bank, and a goal was added-- to raise funds for the establishment of a synagogue. In 1914, following a dispute over internal matters, some members left the group and formed another organization known as Ahavat Shalom.

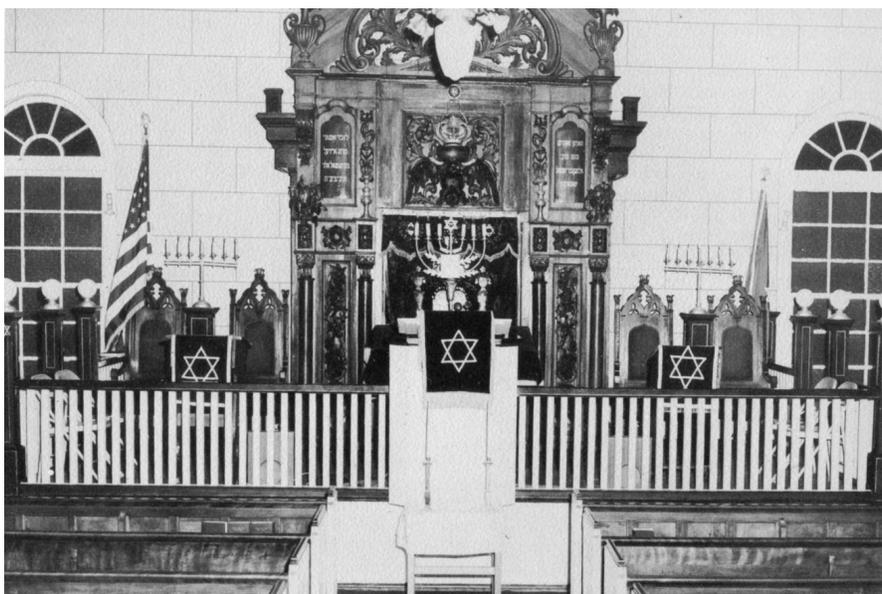
The formation of Ahavat Shalom is recorded in the Yiddish Minutes of its board meetings in the years 1914-1917. On April 2, 1914, thirteen men "gathered at the house of Mr. Rosen on West Front Street for the purpose of founding a spiritual center - a synagogue and a Talmud Torah (religious school), to be named Ahavat Shalom of Red Bank." Also recorded are the unsuccessful attempts of the two groups to reunite.

The Birth of Congregation B'nai Israel:

"On January 5, 1922 a meeting of the Congregation B'nai Israel was held at the Town Hall" (in Red Bank). This is the opening sentence of the minutes taken at that meeting, the purpose of which was to elect the Congregation's officials. The minutes are in English, and the recording secretary is Michael Silberstein (Dave Silberstein's and Mimi Friedman's father). Most of the approximately 35 men attending were members of the original two groups.

A few days later, the first official congregational meeting was held in the temporary synagogue on top of the Kridel Store, at the corner of Broad and Front Streets in Red Bank. The meeting's attendees made the decision to purchase a building at 10 Riverside Avenue, Red Bank, and to renovate it as a synagogue.

Alice, daughter of actively involved original member Max Mindlin, recalled that there had been "ambivalent feelings in Red Bank toward the sale of a house for use as a synagogue. To avoid animosity from unsympathetic factions in town," the title to the property was taken by Mr. Mindlin. On January 23, 1922, Mr. Mindlin and Mr. Quinn, a Red Bank attorney, went to New York City "to see that the property we are purchasing is transferred legally." The next day the title to 10 Riverside Avenue was transferred to Congregation B'nai Israel.



Riverside Avenue Pulpit

Sigmund Eisner was appointed the first Honorary President of Congregation B'nai Israel in appreciation for his outstanding generosity and support.

The Congregation began its operations with a membership of 40 families. The members formed a Board of Education and Religious, Finance, House, and Building Committees. Dr. L. Joshua Weiner was hired as the Congregation's first official Rabbi. There were 40 students in the Sunday school and 20 in the Hebrew School. A youth group was launched as Boy Scout Troop 60, and a Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA) and a Young Women's Hebrew Association (YWHA) were organized.

In 1924, Rabbi Nathan Witkin became the Congregation's spiritual leader. By 1925, membership reached 100 families.

In 1932, Rabbi Arthur Hershon was named spiritual leader. He led the congregation for 27 years.

The Depression and Pre-World War II Years:

The 1930's saw the rise of Nazism. Neither the Red Bank Jewish community nor the rest of American Jewry were fully aware of the horrors that lay ahead. But the alarm and concern were there. In 1934, the lay leadership of the Congregation held a major fund-raising event for the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), two organizations that were aiding the agonized European Jewry. Non-Jewish members of the local community were invited to the event and contributed to the cause.

In 1938, on the eve of World War II, Rabbi Hershon was a guest speaker at several local churches, a practice he continued throughout his years with the Congregation.

During the 1930's, the Congregation voted to open its religious schools to all Jewish children, whether or not their parents were members.



1935 Sunday School Portrait

Those were also the years of the Great Depression. By August 1936, some members (many of whom had been active in various leadership roles) were unable to pay the dues. Several had to resign, but most rejoined in subsequent years.

David Cohen, one of the first children of the Congregation and a former Mayor of Holmdel, remembered the 1930's as a time of "a good Jewish childhood." He reflected, "...We all went to *Cheder* (religious school) two afternoons a week for about an hour after school. We all walked from wherever we lived - in fair weather and foul. After all, both of our parents worked hard at earning our keep and didn't have time to drive us around.... It was a synagogue where everyone knew everyone else and went out of their way to help each other in the only way they knew how - by giving of themselves. It made for a good Jewish childhood."

The World War II Years and the Birth of Israel:

No event in modern Jewish history was more traumatic than the Holocaust. Following the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, World War II broke out. Soon thereafter the family of Dr. Heyman arrived in Red Bank from Germany, having successfully escaped. They were welcomed by the Congregation, which they soon joined. In 1941, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, America entered the war.

In 1944, the Congregation purchased U.S. Savings Bonds as part of the war fund drive. War hit home in December 1944 when Lt. Morton Greenblatt, son of members of the Congregation, was killed on duty.

During and after the war years, there were many Jewish servicemen at nearby Fort Monmouth. Rabbi Hershon was the Fort's chaplain, and members of the Congregation often provided the servicemen with hospitality and entertainment.



1948 Purim Ball at the Molly Pitcher Inn

Marty Ides recalled the life of a Jewish child in Red Bank during that period. "...My friends and I lived within a few blocks of each other and were inseparable. We walked from the Mechanic Street School, Red Bank, to the synagogue... There were many distractions along the way... We usually made a stop at my father's store on West Front Street for some necessary nourishment in the form of potato chips...and soda. Then, of course, there was the ever-present attraction of the Navesink River. There was always something to see at the river - ice boating, skating, and eeling in the winter; sailing and fishing in warm weather. Finally, when we arrived for our Hebrew School class, we were met by a stern disciplinarian, another job performed by the Rabbi. Fortunately for us, his displeasure for our tardiness was usually directed toward his own offspring."



1949 Mothers' Day

In February 1948, Rabbi Hershon returned from the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) Convention in Atlantic City with the motto: "Empty the camps of Europe!" This was in reference to Displaced Persons Camps that housed Holocaust survivors. The Congregation's response was remarkable in providing significant monetary support.

The Congregation has always identified with *k'lal Israel* (the whole of the Jewish people). This has been expressed in its exemplary commitment to UJA, which only grew more in the years that followed. In 1949, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt came to Congregation B'nai Israel in Red Bank to speak at the opening ceremonies for the UJA Women's Division drive.



Fanny Benowitz, Geraldine Thompson, Rose Ashin, Claire Roman, Eleanor Roosevelt, unidentified woman, Vivianne Meistrich, Ida Hershon

On May 14, 1948, inside the crowded auditorium of the Tel Aviv Museum, David Ben Gurion read Israel's Declaration of Independence. Immediately after, President Harry S. Truman announced the United States' *de facto* recognition of the new State. And in Red Bank, at Congregation B'nai Israel, a special celebration was held to herald the establishment of the State of Israel. All Jewish merchants in town closed their stores to mark the historic event.

Israel would become a major focus and a unifying force for the American Jewish community as a whole and to the Congregation. The connection and commitment to the Jewish State has deepened the community's sense of Jewish identity and enriched its life.

The Wonder Years:

Servicemen returning from Europe after the war drew attention to the fact that most of European Jewry had been destroyed. In response, there was a proliferation of new congregations throughout the United States and a rise in memberships in existing ones, including Congregation B'nai Israel.

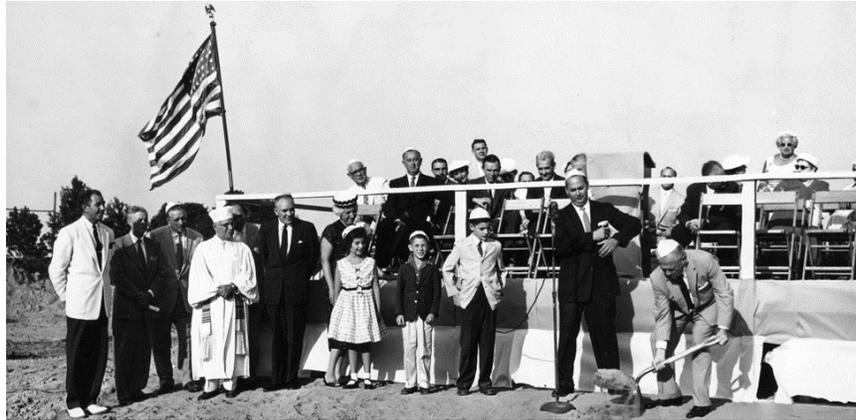
Membership at Congregation B'nai Israel reached 275 families by 1952. It was bustling with spiritual and social activities, and it was thoroughly engaged in all facets of the Jewish and American experience. It was becoming clear that the Congregation had outgrown its home on Riverside Avenue in Red Bank.



1953 Bat Mitzvah Class

The Congregation established committees to plan all aspects of a move. At the November 1955 Board of Trustees meeting, William Klatsky, Esq., reported that “the Borough of Rumson had granted the Congregation a variance to erect a synagogue, a religious center, an educational institution, and a Sunday School at Hance and Ridge Roads.”

In May 1958, the new synagogue in Rumson was completed and dedicated.



Groundbreaking for Rumson building. Charles Komar turning the first shovel of dirt.

Congregation B'nai Israel had been the only Jewish religious organization in the Red Bank area. That changed in 1955 when 30 families, mostly former members of Congregation B'nai Israel who leaned towards Orthodoxy, founded Congregation Beth Shalom in Red Bank. Upon its move to Rumson, Congregation B'nai Israel presented Congregation Beth Shalom with the Ark (the cabinet in which Torahs are kept when not being read) from its former home on 10 Riverside Avenue. In their thank-you note, Congregation Beth Shalom members expressed their "hope for cooperation in our mutual aim for furtherance of Judaism in Red Bank and the surrounding area."

Also, in March 1959, 29 families formed a new congregation in the Red Bank area, eventually to be known as Monmouth Reform Temple.

1959 was an exciting year for Congregation B'nai Israel. Rabbi Hershon retired and became Rabbi Emeritus. Rabbi Gilbert Rosenthal became spiritual leader, and Cantor Sidney Scharff was engaged as a Cantor-Teacher. Membership rose to 380 families.

1960's – Baby Boomers Grow Up, the World Turns Upside-Down, and Congregation B'nai Israel Booms:

President Kennedy, in his inaugural address in 1961, called for "a New Frontier." His optimism could not have predicted the violence and turmoil that lay ahead. In 1963, he was assassinated. In 1968, his brother and presidential candidate Robert Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. were also assassinated.

By mid-decade, race riots raged in major cities, and student protests against America's involvement in the Vietnam War swept campuses throughout the country. In 1967, after years of terrorist activities on Israel's borders, and in the wake of Egypt's blockade of the Straits of Tiran, Israel was drawn into the Six-Day War.

The "sixties" became synonymous with youth rebellion, a search for new directions, social activism and protest rallies. For Jews, it was also a time to reaffirm Jewish values and identity. The American Jewish community's commitment to its heritage, to Israel, and to the beleaguered Soviet Jewry lent purpose and order in a world beset by chaos and discontent.

At Congregation B'nai Israel, the challenges of the "sixties" required special focus on its youth. In June 1964, Rabbi Jack M. Rosoff, who had served as the Jewish chaplain at Fort Monmouth, was engaged as the spiritual leader of the Congregation. His concern for the Congregation's youth was evident soon after he assumed office. He developed a highly successful high school educational program, and his wife, Dr. Barbara Rosoff, would later become the principal of the religious school.



Dr. Barbara Rosoff (back row left) and Rabbi Rosoff (back row right) with 1996 Graduates

Alongside the high school religious school program, the Red Bank Chapter of United Synagogue Youth (USY) evolved into a dynamic, multi-faceted program for the Congregation's teenagers under the wise, innovative, and inspiring leadership of Dr. Seymour (Sy) Siegler, and his wife, Marilyn.

Al Zager (one of the USY members of the period) recalled the "USY section" at Friday night services "in the right rear portion of the sanctuary.... We probably sat there erroneously thinking that the Rabbi and Cantor couldn't hear us whispering to each other during services.... Joel Scharff, the Cantor's youngest son, was in our group and I think he helped sense for the group what his father and the Rabbi would allow. We often went around the corner after services to the Siegler's home on Hunting Lane for an *Oneg Shabbat* (refreshments following Friday night Sabbath services). The apple cider Marilyn served so often somehow tasted better than any other cider...."

Al also remembers the USY trip on Opening Day of the 1964 World's Fair at Flushing Meadows, Queens, NY. "We arrived when the gates first opened in the morning, and I remember how much it looked like a fairyland because the perfectly manicured landscaping had not yet been trampled by the crowds yet to come. The next day three members of our group were pictured in *The New York Times* photos of the first Sunday of the Fair...."

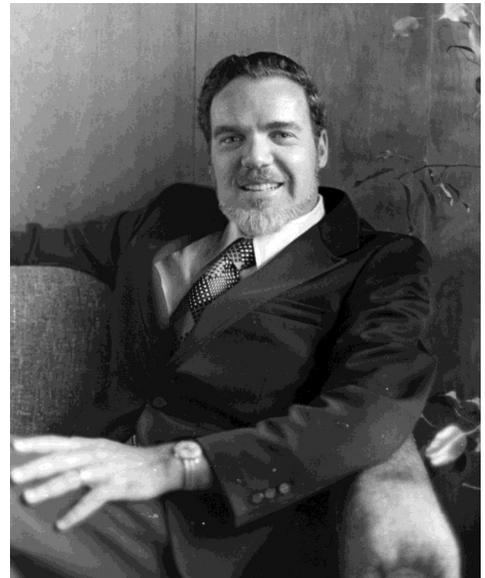
Beyond the socializing, and the enriching cultural and fun activities, Al recalls that Dr. Siegler emphasized that "most of all, USY was the people, young Jews coming together, working together on a goal with great energy and the spirit of the time."

In 1966, Rabbi Rosoff was one of the leaders of the Madison Square Garden Rally to protest discrimination against Jews in the Soviet Union. The Red Bank USY was the first chapter in the country to hold a youth rally on behalf of Soviet Jewry, and Congregation B'nai Israel represented the largest turnout of any United Synagogue congregation in the country.

In 1967, following the Six-Day War, the Congregation co-sponsored the Monmouth County Rally supporting the State of Israel. Many political, spiritual, and civic leaders attended. Rabbi Rosoff was one of the speakers.

In 1968, following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., Rabbi Rosoff delivered one of the three eulogies at a Red Bank community service.

In 1969, U.S. astronauts landed on the moon, and two young Congregation members arrived in the land of Israel. Janet Sternfeld and Linda Schriebman were the first two winners of the Congregation's newly launched Israel Scholarship. In subsequent years, many more members' teenagers went to Israel through this program.



Rabbi Jack Rosoff

Women's Roles Change, Synagogue Building Expands, Congregants' Commitment to Israel Grows, and Change is Born:

The turmoil and activism of the 1960's began to subside in the 1970's. The war in Vietnam ended, and so did the protest movement it had spawned. Yet that movement had sparked an examination not only of the relationships between nations, but also between people. As a result, women's roles in society changed considerably. While the American Jewish community had rejected privatism in favor of its steadfast tradition of communal responsibility, it welcomed the redefinition of gender-linked roles. This social change was reflected in the life of the Congregation.

Until that period, the women of the Congregation were represented only through the Sisterhood. Sisterhood members were essential in every aspect of the life of the Congregation, for they organized and carried out its many social, fundraising, and celebratory events. They were also actively involved with various needs of the local community

In 1957, for example, five Sisterhood members traveled to Newark once a week for twenty weeks to learn to transcribe in Braille. They in turn taught a much larger group at the Synagogue. Several members became certified Braillists and transcribed much-needed books and teaching materials for the blind for about fifteen years.



1947 25th Anniversary Sisterhood

Sisterhood members also contributed significantly to the Congregation's operating budget, but the use of these monies was mostly at the discretion of the men on the Board of Trustees.

Early in the 1970's, Gloria Pamm protested this "taxation without representation," especially after surveying other congregations in which Sisterhood presidents and immediate past presidents were members of their governing boards. Sisterhood's president at the time, Marilyn Ostrov, supported Gloria's proposal that Congregation B'nai Israel follow this practice. It was adopted by the Congregation. Marilyn Ostrov and Betty Cotenoff became the first women to serve on the Board of Trustees, since they were the current and immediate past presidents of Sisterhood. The following June, Marilyn Straus became the first woman elected to the Board.

Soon thereafter, a Congregation constitutional amendment changed the definition "Member" from the male "Head of Family" to the "Family" as a whole, and each family was granted one vote regardless of gender.



Wedding at new synagogue

Women's equal participation in ritual quickly followed. Women were now counted in the *minyan* (a "quorum" of 10 adults required for community Jewish worship), called for *aliyot* (the honor of being called to the Torah during its reading), and permitted to carry and to read from the Torah. They also began to serve on the Religious Committee.

As previously described, starting in 1969 and for many years to follow, the Congregation supported a scholarship fund to subsidize its USY students in the junior class to participate in the USY Summer Pilgrimage to Israel. It was a six-week trip to Israel with other USY groups from around the world. At Kol Nidre Services every year, the returning "pilgrims" would relate some of the experiences of their trip and what the trip meant to them, to the warm appreciation of the Congregation.

In 1972, construction of a "new wing" was begun to meet the needs of the growing Congregation. It included youth facilities, a chapel, classrooms, a library, and a gym. It was completed and celebrated in conjunction with the Congregation's 50th Anniversary.

In 1979, Dr. Seymour (Sy) Siegler and Professor Jack Needle, both members of the Congregation and professors at Brookdale Community College, along with Brookdale Dean Norma Klein, also a member of the Congregation, founded the Center for Holocaust Studies, later to be known as the Center for Holocaust, Human Rights & Genocide Education (Chchange) at Brookdale Community College. This was one of many major impacts Congregants have had, and continue to have, on the broader community.

Synagogue's First Woman President, Gan Yeladim Is Founded, Congregants Respond to the Plight of Soviet Jewry, Synagogue's Woman Cantor, and the Judaica Showcase:

In 1981, the United States celebrated the appointment of Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman Supreme Court Justice. Two years later Congregation B'nai Israel welcomed its first woman president, Gloria Landy.

President Landy's signature achievement was the founding of the Gan Yeladim (Garden of Children), a reincarnation and reinvigoration of the synagogue's nursery school. Ima and Me, a program for parents/caretakers with children too young for the independent Gan classes, and a pre-K enrichment program were also inaugurated.



Painting in Gan Yeladim



Learning About Sukkot

In 1982, the Congregation marked its 60th anniversary. It reaffirmed itself as a committed community that is well aware of its collective responsibility to the whole Jewish People and its heritage, and to all of humanity. That year, State Senator Thomas Gagliano introduced a Resolution to honor the synagogue's milestone, which was passed by the New Jersey Senate. Also, during that year, Westminster Synagogue in London permanently loaned the Congregation a Torah from Czechoslovakia that came to be known as "The Holocaust Torah." At the same time, the synagogue donated one of its Torahs to a newly-established Conservative congregation in Jerusalem.

During this time, relations with the Soviet Union were growing tense over its invasion of Afghanistan. This culminated in the U.S. boycotting the 1980 Moscow Olympics. In retaliation, the Eastern European countries, along with the USSR, boycotted the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles.

In 1983 the circumstances of Soviet Jews, especially those seeking to emigrate (refuseniks), worsened considerably. The refuseniks were desperate and in danger. In response and despite great risks, Jewish communities in the United States and elsewhere mobilized on their behalf. Jewish communities wrote letters to, and telephoned, the refuseniks. They also clandestinely met with refuseniks and transferred medical supplies, financial aid, food, and other means of support to them.

The Congregation formed a Soviet Jewry Committee under the leadership of John Zyskind and “adopted” several refusenik families. In 1987, 150 Congregation members, including 30 USY members, traveled to Washington, D.C. to participate in the National Mobilization for Soviet Jewry. Natasha Khassin, one of the refuseniks supported by the Congregation, was released in 1988, and she immigrated to Israel with her family. Shortly after, resources were made available through the Soviet Jewry Fund to sponsor a United States speaking tour for her, and Congregation B’nai Israel was included in her itinerary. During the Shabbat Service of her visit, Rabbi Rosoff welcomed Natasha as an honorary member of the Congregation.

1987 also brought Cantor Marla Barugel, one of the first two pioneering women cantors in the Conservative Movement, to the Congregation. Her beautiful voice was a wonderful addition to services. She was dedicated to the instruction of the bar and bat mitzvah students. She also started the synagogue’s choir, soon to be known as the “Choir of Fire.” It thrived under Cantor Barugel’s guidance and the volunteer direction of Congregation members Rob and Pat Fire. The Choir of Fire enhanced services for 25 years.

Fay and Jack Cooperhouse were pillars of the Congregation for many years. In addition to the many jobs Fay did for the synagogue, she arranged trips to see Broadway shows. On one occasion after a performance, the participants enjoyed a meal at a Mediterranean restaurant, including belly dancer entertainment. Morris Westerman, a long-time congregant, joined in the dancing, much to the great enjoyment of the group.

In 1989, under the leadership of Co-Chairs Selma and Delbert Mammen and Leonard and Gloria Pamm, the synagogue held the first of 15 Judaica Showcases, featuring arts and crafts by Israeli artists. This art exhibit and sale was enjoyed by the community at large, and it was both a social and a fundraising success. The Showcase’s curator was Israel’s Colonel Izzy Assour, who became a great friend to many congregants and the synagogue as a whole.

The World Wide Web is Born, Rabbi Rosoff Retires, and Ezra Begins:

While the U.S. was fighting what became known as the First Gulf War, both the congregation and its neighbor, the Church of the Nativity, dealt with the desecration of their houses of worship. Later, in April 1992, two 20-year-old men were apprehended and charged. After years of legal wrangling, they were sentenced in April 1995.

In the early 1990's, the world was introduced to the World Wide Web. More importantly to the Congregation, Ezra, the social service committee, was founded under the leadership of Adelaide Komar and Sylviette Pressman. Ezra's purpose is to serve as a source of congregational volunteers to benefit both the Jewish community and the community at large. In 1994, it sent about half of its funds raised to Rwanda. That year it also established Operation Isaiah, a summer program for disadvantaged youth in the area. Mimi Friedman and others led Ezra for many years. Anne and David Greene assumed its leadership in 2017, and Ezra continues its exceptional work to this day.

In 1993, the Congregation dedicated the Holocaust Memorial in the lobby. German Consul Dr. Ehrhard Holtermann attended and presented a lecture on "Democracy and Racism in Germany Today." The talk was attended by over 500 people, including Members of Congress, State legislators, local mayors, and members of the community-at-large.

In that same year, Itzhak Rabin was assassinated by an Orthodox zealot in Tel Aviv, drastically changing the future of Israeli-Palestinian relations. A memorial service at Madison Square Garden was attended by many congregants.

The College Connection Committee continued to keep in contact with the Congregation's Hebrew High School graduates when they were in college or the military.

In 1998, Rabbi Rosoff announced that he was retiring after 34 years of leadership. Education had been one of his foremost goals, and at his departure he said "our education program is second to none; we have youth groups for our children, an outstanding Israel Scholarship Program and even a small scholarship program for our college students to help pay for courses in Judaic Studies."

A motion was unanimously passed by the Congregation's Board of Trustees to name the 8th-through-12th-grade segment of the religious school the "Rabbi Jack M. Rosoff Hebrew High School...in appreciation of his outstanding efforts establishing, sustaining, and improving our High School over the past three decades." In addition, a new chapel curtain was dedicated in honor of Dr. Barbara Rosoff, the Hebrew School's principal for many years.

In May 1998, Rabbi Jack M. Rosoff retired, becoming the synagogue's Rabbi Emeritus, and Rabbi Harry Levin was engaged as the new spiritual leader.

Wandering Toward the Promised Land:

The 21st century brought the United States a tumultuous election whose result was decided in the U.S. Supreme Court. Then on September 11, 2001, a horrendous attack on New York City, Washington D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania, led to a very anxious time for the nation. Similarly, Congregation B'nai Israel began its 80th year with a new rabbi and, in retrospect, uncertain times. Rabbi Levin led a community 9/11 Memorial Service in Fair Haven Fields, using Shabbat candles to represent the fallen Twin Towers while educating the greater community about some Jewish traditions.

The synagogue witnessed another attack on the building. At the Kabbalat Shabbat services two months later, Assistant Monmouth County Prosecutor Robert Honecker, Monmouth County Detective Louis Jordan, and congregant and former Holmdel Township Mayor David Cohen, spoke on “Problems of Bias and Bigotry in Monmouth County.” The next month the perpetrator was arrested and jailed.

In October 2001, the United States, with a coalition of over 40 other countries, began its longest war.

In August 2002, the Board of Trustees voted that the Musaf Service during Rosh Hashanah would include a special service “to commemorate and honor those involved in the attacks on 9/11.”

While the U.S. was beginning its longest war, the Congregation continued on a quest to find the right fit for a spiritual leader. Rabbi Levin’s tenure ended in 2003, and he was replaced by Interim Rabbi Robert E. Fine for a year. Among other achievements, Rabbi Fine began an evening Bible Study class that was well attended and very thought-provoking.

In 2005, Rabbi Andrew Bloom began his tenure. During that time, Joel Weissglass started the Sunday Schmooz. The Schmooz offered coffee and bagels in the lobby every Sunday that school was in session to entice both parents and non-parents to socialize.

Also, during this time, the former Bikur Holim, originally a Sisterhood activity, was revitalized as “Community of Caring,” by Mindy Hoffman, Loren Lewin, and Sandy Rosenbloom. The Community of Caring continues to send notes of mazel tov and sympathy, make friendly calls to congregants, and cook and deliver soup and challah to congregants experiencing challenging times. In addition, its hospital-patient-visiting volunteers look forward to a time when that activity can resume.

The Learning Service was started and led by Dr. Yona Shulman and Steve Siers. Those services were held regularly in the Chapel and offered greater connection to spiritual life for many.

Yona also led the revival of the Youth Commission, expanding activities in all age groups, including Kadima and USY basketball, USY regional dances, Shabbat services, and Summer Encampments.

Our nursery school, the *Gan Yeladim* (“children’s garden”), had existed for many years. In September 2008, with assistance from the Jewish Community Center, Suzanne Wycoff, became its “on site” Director. Since then and until the present, under Suzanne’s leadership, the Gan has become a thriving program that attracts families with young children from both the Jewish and non-Jewish members of the community.

The renovation and enhancement of the *Bimah* (the platform in the sanctuary from which the Torah is read) and the Ark, a project begun by Leonard Pamm and advanced by Leonard Green, was completed.



New Bimah

On to the Promised Land:

In the midst of times of hope, and anxiety because of what had become the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, the synagogue welcomed Joshua Nelson and his Kosher Gospel Singers to be Artist in Residence for a weekend at the beginning of the 2010 decade. Mr. Nelson, who is Black and Jewish and goes by the nickname “The Prince of Kosher Gospel,” participated in the Congregation’s Friday Shabbat Service. On Saturday night, he gave a rousing concert at Red Bank’s Two River Theater. He finished his weekend in residence with the religious school students.

In 2011, Rabbi Bloom’s contract was not extended, and Rabbi Jeff Sultar became the Interim Rabbi. Contrary to tradition, when his interim year ended, he was offered a contract that he accepted.

President Fran Semaya appointed an ad hoc Governance Committee to study how the Congregation could improve on how it functioned. Some of the fundamental changes were inspired by Rabbi Sultar's observations. The committee, under the leadership of Al Zager, presented a new governing document to the Trustees and then to the Congregation, which approved it in June 2015. The new "Constitution and By-Laws" provided for a smaller Board of Trustees, assigned responsibility for officers and some trustees, and more empowerment of committees. Joel Weissglass became the first president to serve under the new structure. He also spearheaded the establishment of the Congregation's Life & Legacy Society, whose members commit to making a legacy gift to the Congregation's Endowment Fund for the benefit of its future.

In 2013, Cantor Barugel retired and became Cantor Emerita. She was succeeded by Cantor Dov Goldberg.

After the Board of Trustees recommended that Rabbi Sultar be offered a new contract, the Congregation vote failed to endorse that recommendation. Cantor Goldberg, who had many years of clerical leadership experience, became spiritual leader. He remained as Cantor and Education Director, while working towards his rabbinical ordination. In 2016, Cantor Goldberg became Rabbi Goldberg, and Mike Wikes was engaged as the Education Director.

With the generous support of the Komar Family, along with others, major renovations to the building were made. The administrative offices were moved to the central doorway, and a portico was added to give the entrance a welcoming feeling. These improvements had been inspired by Rabbi Sultar. As part of the building upgrades, the restrooms off the main lobby were modernized, a new classroom off the lobby and a small conference room adjacent to the Rabbi's office were created, and other improvements were made.



New Entrance

In February 2017, Rabbi Goldberg, with the generous support of an anonymous donor, led a congregational trip to Israel. Among the many highlights of the trip was a ceremony at Hadassah Hospital honoring the generosity of former synagogue presidents, Len and Lois Green, who had underwritten the cost of a new operating room.

The Israel Scholarship Program, started by Rabbi Rosoff, was reevaluated and revised by Liran Blum, Rabbi Goldberg, Jack Needle, Sandy Rosenbloom, and Mike Wikes. It created a “passport” system whereby students earn credits to help defray the cost of a teenage experience in Israel.

The Congregation also supported Shinshinim, an Israeli youth ambassadorship program. It brought a 2018 Israel high school graduate, Dana Zachar, to the synagogue for a year of service, during which the students and adults learned about life in Israel, and she learned about life in Monmouth County and beyond.

Following the horrific 2018 attack at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, the worst anti-Semitic action in the United States in memory, Rabbi Goldberg led a memorial service in the sanctuary. It overflowed with congregants, local community members, church representatives, police officers, and governmental officials.

There have been opportunities to *kvell* over the significant honors awarded to congregants. Renee “Bozzi” Swartz, who had been a member of the Monmouth County Library Commission since 1966 and its chair since 1976, was honored by having the Eastern Branch Children’s Library in Shrewsbury named for her. The Congregation proudly celebrated this marvelous recognition with her at a Friday Shabbat service in April 2019.

Another amazing honor occurred in 2018 when congregant Arthur Ashkin was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics. At 96 years old, he was then the oldest person to receive a Nobel Prize. His work was undertaken at Bell Labs (where many congregants had worked, at its facilities in Holmdel and elsewhere) on the manipulation of micro particles with laser light. He was lauded by many congregants and other community members, and gave a lecture about his work, at the synagogue in April 2019.



Arthur Ashkin lecture

It was with joy and sadness that the Congregation celebrated the retirement of Charles Norman, the synagogue's head custodian for many years. Charles always had a smile and tireless energy in caring for the building, and in greeting all who entered. The children, in particular, had wonderful relationships with him. He was known to walk in on Kadima and USY basketball games and offer playing tips.

In June 2019, Rabbi Goldberg abruptly announced he was leaving Congregation B'nai Israel for a congregation in North Carolina. This was a very challenging start to the new term of President Fran Semaya. However, fortune shined on the Congregation when, in a matter of weeks, it found its current spiritual leader, Rabbi Doug Sagal. He was initially engaged to be the Interim Rabbi until the end of June 2020. An ad hoc group of volunteers energetically rehabbed and furnished the Congregation's parsonage on Hance Road near the synagogue that summer, to welcome him into the synagogue "family." His inspirational talent was soon apparent during the High Holy Days. The mutual belief that the Congregation is the right place for Rabbi Sagal led to committing to a three-year contract that began on July 1, 2020.

Less than one year after joining the Congregation B'nai Israel community, Rabbi Sagal and President Fran Semaya energetically led the effort to navigate the unprecedented health, financial, and spiritual challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic starting in early 2020. On-line interactive video sessions via the Zoom platform became part of the fabric of the continuously vibrant synagogue community. Emilie Kovit-Meyer, our Executive Director, and the entire staff had to help the congregation adapt to using available technology for "Zooming" services, programs and meetings, Livestreaming High Holy Day and other services, and operating as much as possible in a "germ-free" environment so that all people in our facility could remain safe from the virus. While balancing the need to remain safe from this virus, under President Barbara Rosen's leadership starting in 2021, the Congregation is unswervingly working to remain "open for business" to serve the needs of congregants and the community at large.

After Rabbi Rosoff's retirement in 1998, unlike prior periods in its history, the Congregation experienced many rabbis. Rabbi Hershon led for 27 years, and Rabbi Rosoff led for 34 years. Yet, in the past 24 years, it has had six rabbis. Congregation B'nai Israel's members are now overjoyed and optimistic that, as Rabbi Sagal walks with us into our second century, he will lead us on to the Promised Land.

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