

A History

OF THE
YOUNG ISRAEL
OF BAL HARBOUR

Building
OUR *Future*

Written by
Mali Schwartz



YOUNG

ISRAEL

A History of The Young Israel of Bal Harbour: Building Our Future

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Foreword

As we stroll down memory lane, we remember so many individuals who were instrumental in bringing our Young Israel to where we are today. Their hard work and selfless dedication is a testimony to their commitment to the enhancement of Judaism and the Jewish community. It is through their efforts that we begin a new chapter in the Young Israel legacy, which will bring a new beautiful edifice of Torah & Tefillah to our community. Those who have shown so much sacrifice in the past will now reap the benefits of the present and future for they are truly the builders of our Shul. We thank them for all they have done. May they merit to fulfill the verse in Isaiah (54:13) "That all your children will be students of G-d and your children (banaich) will have peace." Says the Talmud, rather read it bonaich (your builders) will have peace. May you who are building this community only see peace and prosperity all the days of your life.

Rabbi Moshe Gruenstein

Introduction _____

We want to pay tribute to the Young Israel Congregation members who have helped to lay the groundwork that has led to the creation of a thriving, dynamic synagogue community – one which serves the communities of Bal Harbour, Bay Harbor Islands, Surfside and Indian Creek. Young Israel members – some who were here from the beginning, when the idea of having a Shomer Shabbos Modern Orthodox community was just a dream – have helped to create a strong kehilla.

As the Young Israel prepares to build a new structure to accommodate the ongoing growth of the synagogue community, now is the time to share the stories of what these members have encountered along the way. We hope that their stories will help the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the events that have helped to shape the Young Israel community. Our Young Israel officially began in March 1999. Many hurdles have been overcome during the 14 years that the Young Israel has been in existence.

But let's start at the beginning...

Mali Schwartz

Although we have made every effort to include everyone who has played a pivotal role in the growth of the Young Israel, we apologize if we unintentionally left anyone out of this journal. Please note that the order in which Young Israel members are listed in each of the chapters is not in alphabetical order but in the order of when these members joined the Young Israel.

The History of the Young Israel National Organization _____

What led a small group of men who lived in Surfside in the late 1990s to want a Young Israel in their community? What measures did they take to achieve their goal? To help answer this question we should first take a look at the role of the Young Israel movement in North America – the circumstances which led to its creation in 1912, and the forces and events which have influenced its subsequent development.

The conditions under which North American Jewry lived during the early decades of the twentieth century were not conducive to the practice of a religious lifestyle. Because practically all jobs required work on Saturday, Shabbos observance was rare and typically required extraordinary sacrifice.

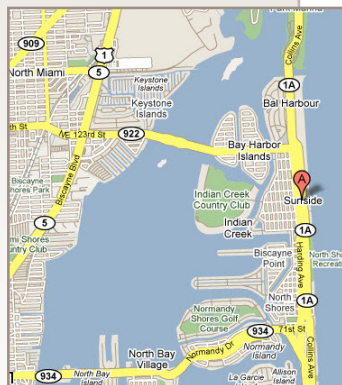
The goal of the Young Israel movement was to broaden the appeal of synagogue services to American-raised Jewish youth. Jewish youth of that era generally avoided the synagogue, attending only when required by family custom. To counteract the loss of young Jewish hearts and minds to Jewish belief and practice as we understand it today, Young Israel was founded.

Taking the First Step...

Understanding why there was a desire to become affiliated with the Young Israel leads us to ask other questions. What were some of the circumstances that had to be faced before founding a Young Israel in the town of Surfside? What does Surfside offer its residents? How has this small town that is part of Miami-Dade County changed over time? Reading about the description of Surfside found on the township's website can provide some insight into these questions.

The Township of Surfside

The Town of Surfside is a beautiful oceanfront community located in the tropical paradise of South Florida. It was incorporated in 1935 through the signatures of only 35 people, members of the Surf Club, a private club in town. They gave the town its name and a loan of about \$30,000 to get the town started. Originally the area was nothing more than about a square mile of land with about fifty residents. It was after World War II that the town saw a significant boost in residency, with individuals migrating to Surfside from every place imaginable, attracted to the beautiful beach and the strong sense of civic duty displayed by those who controlled the town.



Today, Surfside is home to approximately 5,800 residents and includes a tranquil and attractive residential neighborhood, multi-family condominium and apartment buildings, a traditional “home town” business district as well as tourist facilities that welcome visitors year round.

All of the homes, apartments, condominiums, hotels and resorts in Surfside are within walking distance of world class shopping, fantastic public beaches, a number of public parks, playgrounds, tennis courts, and recreational facilities including a new Community Center and Aquatics Facility.

The Town of Surfside encompasses the area from 87th Terrace to 96th Street, and it is situated between the City of Miami Beach to the south and the Village of Bal Harbour to the north. Surfside has earned a truly superb reputation as a family community and destination, offering a wide range of accommodations, resort facilities, shopping opportunities and leisure activities. Surfside is also within easy range of all of South Florida’s world-renowned attractions.

Surfside has about a mile of public beach that can rival any beach in the world. The beaches are peaceful, clean, pleasant, safe, and free of commercial intrusion. There are many kosher restaurants in Surfside's business and commercial district, as well as a kosher grocery store and a great variety of other stores and services. Hotels and resorts provide accommodations for all tastes and budgets.

The Founding of the Young Israel of Bal Harbour

Allen & Chana Henya Schloss and Stephen & Sharon Opert remain close friends until today. Allen and Stephen, who moved into the resort community of Surfside in 1985 and 1996 respectively, remember the days before there was a Young Israel in the area. Stephen recalls that there were only two synagogues in the entire area – The Shul of Bal Harbour, founded in 1981, and Mogen David Congregation of Surfside, a shteibel where services were held in the living room on 9348 Harding Avenue in Surfside. Rabbi Isaac David Vine received a blessing from the Lubavitcher Rebbe to become the spiritual leader of Mogen David, which was founded in the late 1960s.



The Mogen David had the potential to expand and attract more people to its services, but when Rabbi Vine passed away in the mid 1970s, his Rebbetzin, Molly Vine, took over. Eli Cohen, a Sephardic member of Mogen David and Rebbetzin Vine's right hand man, wanted to change the Mogen David to a Sepharadi congregation. Gradually, the Mogen David began to lose its numbers as its members began davening in The Shul of Bal Harbor.



The spark of an idea to have a Modern Orthodox synagogue with nusach Ashkenaz as an alternative place of worship was entertained by **Bernie Lack**, a retired war veteran, Stephen Opert, a pharmacist, and Allen Schloss, a real estate businessman, in the latter part of 1997. These men knew that the Mogen David was changing to a Sepharadi shul, which it did after the Young Israel Congregation was founded.

They were also able to see the potential of a Modern Orthodox synagogue attracting a greater number of Jews to the area.

Allen took the first step and set up a meeting to speak with Mayor Paul Novack, the longest serving mayor of Surfside (1992-2004), and predicted that a new synagogue would attract Jews from all over the world since it was such a desirable place to live. The next step was taken by Stephen, who contacted the Young Israel National Office and spoke with Rabbi Aaron Tirschwell. Rabbi Tirschwell met with the three men when he came to the Fontainebleau with his family for Passover in 1998.

When Bernie, Allen and Stephen were asked at a meeting by members of the Surfside municipality, "How many families do you anticipate The Young Israel would attract as members?" they enthusiastically responded, "300 in the not so distant future, and more if families move into the condominiums along the shore!" The seed was planted and there were long nights of conversation and a unity of purpose to attain their goal.

The town commissioner brought up a zoning restriction that specified that a house of worship be located further south on Harding and not in the center of town. The three men forged ahead and didn't let this restriction stop their search for a location closer to the heart of town, where many potential congregants lived. Ben Levine, a Mogen David member and a former mayor of Surfside, was helpful with getting town permits for the Young Israel.

Bernie Lack diligently searched for a location to hold services and found one in a room in the lower level of the Coronado Hotel, a beachfront property located on 9501 Collins Avenue which billed itself as being located “just moments from the renowned Bal Harbour shopping center and where you can also enjoy the prestigious facilities at Indian Creek and La Gorce Island.” The Young Israel was founded in 1999 and minyanim were held in the Coronado starting in March, 1999.

While rent was exorbitant and the management was difficult to deal with, the first hurdle had been overcome. The next step was to find a rabbinic leader. The Young Israel National Office recommended Rabbi Chaim Casper, who had a young family and was the owner of a florist shop on Harding Avenue. He served as Rabbi of the Young Israel for approximately one year. Although Stephen Opert helped to create the momentum that led to the establishment of the new Young Israel, he had committed to serving as gabbai of the Mogen David Congregation and therefore did not leave them to attend Young Israel services until 2004, when the Mogen David completed the change to Sepharadi.

We pay tribute to Bernie Lack who spent countless hours rallying people around the idea of establishing a Young Israel. Bernie was a Korean War Veteran, who was wounded during that war. He lived in the Four Winds, a condo in Surfside, and was renowned for his hospitality. Every Shabbos he would have an open door policy, and he invited anyone and everyone to his table. He served as gabbai of the Young Israel when the synagogue first moved to the Amtrust Bank. He used the tenacity he had gained as a soldier to do whatever it took and he was able to see his dream of having a Young Israel in our community come to fruition. Bernie drew his last breath at the Veterans Hospital, part of the Jackson Hospital Complex, in 2001.

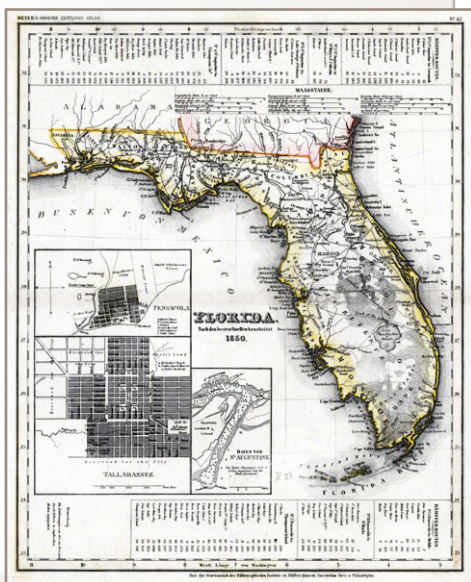
The History of the Jews of Florida



Today, we might take it for granted that there is a large proportion of Jews living in the state of Florida – but can you guess the percentage of Jews who actually live in the Sunshine State? At the present, 16% of the American Jewish community lives in Florida.

The state hosts the nation's third largest Jewish community (after NY and CA) with at least 850,000.

Jews have been a significant part of the development of our state since 1763, which is the first year that Jews were allowed to live (as Jews) in Florida. Since Florida was owned by Spain from 1513, it was “for Catholics only” for 250 years. The first Jews settled in Pensacola after the Treaty of Paris was signed that turned Florida over from Spain to England. When Florida became a state on March 3, 1845, there were less than 100 Jews in a population of 66,500. By 1940, there were about 25,000 Jews in Florida and by 1960 the Jewish population grew to 175,000.



In 250 years, the Jewish community of Florida has left their indelible footprints across the entire state. Florida is the only state that celebrates its own Jewish History Month (January) which increases awareness of the contribution by Jews to the state. Jewish American Heritage Month (May), which recognizes the more than 350-year history of Jewish contributions to American

culture, began with a Proclamation signed by President George W. Bush in 2006.

Marcia Jo Zerivitz, the founding executive director (1992) of The Jewish Museum of Florida, was instrumental in having legislation passed for both the Jewish History Month and the Jewish American Heritage Month. She also launched a statewide effort to document Florida Jewish history in 1986 and traveled more than 200,000 miles to 30 cities. Begun in 1984, the project was known as MOSAIC, symbolizing the idea that every Jew has contributed his/her own unique resources and talent to the Florida communities in which they reside. The end product is a work of art made up of the individual contributions of Florida Jewish residents who in their entirety have created a beautiful mosaic.

The Young Israel of Bal Harbour “Pioneers” _____

Just as the number of Jews in the state of Florida has grown exponentially over the years, so has the number of Young Israel members, as more families continue to move into the area. But who were the “pioneers” – the personalities, the stakeholders, the people who were here from the beginning – the first Young Israel Congregation members?

Joel and Debra Sussman have been active Young Israel members since their son Matthew and daughter Elizabeth were little children. Joel recalls being quite content in the apartment Debra and he lived in on 40th Street in Miami Beach, but Debra felt it was time to move into a house. Joel suggested looking in the Bal Harbour area because he knew about the orthodox shul that Rabbi Lipskar had founded and he liked the idea of living in that community. Debra found a house in record time that the Sussmans have made their home since 1990. Their home is in Bay Harbor Village, an exclusive gated community and Joel remembers being the 10th Jewish family to move there.

The reason that Jews were not allowed to live in Bay Harbor Village before the mid 1980s had to do with the fact that people who desired to live in this neighborhood also had to belong to the Bal Harbour Club. Since Jews were not allowed to be club members, they also could not purchase a home in Bay Harbor Village. This restriction was lifted in the mid-80s due to a lawsuit that one of the Bay Harbor Village residents won. Presently many Jews make their home in Bay Harbor Village.

Joel clearly remembers the rabbinic search that took place in the late 1990s and felt that Rabbi Gruenstein was head and shoulders above the other candidates. "About half a dozen candidates were invited to come for a Shabbos to give a D'var Torah and to meet the Young Israel shul members," Joel recalls. Ira, Sam Eltes and I went to see Rabbi Gruenstein at a Heritage Foundation Dinner, an outreach organization that Rabbi Gruenstein worked for. He also taught at Toras Chaim High School, a Yeshiva located in Miami Beach. Joel states that "it was an open process when it came time to deciding on a rabbi. The entire congregation voted and Rabbi Gruenstein passed with flying colors."

Brothers Joel and Ira were both raised in Bal Harbour along with their sister Perri, who is married to Akiba Stern. Joel and Debra have four children and attending Young Israel services has been an integral part of their development. "It has brought us a lot of satisfaction to celebrate our special smachot with the Young Israel kehilla," shares Debra and Joel. The two brothers work together in hotel real estate management, a business their father Eli began. **Eli Sussman** has been a long time supporter and member of the Young Israel. Their mother, Dorothy, z'l, was a gracious hostess, a community leader, and active in Young Israel events.

Ira & Marsha Sussman moved to the area in 1986. Ira moved from Bal Harbour to attend college up north where he met Marsha. They decided to move back to Florida to raise



their family. Ira initially attended services at The Shul of Bal Harbour and remembers that the Shabbos minyan took place “in a former shoe store in the lower lobby of the Sheraton Bal Harbour” before they moved into their current space. When the Sussmans moved to Bay Harbor Island, Ira recalls that “we had the only sukkah on the entire island!”

Ira is honored to have had the zchus to attend the very first minyan at the Young Israel. Ira recounts that Rabbi Casper picked up the aron, shulchan and tallit holder that the Sussman family provided. “We had home-made chulent for kiddush at the Coronado since Rabbi Casper made it himself, and he also set up a chuppah for Shavuot.” Ira remembers that the first Young Israel dinner, which was held at the Hemispheres in Hallandale, included representatives from the National Young Israel office.

For Ira, some of his fondest memories of belonging to the Young Israel is seeing his children and nieces and nephews grow up in the synagogue. His son Max led the anim zemiros, celebrated his becoming a Bar Mitzvah, and occasionally leads services at the Young Israel until today. His four daughters, Mollie, Paige, Rachel and Miriam, each celebrated becoming a Bat Mitzvah at the Young Israel as well.

While there have been many challenges along the way with the township, landlord, neighbors, court and lawyers, Ira remembers that the first challenge was when Young Israel members were not sure which way to face during the Friday night L'cha Dodi service when the congregation turns around to greet the “Shabbat Kallah when services were held at the Coronado.” Ira recalls “about half of the members faced toward the front of the room where the door was located while the other half faced toward the back of the room.”

The Sussmans look forward to davening and attending programs in the new space where there will be ample room for all the Young Israel congregation's needs.

David & Ann Kwiat moved to Bal Harbour in 1989 from North Woodmere, New York. David remembers that “there were a limited number of orthodox Jews in the area.” David first became involved with the Young Israel in 1997 when Bernie Lack discussed the idea of establishing a Young Israel with him. When ten people each gave \$500 as the seed money to found the Young Israel, the idea took off.



Things got off to a shaky start as the Young Israel was immediately assessed a \$1,000 a day fine by the township. The township began fining the Young Israel, claiming that a house of worship could not congregate in the area in which the Coronado Hotel was located, but preferred that the synagogue be located south of 89th Street. This was a problem since most Young Israel members lived further north. The township cited the same zoning restriction that had initially been mentioned to Bernie Lack, Stephen Opert and Allen Schloss. The Young Israel filed an injunction and appealed the township's decision and eventually won.

According to David, in addition to the people who gave the seed money, a lot of the hard work was done by Martin Patrick, a lawyer who helped with township issues; Leon Brum, who along with his wife Adrienne, was in charge of the kiddushes at the Coronado as well as other responsibilities; and Nat Gurvitch, who was able to solicit funds from his friends, many of whom were not religious, some whom never stepped into the Young Israel. Shopsie Schraga, along with his mother Minnie, remember that the community was small and scattered with not that many frum people when they first moved to the area in 1995. “Having a good Rabbi and establishing programs for children and families has helped the Young Israel to grow,” Shopsie added.

David remembers that while the Coronado was a small space, it was an auspicious beginning for the Young Israel and the people who were there from the start were very supportive of helping to get the Young Israel off the ground. Services were held at the Coronado for about a year and a half before moving to the second floor of Amtrust Bank, our current location, after a small group of Sephardim who held services there decided to move out. The move to the Amtrust Bank was “quite luxurious” in the beginning, recalls David, until membership grew.

David, who served as Young Israel President from 1999 – 2002, was thrilled when the Young Israel won the lawsuit against the township that involved another zoning restriction. This one precluded having a house of worship meet on the second floor of a building – specifically the Amtrust Bank. As Young Israel President, David pressed this issue, realizing that “if the Young Israel was forced out of our location, we would be out of business.” According to zoning laws, a group of people who met regularly was not allowed to congregate in a business district according to zoning laws. The lawsuit was decided by the appellate court. The Township of Surfside appealed to the US Supreme Court, but the appeal was not accepted. The Young Israel retained legal aid and the case was removed to federal court. Initially, the magistrate ruled against the Young Israel, which was given 90 days to vacate the premises. That would have been Erev Yom Kippur, but the 11th circuit granted a stay pending the Young Israel appeal. The Young Israel eventually won the case in the early 2000s.

David feels that “this Young Israel is different from other synagogues I have been part of in New York and Holland, because there are always new people in town since this is a resort and retirement area. This provides a platform to meet old friends as well as Jews from different states and countries.” He goes on to say that through his involvement with Young Israel, he has been able to extend his circle of friends since there are numerous people now settling in our area.

The Young Israel kehilla is “fortunate to have among us wealthy individuals who are able and willing to provide the extra support necessary to build our community.” And while countries such as Venezuela, France, Argentina and Mexico, are forcing Jews to leave, we are lucky that a number of them have chosen to settle in our area. David remembers that in the past, the majority of Jews came from the Middle East.

David intimately understands the importance of synagogue involvement since he served as president, secretary, and treasurer in the early days of the Young Israel, “keeping all the records, making phone calls and fundraising.” David brought a wealth of experience, having helped to start the Young Israel in North Woodmere, and from his management experience working at Shell Corporation. David is optimistic that the new building will bring exponential growth for the Young Israel.

Max & Ginette Dekelbaum: Max originally lived in The Waves, a condo in Surfside that housed a number of long time Young Israel members such as the Margolises and the Engelsteins. He moved to Florida with his wife Anita, z'l, in the mid 1990s. Recalling what Surfside was like at the time, Max remembers it being a quaint, quiet



little town. During his tenure as Young Israel President, which he served with David Kwiat in 2005 – 2006, and then on his own in 2007 - 2008, the synagogue was able to secure the piece of property where the new building will ultimately stand.

Anita passed away several years ago. Max has been married to Ginette, known as Ginou, for four years. Ginou really enjoys Rabbi Gruenstein's shiurim which she applies to her daily life. She feels that Rabbi G “doesn't cut corners and tell you what you want to hear, but teaches what is halachically correct.” As for the Young Israel, Ginou enjoys coming to synagogue on a regular basis since it “feels like you are in a family atmosphere.”

Max warmly remembers the Young Israel Purim seudahs, spending time with the seniors of the community such as Nat Gurvich, Sara and Sol Benson, and Vivian Namer, who, while no longer part of the Young Israel community, are fondly remembered. Another special memory is when Anita and Max had a Sefer Torah Dedication and donated a Torah in memory of both sets of parents.

Born and raised in Washington, DC, Max was a member of an orthodox synagogue in Potomac, Maryland, where he served as the president and proudly recalls the fundraising efforts that raised seven million dollars and resulted in a beautiful new building to house the synagogue. He credits his leadership ability to being the owner of his own business, a full service deluxe kosher grocery store and catering business located in Silver Spring.

A man of few words, Max believes in taking action and getting the job done. His on the job training in customer service and eye for detail was developed overseeing his businesses, the Shalom Kosher Market and Signature Catering. His late wife Anita, who worked alongside him in the business, also volunteered at the Young Israel when it came to Shabbatonim. "She enjoyed helping with the catering. She loved photography and the Young Israel benefitted from her efforts, since she graced the walls of the synagogue with her pictures."



Susan and Jack Gluck first moved to Bal Harbour in 1997 and traveled back and forth from Woodmere, New York. They decided to move here permanently in 2004. Jack remembers davening at the Mogen David and recalls that there were many empty seats in The Shul of Bal Harbour ten years ago. In just 10 short years, "I have seen the Young Israel membership roster jump from

25 families in 2002 to 90 families five years ago and then 180 plus families today.” Jack feels that there is a good synergy in the Young Israel community and that as “our kehillah continues to grow there is a stronger community purpose and the synagogue is a more powerful force in the life of its members.”

“There aren’t many communities that include beautiful beachfront properties, wonderful shopping and kosher restaurants right at your fingertips. I can foresee that there will be a larger influx of families – especially baby boomers – moving into the area over the next 5-10 years as never before – an exponential growth – what with the new building and what we have to offer.”

Jack stepped into leadership roles at the Young Israel, first by serving as president for 2009-2010. One of his favorite activities as president was to meet and greet new members and the many guests that regularly walk through the door. He also enjoyed working with the board. And since the Young Israel does not have an executive director on staff, Jack made sure that the detail work got done. He gained many years of leadership skills by serving on the executive and building committees of the Young Israel of Woodmere and the executive committee at HAFTR, Hebrew Academy of the Five Towns and Rockaway.

Susan works diligently alongside Jack, as theirs is a true partnership. She has brought her own organization skills and flair to the Young Israel. Susan, who worked as an interior decorator up north, has helped to oversee Shabbatonim, the Young Israel Annual Dinner, and the Sisterhood Annual Fashion Show, which is held in Neiman Marcus in the Bal Harbor Shops and has become a very popular event. She does so in a humble manner and the Young Israel has benefitted from her efforts.

The idea of having a permanent new home for the Young Israel was examined in 2006 when a building committee was formed. Jack served as Building Campaign Chair (simultaneously while serving as President) and felt it was vital to find a piece

of property near Amtrust Bank so that the location would be convenient for current members. Getting town approval for the new building was an arduous task and funds went toward ensuring that zoning codes and town requirements met with the town council's approval.

In 2008, the Young Israel filed suit to build the new structure using the Federal Housing and Land Use Discrimination Act (RLUIPA) which is a federal statute that was passed in 2000 to provide stronger protection for religious freedom in land use. Two years later, in 2010, the town council voted to approve Young Israel's building application and the final approvals were given during Pesach 2012. Since then, there has been a town council election with very positive results. Today the Young Israel Building Committee has very a good relationship with Mayor Daniel Dietch and the town council, and is looking forward to working with them as the building committee starts the next stage of the project.

According to Jack, the new building will provide a sanctuary that will hold 400 people. "I can see a time where we will be able to have 4 minyanim simultaneously and the social hall will be able to hold 300 people for events and programs."

The Young Israel of Bal Harbour

Spiritual Leaders:

Rabbi Moshe & Rebbetzin Rena Gruenstein



Rabbi Gruenstein remembers that when he first became Rabbi of the Young Israel in 2001, it was a very small community with 60 members and with no programs, classes or events. Even though today, "our shul has grown to a membership of 180 and the Young Israel has been a catalyst to bring about much change to the community, so much more needs to be done." Rabbi

Gruenstein has helped to create an environment of Torah and Tefillah which is inspiring and motivating. “I feel that there is a feeling of camaraderie among the diverse constituency that the Young Israel has attracted over the years,” states Rabbi Gruenstein.

Rabbi Gruenstein along with his lovely wife, Rebbetzin Rena, have graciously opened their home to one and all with their extensive Shabbos invitations and with their annual Chanukah party, where Rena serves huge platters of delicious home made latkes. Rena has also taught classes and has been involved in countless acts of chesed which she does in a humble unassuming way. Their home hospitality has helped to make Young Israel members feel that they are a part of the Gruensteins’ extended family.

Giving the Young Israel the financial ability to bring in notable guest speakers and lecturers to enlighten, educate and inspire our community is vital to the ongoing growth of our community. Rabbi Gruenstein wants to “express my gratitude to Richard Bergman, z’l, Allen Baron, and Aaron Attias for their generous contributions that have helped to support these programs.”

Rabbi Gruenstein believes that “dealing with the City of Surfside has been one of our greatest challenges, but through hard work and effort by many we have persevered.” With the new building on the horizon, Rabbi Gruenstein feels that “the future is limitless in conducting more intellectually stimulating, innovative programming. The ability to produce more youth programs and social events for people of all ages will help foster a greater sense of belonging in our Shul and community.”

One of the things he is most proud of is “the improvement of our youth program since the future of our Young Israel and the Jewish people is the next generation.” Rabbi Gruenstein feels strongly that a challenge that we face is “to do more to inspire our youth and help them to build a strong connection to Judaism, not only to ensure the eternity of our people, but to ensure an emotionally stable and fulfilling life.”

The Jews of South Florida _____

South Florida Jews can be proud of its own unique history as well as being home to the largest percentage of Jews living in Florida today. According to information found in “*Jews of South Florida*” (Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture and Life), “the tri-county area of Miami-Dade, (where the Young Israel is located), Broward, and Palm Beach is home to a community of more than 625,000 Jews – about 10 percent of American Jews – and comprises nearly 200 congregations, 3 major Jewish federations, 20 Hebrew day schools, a world-recognized Holocaust memorial, and more.”

The South Florida Jewish community is distinguished from other Jewish communities in the U.S. by its diverse population. It has a distinctive Latin flavor, which began with the post-Castro migration of Cubans. Hispanic Jews have moved to South Florida from several Latin American nations, and these Spanish-speaking Jews have worked hard to maintain their cultural heritage even as they have adapted to life in the United States. South Florida is also home to the largest community of Holocaust survivors in the country. More recent Jewish immigrants from Arab nations, the Soviet Union, and Israel have added to the distinctive diversity of Jewish life in South Florida.

The Latin American Connection _____

The Young Israel reflects the diversity of the South Florida Jewish community in that one can meet people from all over the world in our shul. Several Young Israel members come from Latin American countries.

The Attias and Sterental Families are known for their generosity and caring spirit. Gloria Sterental and Tammy Attias are first cousins on their mother’s side, but they look more like sisters. Gloria was the first to move into the community from Peru in

2002 with her husband Paul, z'l, and their children. Tammy and her husband Aaron along with their children followed in 2006 from Bogota, Columbia.

Tammy and Aaron were honored at the 2010 Young Israel Annual Dinner and Paul, z'l, was honored at the 2012 Young Israel Dinner in memoriam. According to his wife Gloria, "Paul was active everywhere we became members – at the Young Israel of Aventura and in Peru where he served as a gabbai." At the Young Israel, Paul helped to redesign the youth activities room and the kitchen, not only using his expertise as an industrial engineer but using workman's tools and his own elbow grease to personally execute the building plans. He also served as treasurer and became a founding member of the building committee.



Tammy recalls becoming involved members right away by supporting most activities and helping with whatever was needed. While Tammy was a bit hesitant about her children's integration into the synagogue community, since she was one of the younger members, she was pleasantly surprised that "they have always felt right at home at Young Israel." Even so, Tammy would love to see more early childhood programs, teen activities and formal daily adult classes. Her husband Aaron has been a generous supporter of Young Israel programs and activities.



Gloria remembers that both she and Paul were very inspired by their rabbi in Peru and gradually they took on more mitzvos. She was used to knowing everyone in her synagogue and school community in her native country. She enjoyed her early days at Young Israel when things were more intimate and heimesh. Now, "I don't know half the people and I hope that when we

move into the new building it will still have a homey feeling.”

Some of Gloria’s fondest memories are the Purim parties and the Shabbatons that the Young Israel has organized over the years. She remembers that before Paul found and hired “Junior,” the synagogue’s custodian, to help with the set up and clean up for synagogue activities, there were a handful of people including Paul and Gloria that performed these tasks. Gloria is happy to note that around 4-5 years ago many young couples began moving into the community, which helps to maintain the number of children that come to services all year round. The Young Israel is lucky to have made a “Latin American connection” with these wonderful families.

Anti-Semitism in Florida _____

The first Jew to arrive in Miami was Samuel Singer, who migrated from northern Palm Beach in 1895. He was the exception – most Jews were moving in the opposite direction, from Key West in the south to the northern city of Miami, according to information found on The Jewish Virtual Library website. Some early anti-Semitic attitudes among Miami’s developers were prevalent, including Carl Fisher’s refusal to serve Jewish customers and Henry Flagler’s prohibition on land sales and hotel lodgings for Jewish clients.

Despite anti-Semitic attitudes, a group of Jews held their own Yom Kippur services in 1896 in a room over a retail store. The group was short-lived: a yellow fever epidemic killed some and the remainder fled to other parts of the state. The first synagogue in Miami, Bnai Zion, was established in 1912. It is currently the Beth David synagogue on Southwest Third Avenue.

Anti-Semitism also reared its ugly head in the village of Bal Harbour. An example of how these feelings toward Jews manifested was at the Kenilworth-by-the-Sea, the first hotel opened for business in December 1946. Described as “ultra-



modern,” the 160-room ten-story Kenilworth promoted the concept of “luxurious leisure.” In 1953, Arthur Godfrey, who owned the Kenilworth, brought considerable media attention to the area as he was the first entertainer to televise nationally from Bal Harbour. He broadcast to his radio and television audience, estimated at between 40 and 60 million, from the Kenilworth Hotel.

Arthur Godfrey was the host of radio’s most important amateur talent contest. According to Eddie Fisher in his autobiography, *Been There, Done That*, “Godfrey owned the Kenilworth Hotel in Florida, which supposedly had a sign in front that read NO DOGS OR JEWS ALLOWED.”

Today’s Kenilworth, built in 1975, is a condominium that is home to many Jews, including a number of Young Israel congregants. The Kenilworth is just one among many condos located on Collins Avenue where Young Israel families reside today. Bal Harbour has its own distinct history...

The Village of Bal Harbour_____

When one hears the name Bal Harbour what comes to mind? How about the fact that Bal Harbour oceanfront condos and real estate are among the most desirable pieces of real estate in the country? Not that long ago, resort hotels stood where there are now luxurious condominiums. Spanning a distance of just under a mile on Collins Avenue, these condos are ideally located for walking to the Young Israel.

Bal Harbour has its own unique zoning laws so that condominiums directly on the ocean front keep getting taller and taller. The newest building, the St. Regis, is the tallest of all, standing 29 stories high. Yet on the opposite side of the street, there are low rise buildings that stand just three stories high. Let’s examine how the village of Bal Harbour came into existence and how it has since evolved.

In describing his vision for Bal Harbour, founder Robert Graham stated more than sixty years ago, “We have only one objective. We want to make this village, with its unusual advantages of ocean and bay and South Florida climate, a lovely place to live.” The “dream village” that Graham envisioned so many years ago continues to prosper and thrive today.

The vision for this subtropical paradise began in 1929 when Miami Beach Heights, a Detroit-based real estate development corporation, purchased the raw land. Perhaps most significantly, one of the leading urban planning firms of the twentieth century – Harland Bartholomew & Associates – was hired to design the Village. Bal Harbour and Coral Gables are the only Miami-Dade municipalities that were built with a fully conceived master plan in place.

On August 14, 1946, the Village was incorporated and the first Council elected. Bolstered by Miami’s post war prosperity, Bal Harbour’s growth escalated with the rapid sale of residential lots, the development of community resources and the construction of hotels. Over the next decade, a total of nine resorts would line the Village’s beachfront as the Sea View, the Bal Harbour, the Balmoral, the Ivanhoe, the Colony, the Singapore, the Beau Rivage and the Americana all held court. At the height of South Florida’s hotel boom, these world-class resorts attracted a steady stream of upscale clientele and helped put Bal Harbour on the map.

In the 1950’s, Bal Harbour and Miami Beach were considered America’s Riviera, a magnet for the era’s top musicians and entertainers. Bal Harbour’s hotels quickly became the chosen destination for countless dignitaries, celebrities, and presidents.

In 1957, real estate developer Stanley Whitman, with a vision that few understood, purchased sixteen acres that were originally planned as the site for a gas station and grocery store. At the time, the once elegant and upscale Lincoln Road had declined tremendously and Whitman was adamant that a new high-

fashion center located in Bal Harbour could thrive. Further bucking trends, he insisted that the mall be open-air, including lush landscaping and parking structure. Despite resistance to his ideas and many obstacles, the Shops opened in 1965 with thirty upscale, mostly New York-based tenants. The venture was immediately successful.



Today, celebrating forty years in business, Bal Harbour Shops is recognized as the industry leader and, according to Women's Wear Daily, is the "number one most productive shopping center in the United States." Stanley Whitman is now widely acknowledged as "the Walt Disney of luxury retailing," having created his own magical kingdom.

As economic and real estate dynamics shifted, many hotel owners opted to convert their properties into condominiums. This has led to a whole new residential landscape for the Village, continuing to attract newcomers from all over the world that aspire to live the Bal Harbour lifestyle. The new ONE Bal Harbour was re-branded in June of 2009, becoming the northern gateway to the Village. This is the first new hotel to be built in the Village in fifty years. The Sheraton Bal Harbour was demolished in November of 2006, making way for the new St. Regis Bal Harbour Resort and Residences.

The Village of Bal Harbour has much to offer its Young Israel members. Today, a number of our members live in Bal Harbour where it is relatively easy to lead a Modern Orthodox lifestyle, while enjoying the perks that living in Bal Harbour provides. But it wasn't always that way...

Paving the Way: The Efforts of Rabbi Sholom and Rebbetzin Chani Lipskar _____



Rabbi Sholom D. Lipskar, along with his wife, **Rebbetzin Chani Lipskar,** were determined to create a thriving Jewish community in Bal Harbour beginning in 1981, before there was much in the way of any

Jewish religious life in the area. The Lipskars are emissaries of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi M. M. Schneerson, z'l. For over 30 years, Rabbi Lipskar has served as the Rabbi and Spiritual Leader of The Shul of Bal Harbour, which attracts members from the communities of Bal Harbour, Bay Harbor, Indian Creek Village and Surfside.

The Lipskars remember that, “for 30 great, challenging and swift moving years we have together worked to build and create our outstanding world class Shul and Community. We faced every challenge possible as we grew and developed, experiencing wandering homelessness, financial crisis, existential crisis and legal/zoning hurdles.”

We pay tribute to the tireless efforts of Rabbi Sholom and Rebbetzin Chani Lipskar for their outstanding leadership. The Lipskars, in founding The Shul, have paved the way for other synagogues like the Young Israel to be able to have a home in this community.

And the Story Continues... _____

Ongoing synagogue involvement is crucial to creating ongoing synagogue growth. The Young Israel Congregation experienced a surge of growth which took place during the mid-2000s as

more Jewish families moved into the area. This influx of new members has helped the Young Israel to expand its volunteer base. These members have also enriched the kehilla with their own unique talents. Featured here are some members who moved in during the mid-2000s.

Shelly & Miriam Lisbon officially moved to Surfside fulltime in 2006 after traveling back and forth to their home in Silver Spring for four years. Both Shelly and Miriam are teachers and found teaching positions in Florida. Shelly teaches at several junior high and high schools such as the Lubavitch Boy's (Klurman Yeshiva) and Girl's Schools (Bais Chanah) as well as Bais Yaakov where he teaches US Government, World History and Geography. "I really enjoy teaching the kids that attend these private yeshivas and get a lot of professional satisfaction." Miriam teaches at a Lubavitch pre-school where she enjoys interacting with the little ones.



Shelly had a Jewish bookstore in Silver Spring "right next to Max Dekelbaum's kosher grocery store and catering business." As a matter of fact, Max encouraged the Lisbons to come down south. Shelly is happy that they did and finds the community "quite heimish and comfortable." He actually enjoys the intimacy and warmth of the Young Israel just as much if not more than he did davening at Kemp Mill. One of his fondest memories was "being honored with Penny and Stuart Harris at the Young Israel Dinner Banquet."

"I have more time to volunteer down here and when there was a vacancy on the board, I stepped up to the plate which led to my filling in as secretary and then becoming Co-President of the Young Israel in 2011 with Morris Kaplan." Miriam lends a hand serving the hot kiddushes and always has a gracious smile and warm greeting for everyone she meets.

Shelly is happy to report that as the Young Israel has grown there have been more synagogue activities for all ages such as the Saturday night father/son learning program; learning with Rabbi Blumberg; and the Lunch and Learn program which takes place at different people's homes throughout the community on a weekly basis.

Shelly never thought he would get involved with town politics, but from 2010 to 2011, he was a member of the Surfside planning and zoning department, where he met with the mayor and town manager of Surfside. His position also helped him to develop a better understanding of the ongoing battle between the township and the Young Israel over the right to build on the newly acquired property. "There was a traffic concern as well as a height concern which led the building committee to reduce the height of the new building from 40 feet to 30 feet."

Shelly went on to run for and win a seat to serve as a Surfside Town Commissioner. Shortly after that, Shelly ran for State Representative and had to step down from his position as Commissioner, since the state of Florida does not allow someone to hold a public position while running for another office. He lost that election.

Shelly envisions that the new building will need more professional staff such as an assistant rabbi and an executive director.

Stuart & Penny Harris moved to Bal Harbour in August 2006. Since they've become members, they have witnessed a constant growth in the number of Jews who have settled here –many



empty nesters from New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut – even Kentucky, where the Harrises lived for many years. Stuart lived in Louisville for 68 years and was a member of Anshei Sfard, a Modern Orthodox synagogue, where he was very active, serving as president and treasurer, a long-time board member of the local

Jewish Community Center, treasurer of the Eliahu Academy Jewish Day School and president of the Louisville Vaad.

Penny, who lived in Lexington with her late husband, Robert Miller, z'l, chaired the Women's Division of Central Kentucky Jewish Federation and served as Vice President of Temple Adath Israel Sisterhood.

The Harrises have brought a wealth of communal experience and talent to the Young Israel community. Stuart has served on the board for several years, was a big help organizing the financial records and continues to oversee the weekly Shabbos kiddush by ensuring that there are sponsors for the ample hot kiddushes. And Penny enjoys serving the food. She feels that "it's important that members understand that in order to continue to enjoy the delicious kiddushes that they must volunteer to sponsor kiddushes and help to serve as well."

Penny has also used her experience as a professor and director of undergraduate studies in the Political Science Department at the University of Kentucky by giving lectures and helping with the Young Israel dinners and Sisterhood events.

The Harrises remember that at their very first Shabbos, the late Dorothy Sussman, z'l, a long-time member and community leader, welcomed them graciously into the community and immediately invited them to Shabbos lunch with her children and grandchildren. They have seen many changes since they became members such as the increased number of members including people of all ages, a more dynamic social life, more educational experiences for all ages, more programming, such as a phenomenal weekly program on Jewish History led by Professor Hillel Abramson, and being able to have a mincha minyan with ease.

When asked for suggestions on how to create a feeling of unity among synagogue members, the Harrises responded that, "we need to expand the volunteer base where more people are

involved with decision making. We need a representation of all ages on our board, and we need to expand the number of people that lead our services so that everyone who is able gets a chance to lead services.”

Penny and Stuart look forward to moving to the new synagogue building and feel that although it was such an expensive battle, and there were so many obstacles to overcome, that the Young Israel will thrive and grow, attract new members of all ages and offer even more social and educational experiences for the membership.

In addition to the Young Israel, the Harrises have become supporters of AIPAC, The Shul of Bal Harbour, and the Helping Hands Kosher Food Ko-op. Penny is a board member and vice-chair of the Center for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAGE), a board member of the Miami Jewish Film Festival Committee, and the Jewish Federation Day School Committee, and has taught American Government at Touro College South.

Morris & Sandra Kaplan are familiar with davening in a small synagogue space and seeing it expand. Morris was the Chairman of the Board in a synagogue in Marlboro, New Jersey, where he previously lived. He helped to build an addition to that shul which transformed the space from a two-car garage to a 1,600 square foot space.



The Kaplans moved to the area in 2006 and Morris “loved the nice walk in the winter months.” Morris is excited to see how the Young Israel has grown in so many ways. Morris feels that “the wonderful youth

program will be an attraction for young families and beneficial for current Young Israel members with young families.” The new building will “provide services for up to close to 400 members – both men and women – and there will even more learning opportunities.” Morris, who served as President of the Young

Israel in 2012 and as Co-President with Shelly Lisbon in 2011, believes that “having more committees made up of volunteers will help to make the Young Israel even better.” One of Morris’s fondest memories is when the lawsuit with the township of Surfside was settled and getting the final approval to build the new building. Morris felt that “G-d had a hand in ensuring that the Young Israel received a foundation permit from the Town of Surfside for the new building while I was still president.”

Morris is also involved with the Lubavitch Aventura South and also serves as President of K-Space, President of Bris Avraham, and Chairman of Monmouth Torah Links.

Rabbi Simeon & Rose Schreiber have been a part of the Young Israel since 2006 when they moved south from New York where they were members of the Jewish Center of Manhattan. Rose, in commenting on the changes she has seen as the Young Israel has evolved over the last several years, stated: “our kehilla has grown tremendously and is more vibrant, what with the dynamic Scholar in Residence Shabbatons, where members get to listen to intellectually stimulating topics while socializing with their friends.”



Rose feels it is vital to ensure that new members feel welcome since our Young Israel is located in a “major visitor center.” Rose has ensured that there are social opportunities in the neighborhood by helping to institute community Shabbos dinners at a local kosher restaurant, which began several years ago.

Simmy, as he is known to his friends, is a Young Israel board member, gabbai, and enhances Shabbos davening as a ba’al tefillah. He also blows the Shofar for the High Holiday services

as the ba'al tekiya. Simmy is well known for his role as a chaplain at Mt. Sinai Hospital where he has ministered to many Jewish patients. He recently wrote a book about his experiences titled, *"A Caring Presence: Bringing the Gift of Home, Comfort and Courage."* Rose is an active member of WIZO. As Book Club Chair, she has organized a monthly book club which Young Israel members attend for intellectual stimulation. She also serves as membership co-chair. Rose and Simmi are both involved in Keren Or, an organization dedicated exclusively to the education and care of blind children and young adults.

The Schreibers look forward to moving to a new building where there will be ample space for kiddushes and which will attract more members to the community.

Menno and Helen Ratzker purchased a Bal Harbour apartment in 1999 and traveled back and forth from their home in Monsey, New York for a couple of years. Several years ago, they became snowbirds spending longer periods of time in Florida. They have good reason – their son and daughter-in-law, Jeff & Stephanie Ratzker, along with their grandchildren – are also Young Israel members.



Menno served as the Young Israel Building Fund Chairman, helping to raise funds for the new building.

He was successful in getting a number of donors to generously contribute to the Young Israel building fund. Menno has a long track record of community involvement, having served as president of the Community Synagogue in Monsey. He is currently Chairman of the Board of the American Committee for Shaare Zedek, and has been involved with this worthwhile cause for 50 years. Helen is a member of the Shaare Zedek Women's Board as well as a member of the Community Synagogue's Women's Board.

The Ratzkers are excited for the next step in Young Israel's growth and look forward to seeing their grandchildren avail themselves of the wonderful youth programs that will only get better when there is more space for Young Israel youth to participate in activities.

The Next Generation of Young Israel of Bal Harbour Leaders _____

Ensuring that young families are comfortable in the Young Israel by offering more youth programs and young couple's events have been a focus of the Young Israel over the last several years. Under the dynamic leadership of the Rabbi Hod and Chaya Tamir, our youth directors, the synagogue's youth program has doubled in size. As more young families have joined the community, the increasing numbers of children have added a sense of liveliness that wasn't here before. Having a vibrant younger generation also ensures the continuity of the Young Israel community. Let's take a look at some of the first young couples who decided to become members and attend services at the Young Israel. They have become young leaders, acting as examples for others to emulate.

Joey and Bianca Senker are an adventurous couple who drove down to Florida from New York a week after having celebrated their sheva brachot in August 1997. They remember that Bal Harbour was quite beautiful and that The Shul of Bal Harbour had been recently built. When they first moved in, the Senkers were the youngest Young Israel family and remember that "there were a multitude of grandparent age and baby boomer couples."



Bianca loves the lifestyle that Bal Harbour offered and felt as if "we were on vacation every day, what with glorious beaches,

evening strolls on the sandy boardwalk, beautiful warm weather, great professions and a cool night life.” She also is happy to say that she has seen “many snowbirds who have migrated here from all over the world to escape the cold. Young Israel families have helped to bring more value to their neighborhoods by investing resources into remodeling their homes.”

The Senkers remember davening in the Coronado, and Bianca shares that “growing up with my grandparents and being surrounded by Holocaust survivors every summer in the bungalow colonies in the Catskill Mountains helped Joey and me to form relationships with such diverse and interesting elders. We remember some who are no longer with us and their contributions in paving the way for our shul’s future.” The Senkers feel blessed to have met the Gruensteins when their first son, Jonas, was born, and have developed a genuine and meaningful relationship with the entire family. They take credit for coining the shortened version of the Rabbi’s name: “Rabbi G.”

The Senkers immediately became involved with the Young Israel and Joey served as treasurer and has worked on building committees during each phase of the process. The Senkers, as a couple, have worked on every Young Israel Dinner and hosted many classes in their home. Bianca has helped to organize the Chanukah celebrations, Purim Seudah and the Purim Drive. “While originally there was a total of 36 shalach manot packages, today there are festive gatherings and mitzvah projects serving over 150 families”.

One mitzvah project that Bianca helped organize was to deliver food to the sick, families with new babies and to the elderly. “With the help of Rebbetzin Rena and my friends, we continue to supply weeks of food to families that have just had a baby.” Bianca serves as Young Israel Sisterhood Co-President with her friend Stephanie Ratzker, and together they initiated providing a welcome basket for new families. Bianca feels strongly that having a youth program would attract more young couples to the

Young Israel and was instrumental in creating a youth program with her friend Ianna Sterenfeld “where young mothers in the community helped to organize youth programs every month.” She is grateful to “our wonderful youth directors, Rabbi Hod and Chaya Tamir, for their ongoing work with the Young Israel youth.”

Joey and Bianca have many special memories as Young Israel members over the years, such as watching shul congregants dancing around the Torah at the first Torah Dedication, Simchat Torah, their son Jonas’s Pidyan Haben. But their most special memory is watching Young Israel members pushing Publix shopping carts filled with all the Simchat Torah luncheon food to their home the day after Hurricane Wilma to help celebrate their son Nolan’s bris.

The Senkers are involved with their children’s school Hillel where Bianca has chaired the Teacher Appreciation Week Celebration for 7 years and support the Jewish Federation, Hadassah, Chai Lifeline, Cross Fit and Alyn Hospital in Israel. They are looking forward to having a true home for the Young Israel and where their eldest son Jonas, who had the first bris performed at the Young Israel, will potentially be the first Bar Mitzvah in the new building.

Daniel & Jessica Courtney moved into the community in 2000 and remember “the only other couple that was under 40 was Joey and Bianca Senker.” Daniel grew up in a family that was very involved in the Young Israel of Hollywood. Therefore, “I always viewed a synagogue as a positive place to devote energy.”

Daniel recalls the days when he was a youth leader and volunteered to play softball with the children of the synagogue on Sunday mornings in Hollywood. His experience with youth has helped Daniel



understand the importance of having a vibrant synagogue youth program. He feels that with the leadership of Rabbi Gruenstein, the board, and the continued thriving of our youth program led by Rabbi Tamir, many families in our area who have not yet joined will want to become more involved. He also believes that “more young families who want to get away from the cold winters will want to be part of our Young Israel, housed in a beautiful new building, located in a top destination.”

While Daniel took a risk in joining the Young Israel before many young families were even part of the equation, “seeing more children gives me a more secure feeling that our community will endure.” Daniel found out that there was a Young Israel “on the second floor of a bank” from his father-in-law, who was visiting from Washington DC, and was told by a colleague that there was a synagogue in the area. After attending regularly for several months, Daniel became a board member and within a few years served first as Young Israel President in 2003 – 2004 and then as Young Israel Co-President with Jack Gluck in 2009 - 2010.

Daniel appreciates the selflessness and dedication of a number of individuals who “without their perseverance, we would not be anywhere close to where we are today.” He also remembers the years when there was a “fear of being thrown out of our space.” The ongoing court battle with the township had a “detrimental impact on our ability to attract new members and to keep existing members, but with the new building, this issue will not be relevant any longer.”

When asked for his input on how to encourage a feeling of unity among our membership, Daniel suggests that as more people get involved with helping and investing in our synagogue, this will create a feeling of love for all Young Israel members. He also feels that the older members should focus on the needs of the younger families, and that the younger families need to develop a greater respect for the more senior Young Israel members.

Michael & Elana Szafranski remember when the Young Israel was very small and intimate, and when everybody's presence made a difference. This young couple moved into Bal Harbour in May of 2001 and recall feeling that the Young Israel "had the potential to grow into a vibrant, Modern Orthodox congregation." Michael remembers that when they first moved in, there were 75 men on a busy Shabbos in the winter season, while now that is the normal Shabbos attendance during the summer when many snowbirds have left the area. Showing off their baby daughter Alexa, the first baby girl born in the Young Israel Congregation, to the kehilla was an exciting moment. They also remember that at first, Rabbi Gruenstein was only here part time, while now he is an integral part of the community who has spearheaded the growth of our congregation.

After being a Young Israel member for only four months, Mike was appointed as gabbai at a board meeting. This role gave him the opportunity to meet Young Israel members and to "get a front row seat watching the growth of the congregation." Shortly after that, he was appointed to the board of directors and Mike has held these two positions ever since. Elana became involved in Sisterhood, the dinner committee and in planning Shabbatonim. She has also been involved in greeting new members, arranging the seating at most events and taking an active role in the Purim seudah as well as other shul activities.

A highlight that the Szafranskis fondly remember is when they were honored by the Young Israel – "a touching and humbling moment." Mike feels that the growth of the Young Israel has led to the challenge of integrating the new ideas of new members who come from a diversity of backgrounds and levels of observance, while preserving the unique character of the Young Israel. Mike feels that younger families have a true advantage in the sense that they "get to rely on the wisdom of our senior members."

The Szafranskis believe that the new building will lead to a dramatic increase in membership and that the Young Israel will

become a flagship Modern Orthodox synagogue in the south Florida region – a model to which all congregations will look.”

Bay Harbor Islands situated along Kane Concourse is where many Young Israel members and young families live today. Bay Harbor Islands has its own distinctive history...

The Bay Harbor Islands _____

The Town of Bay Harbor Islands grew from the foresight of Shepard Broad, who came to America from Pinsk, Russia in 1920 at the age of 14. Seven years later, he held a degree from the New York Law School. Mr. Broad practiced law in New York until 1940, when he brought his wife Ruth to live in South Florida.

In 1945, Broad acquired two undeveloped mangrove swamp islands, located between the beach barrier island and mainland North Miami. With his own funds and with down payments on the sale of lots, Shepard Broad filled in the islands and watched as Bay Harbor began to spring up. He was joined in the venture by a prominent businessman, the late Benjamin N. Kane, for whom the Town's main thoroughfare was named.

In 1947, the Town of Bay Harbor Islands was incorporated. In 1953, the present municipality was chartered by the Florida Legislature, and later that same year approved by the voters of the Town. Shepard Broad was elected the first mayor of the Town and served in that position for 26 consecutive years.

On June 15, 1947, the first building permit was applied for. Within four years, the Town had a population of 550 citizens living in 46 private residences. Today, the Town's population is approximately 5,100. Following through on the concept of zoning Shepard Broad brought to the islands, the 103-acre West Island remains open only to single-family unit development. The 150 acres of the East Island contain multiple-family dwellings and also a small business district to provide

Bay Harbor residents with a complete selection of goods and services. In 1951, the Broad Causeway was opened, joining the islands with the mainland of northern Dade County.



Building for the Future _____

We are fortunate to have Young Israel members who have been tremendously generous with their building pledges. They are committed to standing behind the new structure that will house the Young Israel Congregation. Through their dedication, they have encouraged other Young Israel members to pledge funds that will help to build a new 24,000 square foot space. It took a total of 5 years to receive the final approvals from the township. The next step, to be taken in the near future, will be to break ground to start the building process.

Murray Laulicht states, “the primary challenge – then and now – is to build a synagogue. Thanks to many members of the community we are on our way.” The Laulichts moved into Bal Harbour in 1989 when the Shul of Bal Harbour had recently had a ground breaking and the only store that provided kosher goods was The Rolling Pin Bakery. Now with several shuls, many restaurants and a kosher supermarket, the community has experienced a surge of growth.



Murray & Linda Laulicht are originally from West Orange, New Jersey where Murray served as president of Congregation Ahawas Achim B'nai David and Jacob and as president of the MetroWest Federation. Linda and Murray are board members of Israel Bonds, CAJE, Shaare Zedek, Ohr Torah Stone, American Jewish Joint

Distribution Committee and Linda is on the board of Stern College for Women. Murray has recently become the President of the American Committee for Shaare Zedek. Through his experience as a communal leader, Murray has learned that “while leaders must lead, they must build a consensus before implementing any drastic changes.”

Murray predicts that the “Young Israel will grow and more young families will come because people are looking for a Modern Orthodox synagogue and the Young Israel can fill that need.” He recalls with fond memories that he always considered the Young Israel to be a very warm community where all are welcome and encouraged to participate. Murray feels that to help further a feeling of unity as the Young Israel grows, it’s important to “continue to welcome everyone who comes through our doors and to encourage their participation in whatever way makes them comfortable.”

Charles & Seryl Kushner are active supporters of the Young Israel Building Campaign. Charles, a real estate developer, enjoys davening in the Young Israel when he is in town. Their generous contribution will enable the Young Israel to accommodate more members and provide more programs and activities in the beautiful new synagogue space.



Charles Kushner and Linda Laulicht are brother and sister and are staunch supporters of Holocaust initiatives, of Eretz Yisrael, and support many Jewish causes. Their parents, Rae and Joseph Kushner, were partisans during World War II where they first met. After the war they came to America where they began life anew in Hillside, New Jersey. They were supporters of Rabbi Pinchas M. Teitz's synagogue and Jewish Educational Center in Elizabeth, New Jersey. The Kushner and Laulicht families have made a pledge to the Young Israel of Bal Harbour to name the new synagogue building in memory of their parents of blessed memory, Rae and Joseph Kushner.

Conclusion

Well there you have it – the Young Israel of Bal Harbour has been in existence for a total of 14 years. While not a very long history, it is one filled with a treasure trove of wonderful memories and daunting challenges that have been overcome through the efforts of the Young Israel members whose stories have been told on the pages of this journal.

From a spark of an idea that led to the founding of the Young Israel which currently services the communities of Bal Harbour, Bay Harbor Islands, Surfside and Indian Creek, today the Young Israel continues to attract many new members and visitors to its congregation. As was recounted in this journal, when the three men, Bernie Lack, Stephen Opert and Allen Schloss, first met with the Surfside Township in the late 1990s to discuss the idea of having a Young Israel in Surfside, they told township officials that the Young Israel could attract 300 members. Today with over 180 plus families who are Young Israel members, this number has already been surpassed.

We thank them for taking the first step. Other Young Israel members have followed in their footsteps. The Young Israel pioneers remember davening in a small meeting room in the basement of the Coronado Hotel when there were just a

handful of members. They were willing to take a risk on a new synagogue and saw the potential of developing a congregation in a neighborhood that includes beautiful beachfront properties, wonderful shopping and kosher restaurants right at your fingertips.

With the move to the second floor of the Amtrust Bank, the congregation came to the realization that they needed a new rabbinic leader and Rabbi Moshe Gruenstein was hired. Rabbi Gruenstein has been the Young Israel's spiritual leader, aided by his wife Rebbetzin Rena, since 2001. Rabbi Gruenstein has helped to implement a number of learning opportunities for the congregation and has stressed the importance of reaching out to the youth since they are the future of our Young Israel and the Jewish people.

Rabbi Gruenstein has also helped to create an environment of Torah and Tefillah with his weekly Shabbos drasha and Lunch and Learn classes. He has seen the Young Israel grow exponentially during his tenure while maintaining a feeling of camaraderie among its diverse membership. Rabbi Gruenstein looks forward to having the Young Israel move to its new building which "will create even more opportunities for our congregation."

In this journal, Young Israel members have shared some of their fondest memories with the widespread theme that includes sharing Young Israel activities with new-found friends; raising their children in the warmth of the congregation; living in a community with great amenities; and expressing satisfaction at having made a difference through their leadership.

There have also been challenges that the Young Israel has faced, such as: court battles with the Township of Surfside to allow the Young Israel to have a house of worship in its current and future locations; dealing with an increasingly larger Shabbos crowd which has led to space issues; ensuring that all members and guests feel welcome; encouraging intergenerational interaction

and participation by all; creating more learning activities for adults, families, and our youth; and cultivating more volunteers to help with Young Israel activities.

Yet what makes the Young Israel Community unique is its members – members who have generously given of themselves, whether it is their resources or their talents (or both). It is the members with the guidance of Rabbi Gruenstein who have helped to create a kehilla we can be proud of as we take the next step in building our future.



Acknowledgements _____

A heartfelt thank you to the people who helped to produce this journal that delineates the history of the Young Israel of Bal Harbour since its humble beginning in 1999 with a look toward its future:

The Committee:

Mali Schwartz, *Editor/Writer*

Mimie Rose, *Interviewer*

Marsha Sussman, *Interviewer*

Steve Schwartz, *Proofreader*

For Providing Photographs:

Max Dekelbaum

David Kwiat

Rick Moore

Stephen Opert

Bianca Senker

A Special Thanks to:

Rabbi Gruenstein

Yakira Navarro

Freda Greenbaum

Steven Mills

Young Israel of Bal Harbour Annual Dinner



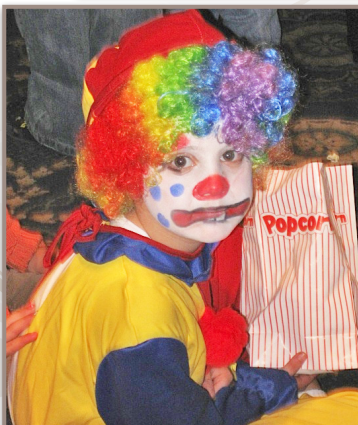
Young Israel of Bal Harbour Torah Dedication



Torah Dedication



Young Israel of Bal Harbour Purim!



Purim!

