



Beth Jacob Synagogue is on quiet Montpelier side street.

Montpelier's own

visit to Beth-Jacob Synagogue

By Katherine Blakely

As you walk the main streets of Montpelier you will see many churches. But if you are looking for a synagogue you will have to inquire, for it is tucked away on a short street leading off the northerly end of Loomis Street, away from the traffic.

There at 10 Harrison Ave. the Beth Jacob Synagogue became a formal entity about 1905. It also became a dwelling for the Rabbi as well. In 1967 a \$12,000 addition was built to provide a Communal Hall which would seat about 100 people.

The story of the tragic death of Jacob, the son of Isaac Yett, a prominent citizen, who was killed by a falling icicle from the down-town Hazen block about 1920, memorializes the name of the Synagogue - the Beth Jacobs Synagogue. (Beth being the Hebrew name for "House of")

Montpelier does not have a large population of Jews, but those who have allied themselves with Beth Jacob Synagogue are staunch and faithful.

It was about 1900 when emigrants from Czarist Russia, Lithuania, Poland and bordering countries were arriving in the United States, fleeing their native land because of compulsory military service and seeking religious freedom, that the first Jews came to Montpelier, to live. The name of these people and their contribution to our business world, are still fresh in the minds of old-timers. There was Louis Gould, Hyman Levinthal, Samuel Gould of Barre, Harris and Isaac Yett, Jacob Nathan, Philip Cohen, Israel Schwartz, Abraham Stickolchick and Abraham Fibish.

Morris Leventhal recalls how his

father, who came from Lithuania, served the Jewish Community here as titular head of Montpelier's Synagogue, and he now succeeds him. From its founding it has remained Orthodox but functions in a slightly conservative manner. No missionary work is done.

As a boy Morris spent three hours a night on four evenings a week, and a half day on Sundays, studying the history and bible of the Jewish people in addition to Hebrew, under the leadership of a Rabbi. He also attended public school. The religious classes were compulsory for boys up to 13 years, when they were confirmed and made ready for their bar mitzvah.

For girls, the studies were optional and Morris remembers four or five boys and one or two girls participating in the studies.

In the Jewish homes Yiddish was spoken, a conglomerate mixture of basic German and other languages such as Lithuanian, Polish and Russian. Most of the Jewish households could read Hebrew but could not speak it.

Before the addition to the synagogue was built, it was customary to hire halls from the Knights of Columbus or the Odd Fellows for such special occasions, as the Jewish holidays. Montpelier was the Mecca where Jews came from St. Johnsbury, Newport, Stowe, Waterbury, Northfield, Barre and such nearby colleges as Norwich, Vt. College, and Goddard. About 15-20 families in Barre and Montpelier, were listed as active Jews at that time.

Today, the little synagogue has 25

paying members. Additional money is earned by auctioning off Honors during ceremonies.

A Woman's Sisterhood acts as an auxiliary, raising money through card parties, and rummage sales.

A Sunday School is conducted by Mrs. Irving Anders and Paul Liberman. Synagogue adult services are held subject to call.

No longer is a full time Rabbi employed. Instead, the Hillel Foundation of Burlington provides a student theologian for High Holidays. He receives his expenses plus \$600 for conducting services, assisted by Mr. Leventhal.

The religious education of children is vital to the Jews, and as soon as the elementary foundation is acquired, often a family will move to a larger city, such as Burlington, where a stronger Jewish life is available.

Most of the members of Beth Jacob also subscribe to a half membership in one of the two Burlington synagogues. Burials occur in the Burlington cemetery.

To conduct a religious service Amynien must be present, (at least 10 male adults) Outside Jewish speakers may be participants.

The following persons make up the Board of Montpelier's synagogue - President Robert Carr; Vice-president Ben Rubal, Barre; Secretary Allan R. Carr; Treasurer, Bernard Gropper; Trustees Morris Leventhal, and Hyman L. Meyers, Waterbury.

The basis of the Jewish religion is based on these words "Hears, Oh Israel. Lord Our God. The Lord is One."