

JEWISH HISTORY AND COMMUNITY IN ALBANY, NY

FEBRUARY 3 - MARCH 2, 2003

Opalka Gallery
The Sage Colleges
140 New Scotland Avenue
Albany, New York 12208

NEW YORK

OCT 21 2003

STATE LIBRARY

974.743 J594 20312204 N.Y.S.L.

Jewish history and community in
Albany, NY

Front Cover: Detail of stained glass window at Beth Emeth, photo by JoAnn Fisher Hoose

CONTENTS

JEWS IN ALBANY, Harvey S. Strum. Ph.D

PIONEERS

ALBANY'S LOWER EAST SIDE

FROM A MINYAN TO A CONGREGATION

KADDISH FOR PRESIDENT LINCOLN

ANTI-SEMITISM

SOLIDARITY OF ALL ISRAEL

COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS

LOVE PEACE AND PURSUE IT;

AN APPRECIATION OF CONGREGATION OHAV SHALOM IN ALBANY, NY

Rabbi Dan Ornstein, Congregation Ohav Shalom

A CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

THE SOUL OF OHAV SHALOM

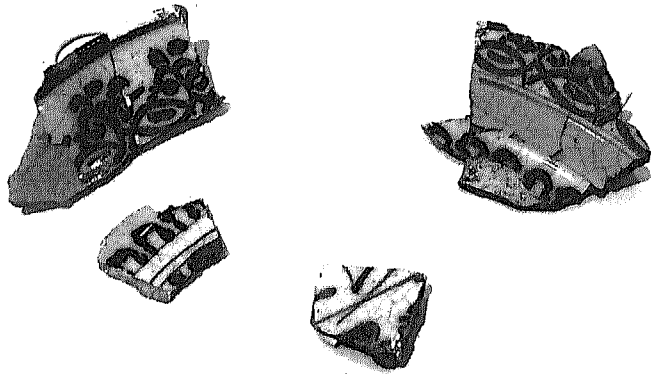
PARTICIPANTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PHOTO CREDITS

JEWES OF ALBANY

Harvery S. Strum, Ph.D



Remnants of a plate, 1780-1800.

These fragments were found during a 1998 archaeological dig at the current site of the DEC building at 625 Broadway. What appears to be Hebrew lettering in the design causes speculation on whether this plate was a Jewish family ritual item, perhaps a Passover seder plate. The resident known to have been at this site was a member of the Dutch Reformed Church. Who lived nearby is not known.

Pioneers

In the 17th and 18th centuries a few Jewish traders temporarily resided in Albany because of its strategic trade and military location, but the Jewish presence in Albany remained limited until the creation of an organized Jewish community in the 1830s/1840s. Asser Levy, the first recorded Jew to reside in Albany arrived in Beverweyk, New Netherlands from Jamaica and did business and owned property in Albany in the 1650s and 1660s. Apparently, Levy resided in Albany until his death in 1680. His widow, Miriam, remained with her second husband Ansell Samuel Levy until 1686 when they moved to Long Island. Several other Jewish merchants, like Jacob Lucena, lived in the Albany area but left by the early 18th century as trading opportunities declined.¹

¹ Louis Silver, "The Jews of Albany, NY." *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* (1954), 216-19; Joseph Munsell, ed., *Collections of the History of Albany* (Albany: J. Munsell, 1871), Vol. IV, 143, 297, 308-09, 362, 371-72, 381-82, 388.

Towards the middle of the 18th century Albany's strategic location began to attract a few Jewish merchants like Hayman Levy who conducted business in Albany in the late 1750s during the French and Indian War. Another Jewish merchant, Jonas Phillips, won recognition as a citizen of Albany in 1759 and ran a store for two years trading food and dry goods for payment in beaver and deerskins until he closed his shop in 1761. Other Jewish traders and merchants who conducted business in Albany included Moses Levy and his son Asher Levy, Moses Michaels, Barrack Hays, and Henry and Moses Seixas Phillips. The most poignant story came from the daughter of Joseph Simon who lived in Kinderhook. Shinah Simon married Dr. Nicholas Schuyler in 1782, an intermarriage frowned upon by both families.¹

An appeal by Shearith Israel in New York in 1817 for financial help to build a new synagogue suggests that several Jewish merchants lived in Albany in the early 19th century.

¹ Rabbi Naphtali Rubinger (Ohav Shalom), "Albany Jewry of the Nineteenth Century," (Ph.D. diss., Yeshive University, 1971), 19-29; New York *Gazette*, September 7, 1761; New York *Mercury*, August 31, 1761.

Jeremiah Wasserman, for example, ran a dry goods store in the 1820s. The most prominent and documented Jewish resident was Levy Solomons. His father, also Levy Solomons, traded in Albany in the 18th century, but Levy Solomons (II) started a chocolate and snuff business, bought out the Caldwell snuff mill and moved the shop to 346 North Pearl Street. Because of the absence of an organized Jewish community, Levy Solomons and his family belonged to Shearith Israel and his four sons were each taken to New York for their bris. Solomons died in 1823. As the receipts in the exhibition suggest his widow and children ran the business for a time and continued to live in Albany.

Shortly after his death in 1823 the Jewish presence in Albany increased as Jews from the German states, especially Bavaria, migrated to Albany. The creation of the Jewish community in Albany paralleled the establishment of organized Jewish communities in other upstate cities, such as Troy, Syracuse and Buffalo. Most Jewish immigrants between 1820-1870 came from southern Germany and came because of restrictive laws on marriage, property ownership, taxes, occupations and citizenship in the German states.

Half of the Jewish immigration into the United States during this time period came from other parts of Europe stretching from Alsace in France on the west to Poland and Lithuania in Russia on the east. While most of the Jewish immigrants who settled in Albany spoke German and Yiddish and came from the German states some arrived from Alsace and from Polish speaking regions of Poznan, (Posen) in the largest German state, Prussia, or the Austrian Empire. There were enough Polish Jews by 1847 to establish a Polish ritual synagogue, Beth El Jacob.

Most Jewish immigrants worked as middlemen, small shopkeepers, peddlers or tailors and came from the poorest segments of the German Jewish population. In Albany, the 1833-34 directory revealed that Jews were tinsmiths, like Isaac Kagan and Samuel Fischer, or tailors like Bernard Levy.¹ For many Jews peddling became a primary occupation. Between 1842-1850 between 52% and 75% of the peddlers in Albany were Jewish. Julius (Joel) Gerson, who became president of Beth El, lacked the capital for a horse and cart and traveled on foot as a peddler.

¹ Silver, "Jews of Albany" 221-22.

Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise commented that most of his congregation were peddlers. Isaac Marx, who became a member of Congregation Anshe Emeth, started out as a poor peddler. Someone who met him on the road noted:

"I met a pedlar [sic] named Marx from Albany, and an immigrant from Wurtemberg. This unfortunate man has been driving himself in this miserable trade for three years to furnish a bare living for himself and his family.² In the 1850s, one quarter of the congregations Beth El and Anshe Emeth were peddlers.³ Initially, the wealth of the first Jewish residents was limited. In an appeal, "Schnorr-Zettel," of November 12, 1839 the local Jews appealed for financial aid to establish the first synagogue in Albany, Beth El.

² Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 191.

³ Hasia Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 36-59, 68. An occupational analysis was not done of Albany's third synagogue, Beth El Jacob; Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 190. For Julius (Joel) Gerson and the licenses of other Jewish peddlers see the Peddlers License Books (1840-1900) in the Secretary of State, Archives, New York State Library.

The members admitted “most of our number are poor, and none are wealthy.”¹ They had only “scanty means” to establish a synagogue. Isaac Mayer Wise also commented about the poverty of the congregation in 1850. An account by Anthony Rosenstock of a peddler who arrived in Albany in 1855, noted that although his family acquired a small store on Madison near South Pearl the lack of money and room led him to sleep on a box under the counter of the store where “I slept for two years.” From there he traveled around the Capital District peddling jewelry, returning to his box bed under the counter at night.² These experiences paralleled those of other Jewish immigrants who settled in upstate New York between the 1830s and the 1870s.

¹ Rubinger, “Albany Jewry,” 51. The original “Schnorr-Zettel” of November 12, 1839 for Beth El Synagogue is in the Archives of Beth Emeth. Also, see records at the American Jewish Archives.

² Isaac M. Wise, *Reminiscences* (Cincinnati: Leo Wise and Co, 1901, 1st edition; 2nd edition, New York: Central Synagogue, 1945), 47; Rubinger, “Albany Jewry,” 191-92.

Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise recorded the modest means of the Jewish community where “few families in Albany had parlors furnished with carpets... The majority lived in two or three rooms.”³ The women of the congregation lacked money for good clothes and men drank three cent beers and smoked three cent cigars, suggesting the modest means of the Albany Jewish community.

By the mid 1850s some of the Jewish merchants who arrived in Albany between 1836 and 1855 had moved up economically as revealed in the 1855 census. Gradually, over the next thirty-five years some members of this predominately German Jewish community succeeded as merchants. In fact, by 1885, Mayor John Boyd Thatcher, while delivering a speech at the laying of the cornerstone of the new Beth Emeth building, commented on the economic success of the “Israelitish community.”⁴

³ Wise, *Reminiscences*, 47.

⁴ Rubinger, “Albany Jewry,” 198.

Few German Jews became wealthy, but many had moved into middle class status by the 1880s.¹ However, with the beginning of the movement of Jews from Eastern Europe in the late 1880s and 1890s class distinctions and significant comparative differences emerged between the new Jewish immigrants of the late 19th century and early 20th century and German Jewish immigrants and their American born children. Once again, many of the recent arrivals from the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires were poorer and worked as peddlers or tailors. This reflected similar differences that emerged in other Jewish communities

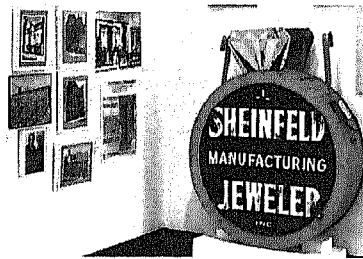
Unlike communities like Boston, Philadelphia or Newark, Albany did not attract large numbers of Jewish immigrants. The arrival of the German Jews created a community which went from a few scattered Jews like Levy Solomons family in the early 1820s to a Jewish population of 772 in 1855, enough to support three synagogues. As a result of immigration the Jewish population rose to 3,000 in the mid 1880s and 4,000 in 1900 with Polish and Russian Jews

¹ Ibid, 199-208.

comprising about 2,500 members of the community. With the end of immigration in the 1920s, the Jewish community contained 9,000-10,000 members.² In 1947 the Albany Jewish Community Council estimated a steady Jewish population of about 9,400 between 1937-47, and in the late 1970s the Council's estimate was 13,500. As part of a pattern repeated in other communities Jews migrated to suburban communities like Delmar, Glenmont, Voorheesville and Slingerlands in the past thirty years, but the synagogues remained in Albany. The continued existence of the synagogues in Albany is fundamentally different than other communities where urban synagogues were abandoned to create new ones in suburbia.³

² Figures from Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 194 for 1855; "GHC" "Albany" *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnells, 1905), Vol.2:21; Hannah Applebaum, "The Jewish Community in Albany: Then and Now." (Unpublished paper, 1985); William Kennedy, *O Albany!* (New York: Viking Press, 1938), 220; Silver, "Jews in Albany," 239.

³ Figures from Albany Jewish Community Council. *Shalom Albany* (Albany; Council, 1976): 7; Jewish Communal Survey of Albany, October 1947, Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds (Unpublished report), Albany County Records Office, 13.



Sheinfeld Jewlry Sign

ALBANY'S LOWER EAST SIDE

Neighborhoods

South Pearl Street emerged in the 19th century as a major commercial and business center in downtown Albany and Jewish immigrants resided in neighboring streets. Already by 1850 a local newspaper, the Albany Express credited a Mr. Sampson with starting the development of the area and noted: "He succeeded in doing a lively business, and was quickly followed by many Jews, who were, at the time, not very well known in the city."¹ Over the next twenty-five years a Jewish neighborhood developed in the South End of Albany centered near South Pearl Street and Madison Avenue between larger Irish and German neighborhoods in the First, Second, and Third Wards of the city.

¹ Albany Express, December 14, 1850, cited in Silver, "Jews in Albany," 239.

Synagogues in nearby streets, like Ferry, Basset, and Herkimer, reinforced the identification of this section of Albany as the major Jewish neighborhood of the middle and late 19th century.²

A study done of Jewish residential patterns in 1876 found a concentration of Jews living on South Pearl, Westerlo, Grand, Herkimer, Hudson, and Madison Streets and Avenues, with South Pearl and Westerlo having the largest numbers of Jewish residents. According to the memory of Morris Sherman in 1936 the Jewish section of Albany in 1882 "centered around Broad, Trinity, and Madison Avenues" while the wealthiest segment of German Jews lived around Trinity Place and Madison Avenue and the poorest recent Polish and Russian Jews centered on Green, Pearl, Waterloo, and Schuyler Streets.³

² Neighborhood information: Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 191; Sol Goldenberg, "The Study of Jewish Immigration and Residence Patterns in Albany, New York in 1876," (Unpublished paper 1977), Albany County Records Office; Thomas Martin, "Urban Ethnic Dispersal in American Cities: The Example of the Jews of the South End of Albany between 1876 and 1939," (Unpublished paper, 1978), 6-8, Albany County Records Office.

³ Silver, "Jews in Albany," 239; Martin, "Urban Ethnic Dispersal," 6-9; Applebaum, "Jewish Community," 5.

Reflecting the higher status, assimilation, and greater wealth German Jews by the end of the century “were already conducting their lives on elite streets – Madison Avenue, Grand, Lancaster, State, Willett- and they could and did hold themselves socially and geographically aloof” from the East European Jewish immigrants.¹ The movement of Temple Beth Emeth to a newly constructed synagogue on Lancaster in the late 1880s partially reflected this status change. By 1916 the wealthier German Jews resided in the Pine Hills neighborhood, an ethnically mixed upper middle class section, where they overcame “a gentleman’s agreement to keep out Jews” from certain streets in Pine Hills.²

For Russian and Polish Jews arriving from the 1880s to the 1920s the South End, especially South Pearl, emerged as the center of Jewish business and as a symbol of Jewish life in Albany. The three Orthodox synagogues, Workmen’s Circle, and the Hebrew Educational Institute were in the South End.

¹ Kennedy, *O Albany!*, 221.

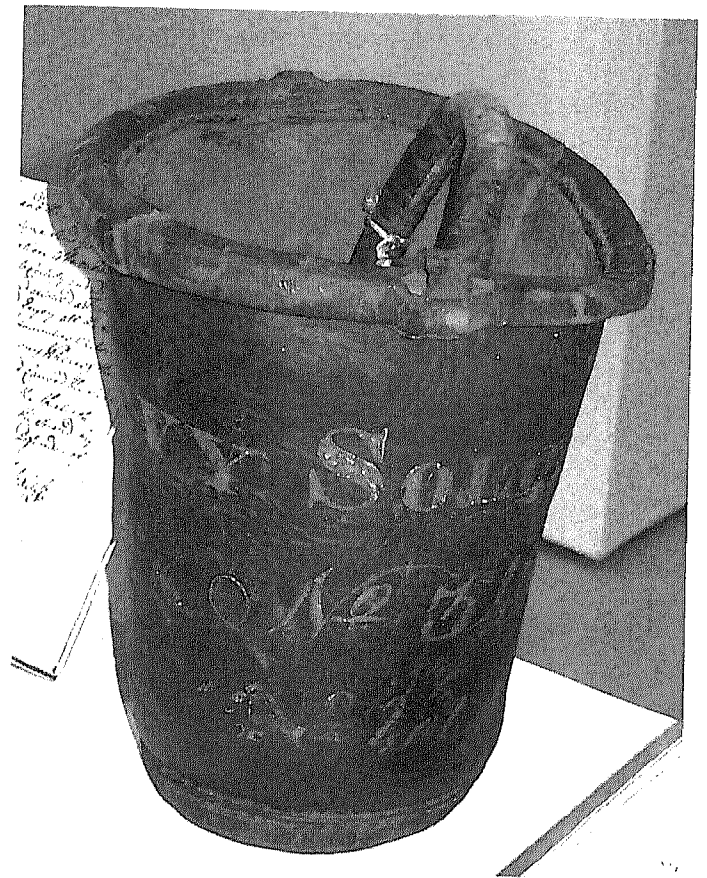
² *Ibid.*, 120-121.

There were Yiddish Theater performances in local theaters, Kosher meat markets, bakeries, and restaurants. As an example, Walter Hyman, left Russian Poland in 1908 and moved to the South End. For close to fifty years he ran Hyman Fish Market and got actively involved in Sons of Abraham. As another example, Mrs. Harriet Gibbor’s maternal grandparents settled in Albany in 1880s, got married in Sons of Abraham, and opened a hardware and houseware store on South Pearl. In 1881 Aaron and Solomon Allen arrived in Albany from Russia fleeing the 1881 pogroms and worked as tailors in the South End, typical of Jewish immigrants from the Russian Empire. The family of Henry Sontz came from Ukraine when he was a child in the early 20th century after the wave of pogroms in 1903. As a child he and other Jewish children went to the Hebrew Educational Institute on Franklin Street, that opened in 1910, and independent religious teachers also taught children of the South End. By 1910 Jews shared part of the South End with recently arrived Italian immigrants. From 1918 until the doors were closed by the National Origins Act of 1924 a last group of Russian and Polish Jews arrived in the South End.

Many in this group of Jewish immigrants came to Albany because of relatives living in the South End.²

Around World War I Jews began to move “up the hill” as some of the Russian and Polish Jewish immigrants and their children reached a modicum of economic security. The South End, because of Jewish businesses and synagogues, remained identified as the Jewish section of Albany, especially South Pearl Street until after World War II. Jewish businesses began moving in the 1920s and 1930s to Central Avenue and Spector’s represents this change as did a proposed boycott of German goods by Central Avenue merchants in 1938 after Kristallnacht. “As more and more immigrants rose from being peddlers to becoming merchants and property owners, the population” moved to Central Avenue and to Delaware Avenue.³

² Transcript of Oral History Interview with Walter Hyman by Kay Wilkie, August 23, 1977; *Knickerbocker News*, October 3, 1980; Oral History Report of Mrs. Harriet Gibbor by Martin Walder, July 25, 1977; *Knickerbocker News*, August 18, 1981; Oral History Report of Henry Sontz by Matthew Rugero, October, 1977; *Albany Times Union*, July 18, 1976. The interviews were done by the Bureau of Cultural Affairs between 1975-1981 about the South End and Jewish life. There are transcripts and tapes at the Albany County Records Office. Also, see Kennedy, *O Albany*, 222-25. ³ Applebaum, “The Jewish Community,” 5.



Levy Solomons's fire bucket

They also moved into the Pine Hills neighborhood following the upper middle class German Jews. The creation of new synagogues to serve the "uptown" needs of Jewish residents started what became Conservative congregations. Congregation Tifereth Israel began at "Schwartz's Mansion" on Woodlawn Avenue in 1936 in Pine Hills before relocating to 404 Partridge Street in 1930. Jewish residents of Delaware Avenue started Congregation Sons of Israel initially as a Hebrew school before establishing a synagogue at 18 Federal Street. Similarly, Ohav Shalom began in 1911 and by 1922 was housed at 411 Washington Avenue because Jewish families had moved uptown "too far away from the Jewish section to walk to Sabbath services."¹ Between the 1950s and early 1990s the relocation of synagogues to New Scotland Avenue, Academy Road, Whitehall Road, and Krumkill Road mirrored the earlier shifts of Jewish residents.

¹ Ibid, 6; Rabbi Baruch Friedman-Kohl, "A Brief History of Congregation Ohav Shalom," in Anne Roberts and Marcia Cockrell, *Historic Albany: Its Churches and Synagogues* (Albany: Library Communications Services, 1986), 146. Also, Donald Cashman, "Temple Israel," 140 in the above, and his "Albany Synagogues," 118.

Until about 1950 the South End and specifically South and North Pearl Streets remained major business sections of Albany, but population shifts and shopping malls killed urban downtowns. Jewish residents who lived or shopped on South Pearl remembered it for Kosher meat markets like, Strauss's, for Kosher delicatessens, like Zimmerman's, Kessler's drugstore and Boochever's furs. Nearby on North Pearl were stores like Saul's Clothing or Muhlfelder's. As late as 1950 when David Mogilensky moved to Albany from Brooklyn to Trinity Place and joined Sons of Abraham, the Hebrew schools were still downtown as well as a Kosher slaughter house on Trinity Place and Jewish bakeries. Many Jewish businesses were still on South Pearl and even a candy store where he could buy Jewish newspapers.

Henry Sontz continued to run Snappy Men's Shop on South Pearl until the late 1970s. However, after 1950 the economic shifts and population movements turned the South End into historical memory as it became the remembered Lower East Side for Albany's Jews. Sontz remembered the Kosher restaurants, Rappaport and Falkow's, from his younger days when the area around South Pearl was the vital center

of Albany Jewry. Summing up the Jewish experience Thomas Martin wrote “the South End remained a desirable workplace and business center for the first half of the twentieth century and Jewish businesses remained and prospered during the time.”¹ Today, population and economic changes have made even Central Avenue historic as Spector’s relocates suggesting the impact of urban change and suburbanization. The Jews of Albany and the shifts of synagogues, people, and businesses reflected these larger urban movements and the history of the Albany Jewish community is part of larger societal trends as well as the internal dynamics of American Jewry.

¹ Albany Times Union, July 18, 1976; Thomas Martin, “Urban Ethnic Dispersal,” 14-15; Kennedy, *O. Albany!*, 224; Oral History Report of David Mogilensky, March 14, 1980, Albany Hall of Records; Advertisements from Albany newspapers from 1881-1942.



Torah Crown, 19th century

FROM A MINYAN TO A CONGREGATION

Organized Jewish life in Albany began in the mid 1830s when a group of Jews met in 1836 for religious worship. Individuals gathered in homes of the members to honor the Sabbath and holidays, and the group probably acquired a Torah scroll.¹ By March 25, 1838 the informal congregation decided to organize formally and met at the home of Mayer Rais to create Congregation Beth El (House of God). The Congregation filed incorporation papers on August 3, 1838. Lacking the money to purchase a house of worship the members of the congregation led by Mayer Rais sent out a Schnorr-Zettel on November 12, 1839 appealing for help since the members of Beth El were poor and "Strangers in a Strange land."²

¹ Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 48. Simon Rosendale and Max Schlesinger, "A History of the Jewish Community of Albany, 1836-1910," *Beth Emeth Annual* (Albany: Beth Emeth Congregation, 1910), 37.

² Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 51. The original document is in the Beth Emeth Archives.

On December 16, 1839 the Congregation agreed to purchase a house at 166 Bassett Street as the synagogue, for \$1,500. In addition, the congregation purchased a burial ground on April 13, 1839 in Bethlehem, and on March 19, 1840 elected a board of the trustees. On March 9, 1840 the congregation adopted formal rules and in 1844 drafted a constitution. Membership grew quickly and in 1841 Beth El purchased a church building from the Irish benevolent society, Hibernian Benevolent Society and dedicated the new building on Erev Rosh Hoshana, September 2, 1841.³ Members of the congregation recorded the synagogue's activities in German suggesting the Bavarian origins of many of its members. However, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise observed that some of the members, who became his allies, were Hungarian and Polish, immigrants from the Austrian Empire and Poznan.⁴ A Jewish traveler visiting Albany in the late 1850s described "the ritual that of Fuerth,"

³ Silver, "Jews in Albany," 225.

⁴ Wise, *Reminiscences*, 165.

a town in Bavaria.¹ Although the membership may have been more diverse than suggested the German speaking members adopted a German ritual which may have played a role in the establishment of a second Albany synagogue, Beth El Jacob.

Disagreements about religious observance and ritual led a dissident group to split from Beth El in 1841 to organize Beth El Jacob, incorporated on February 22, 1841.² Led by Simon Cohen, Simon Newburg, and Samuel Minster, this new congregation adopted minhag Polin, the Polish ritual.³ Again, this provides evidence of the probable ethnic diversity of the initial Albany Jewish community. Overpopulation, the decline in Jewish economy, and anti-Semitism motivated Jews from Poznan, Austrian Empire, and

¹ Charles Reznikoff,, translator, of I.J. Benjamin's Three Years in America, 1859-1862 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956), Vol. I, 284.

² Incorporation Papers of Beth El Jacob, February 22, 1841, "Church Patents of Albany County" Book I, 250, Albany County Records Office.

³ Benjamin, Three Years, 284.

possibly a few from the Polish regions of Russia to immigrate to Albany in the 1830s to the 1850s. Splits between Jewish immigrants based on ethnicity and ritual were typical, especially conflict over German or Polish rituals in synagogue observance.⁴ Jewish unity did not last because of the differences in origins and religious practices of immigrants making "Jewish unity an oxymoron."⁵ After meeting in members' homes, Beth El Jacob acquired a synagogue at 8 Rose Street in 1841 and a burial ground on May 3, 1841. On December 1, 1847 Beth El Jacob held a ceremony laying a cornerstone for a new synagogue. Rabbi Samuel Myer Isaacs, a prominent Jewish leader from New York City and later editor of the Jewish Messenger, and a number of prominent Gentile Albanians, including Mayor William Parmalee, took part in the dedication of the new building on Fulton Street on April 28, 1848. This event attracted large numbers of citizens "hundreds left, unable from the crowd to gain admittance."⁶

⁴ Diner, A Time for Gathering, 50-53, 119.

⁵ Ibid, 119.

⁶ Albany Argus, April 29, 1848, cited in Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 60.

Both congregations considered themselves Orthodox, but the arrival of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise would lead to a split in Beth El. While in New Haven in 1846 Wise met a peddler from Albany of Polish origin who thought Wise should go to Albany because of the quality of Wise's preaching, but "I paid little attention to this, for I had no idea where Albany was."¹ Soon after, the president of Beth El, Moses Schloss, invited Wise to Albany. He gave a sermon on Rosh Hashanah 1846, which led to his selection as rabbi and teacher of the congregation's Hebrew School, The Jewish Academy of Albany. At that time, there were only four Hebrew schools in the United States, and Wise's work with the school was "one of his notable achievements in the Albany Jewish community."²

Wise ran into conflict with his congregation by introducing changes like a mixed choir, and the elimination of certain prayers and religious poetry, that formed part of the service. The introduction of a choir upset members because it appeared that Wise had adopted Protestant religious practices into

¹ Wise, *Reminiscences*, 28.

² Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 89.

traditional Jewish services.³ Also, he introduced other changes in ritual and decorum in the synagogue's services which alienated members. Initially, the congregation reluctantly accepted these changes, but by the summer of 1850 his relationship with a significant portion of the congregation had deteriorated. While Wise instituted reforms he felt strongly about "the sanctity of the Sabbath,"⁴ and he criticized a synagogue member for opening his business on the Sabbath, which further angered congregants. At a congregational meeting on September 5, 1850, a majority favored voiding his contract. When he arrived to officiate Rosh Hashanah services on September 7th, the officers of the synagogue prevented him from taking out the Torah Scrolls. A general fight ensued, Wise was briefly arrested along with several other members of the congregation. By October 11, 1850 Wise and his supporters left the congregation to form Anshe Emeth.⁵

³ *Ibid*, 96.

⁴ *Ibid*, 121.

⁵ Wise, *Reminiscences*, 163-166; Rosendale, "Jewish Community," 46-47; Silver, "Jews in Albany," 232-33; Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 143.

Anshe Emeth became the fourth Reform congregation in the United States. The congregation formally incorporated on April 11, 1851.¹ After meeting in rooms on the corner of Madison and South Pearl the congregation solicited contributions to purchase a Baptist Church on Herkimer Street on September 28, 1851 and consecrated it as Anshe Emeth on October 3, 1851. The congregation purchased land for a cemetery at the Albany Rural Cemetery on August 27, 1851. Rabbi Wise served the congregation of eighty members until 1854 giving his last sermon on April 19th before moving to Cincinnati. Anshe Emeth had 120 members by 1860. Both Simon Rosendale and I.J. Benjamin described the membership as Germans although Wise wrote that his supporters in 1850 included Hungarian and Polish congregants.² German may have been used in sermons and services well into the 1880s.³

¹ Incorporation Papers of Anshe Emeth, April 12, 1851, "Church Patents of Albany County," Book II, 19, Albany County Records Office.

² Rosendale, "Jewish Community," 49-52; Benjamin, *Three Years*, 284; Wise, *Reminiscences*, 165.

³ Albany *Evening Journal*, September 19, 1885.

Beth El remained an Orthodox congregation at 76 Herkimer Street. In 1855 the congregation selected its first rabbi since terminating Wise's contract. Sampson Falk remained rabbi for eight years. On July 14, 1864 Beth El bought a Methodist Church at Ferry and Franklin, and the dedication on January 20, 1866 gave Albany the opportunity to see the parade of the Torah Scrolls, and major public officials participated in the dedication. However, by 1875 the social status and religious observances of Anshe Emeth and Beth El became similar as Beth El moved gradually from Orthodox to Reform religious practices.

An attempt at merger failed, but the inability of Beth El to gain new members while Anshe Emeth attracted new congregants as well as members from both Beth El and Beth El Jacob as more Americanized members opted for Reform Judaism, led Beth El to reconsider in 1884. Formal merger took place on December 1, 1885. The last service took place on December 5, 1885. A new Orthodox congregation, Sons of Abraham bought the Beth El building, and dedicated it on April 11, 1886. Beth El, as a Reform congregation did not appeal to newly arrived

Russian and Polish Jewish immigrants, and could not attract them. The merger of two Reform congregations created a space problem leading to a decision to build a new synagogue. In an impressive ceremony on November 24, 1887 “a great concourse of people gathered at the corner of Lancaster and Swan Streets” to view the laying of the cornerstone, and the congregation held ceremonies on May 23-24, 1889 to dedicate the synagogue with Isaac Mayer Wise giving the sermon in German.¹

Some of the Polish immigrants joined Beth El Jacob, and the synagogue relocated to a new building on the corner of Franklin and Herkimer Streets. “Its cornerstone was laid with imposing ceremonies July 22, 1907,” and the dedication took place on May 31, 1908.² Many Russian Jews and some Polish Jews did not feel comfortable in Beth El Jacob and following the pattern of Jewish immigrants from 1880-1924, they formed their own Orthodox congregation.

¹ Rosendale, “Jewish Community,” 60; Rabbi Donald Cashman, “Albany Synagogues,” 120; Silver, “Jews in Albany,” 236.

² Rosendale, “A Jewish Community,” 63.



Chupah (wedding canopy) and 1947 wedding dress of Hildreth Newhof Reiss

Leaving Beth El Jacob in 1881 to form B'nai Jacob (Sons of Jacob) the congregation incorporated on June 26, 1882 as B'nai Abraham (Sons of Abraham) and initially held services at 69 South Pearl Street before purchasing the Beth El synagogue.¹

The influx of additional Russian Jewish immigrants in the 1890s and the first decade of the 20th century produced further religious splintering. By the turn of the new century the more settled members of Sons of Abraham had lived in Albany for twenty years and some had achieved financial stability or even a degree of economic mobility in comparison to the latest group of Jewish immigrants. Some members did not feel comfortable in Sons of Abraham and began to join for religious services in 1902. Ironically, many of the members of Sons of Abraham started out as peddlers as did the new group of Russian Jews, but some of the more established members of Sons of Abraham described the newest immigrants as "ash-men,"

¹ Cashman, "Albany Synagogues," 120; Congregation Beth Abraham-Jacob. Dedication Booklet, March 9, 1991, 13.

because of their poverty and peddling of the poorest kind."² Three of the members met informally and although they earned only five dollars a week they decided to pool their resources to rent a room on Broad Street for religious worship. By August 22, 1905 the members incorporated as synagogue Agudath Achim (United Brethren Society).³ A year later they purchased a cemetery and in 1911 built a small synagogue on Ferry Street. Members of Sons of Abraham called it "Cossack's Synagogue." And Agudath Achim prided itself as the "only strictly orthodox synagogue in the city using the Chasidic Prayer book."⁴

As indicated earlier the movement of Jews up the hill led to the creation of three conservative congregations.

² Silver, "Jews in Albany," 240. Haim Shiber, the first chairman of Agudath Achim informed Silver of this in 1936.

³ Certificate of Incorporation, United Brethren Society, August 22, 1905, Box 1, Albany Jewish Community, Special Collections, State University of New York, Albany.

⁴ Silver, "Jews in Albany," 240; Morris Gerber, *Pictorial History of Albany's Jewish Community* (Albany: Morris Gerber, 1986), 47; Carlyle Adams, "Judaism," *Albany Times Union*, 11/17/1957.

Ohav Shalom began as an informal religious society in 1911 and discussed incorporation on October 11, 1914. It formally incorporated on March 15, 1915. By 1916 it acquired a cemetery, and organized a Chevra Kadisha to aid in the burial of its congregants. In 1922 the synagogue purchased property at 441 Washington Avenue for its building where it stayed until 1961.¹

Similarly, the movement uptown placed Jews away from the Orthodox congregations and by the 1930s Jews in the Delaware neighborhood who wanted to adhere to traditional, if not totally Orthodox, religious practices met at Hulburt Street. In 1935 they constructed a synagogue on Federal Street off Delaware Avenue. It included bricks the city government donated, allegedly from the demolished Albany Penitentiary. The synagogue became Sons of Israel. Another group of individuals in Pine Hills met at "Schwartz's Mansion" on Woodlawn Road as Tifereth Israel in 1936 and built a synagogue on Partridge Street in 1938.²

¹ Frydman-Kohl, "Ohav Shalom," 146.

² Cashman, "Temple Israel," 140; Gerber, *Pictorial History*, 82; Applebaum, "Jewish Community," 6,8.

From the end of World War I to the present, Temple Beth Emeth, especially in the 1930s, became known in the community for ecumenical outreach. When fire destroyed the Westminster Presbyterian Church, Temple Beth Emeth shared its building. Kenneth Welles thanked the congregation for "opening to us their beautiful Temple since our church was destroyed."³ Similarly, in the mid 1930s Beth Emeth opened its doors to Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church during the construction of a new church.⁴ A regular feature of Beth Emeth's outreach were Union Thanksgiving services with Protestant congregations like the Westminster Presbyterian Church and the First Unitarian Church. Ecumenical outreach by the 1980s included dialogue with the Roman Catholic Diocese and extended to other congregations, such as Temple Israel. For example, on March 23, 1986, the Jewish/Catholic Dialogue Committee of the Roman Catholic Diocese joined with Rabbi Martin Silverman of Beth Emeth

³ Kenneth Welles to Rabbi Bernard Bamberger, April 6, 1930 Beth Emeth Archives.

⁴ Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church Dinner, April 11, 1935, Beth Emeth Archives.

and Rabbi Paul Sifton of Temple Israel in a reconciliation service to dedicate "Portal," a sculpture by Robert Blood, "commissioned by Christians and Jews" as a memorial to reconciliation and ecumenical cooperation in the Capital District.¹

Meanwhile, the continued movement of the Jewish community from the South End, and later from Pine Hills as well as the consequences of economic mobility, Americanization, and the passing of the immigrant generations led to consolidation of congregations, building of new synagogues, and religious splintering for somewhat different reasons. What happened in Albany was not unique and the history of Jewish communities in Syracuse or Boston would provide similar stories. In June 1953 Temple Beth Emeth decided to relocate to Academy Road. The formal dedication was on Erev Rosh Hashanah in September 1957. Originally, the dedication was planned for May, but the death of Rabbi Samuel Wolk led to the postponement.

¹ Program, March 23, 1986, Program, Union Thanksgiving Service November 26, 1953, Beth Emeth Archives.

The First Church of God purchased the Lancaster and Swan building.² The death of Rabbi Wolk was deeply felt in Albany because "rarely has one rabbi been so universally respected by all religious groups in a community – both Jews and Christians."³

Consolidation and movement took place in the Orthodox community. In the mid 1950s, the United Brethren Society negotiated with Beth El Jacob about merger. Declining membership due to the passing of the immigrant generation and movement of Jews out of the South End motivated the decision. After two years of discussion, the members of United Brethren (Agudath or Agudas Achim) on 71 South Ferry Street voted to merge with Beth El Jacob in May 1959 with the official merger completed in June. Members of United Brethren moved to Herkimer

² Patricia Snyder, "Our History," Congregation Beth Emeth, 160th Anniversary Journal (Albany: Beth Emeth, 1998). Beth Emeth Archives; Gerber, *Pictorial History*, 9-10. This essay in the introduction of Gerber's book was written by Hannah Applebaum.

³ Carlyle Adams, "Judaism," *Albany Times Union*, November 17, 1957, E-7; Also, *Albany Times Union*, 30 May, June 1, 1957 on the death of Rabbi Wolk.

and Franklin Street synagogue of Beth El Jacob.¹ A few years later, Beth El Jacob began discussions with Conservative congregation Ohav Shalom. The Board of Trustees at Ohav Shalom favored merger, but some of the members of former United Brethren raised technical questions that prevented merger in 1964.² Instead, in 1974 Beth El Jacob merged with Sons of Abraham on August 5, 1974 to form Beth Abraham – Jacob. This brought together the 200 families in Beth El Jacob – United Brethren with 250 families in Sons of Abraham.³

When Temple Israel moved from its synagogue on Federal Street in 1954 Congregation Sons of Abraham purchased the building in April 1958. A decade later, Sons of Abraham built a new synagogue on Hackett Boulevard reflecting the movement

¹ Harry Sutin to Maurice Flasterstein, May 4, 1959, Merger Committee Meeting, May 17, 1959 Harry Sutin to Benjamin Drooz, March 8, 1959, Beth El Jacob Files, Albany Jewish Community, Special Collections, SUNY Albany.

² *Messenger* (Ohav Shalom), January 17, 31, 1964, Ohav Shalom Records.

³ Cashman, "Albany's Synagogues," 120.

of the Jewish community out of the Delaware neighborhood. The first religious services were on Rosh Hashanah, September 7-8, 1964 and dedication on April 4, 1965, with local leaders and Mayor Erastus Corning present. In 1991 the congregation moved to Whitehall Road with the dedication on March 9, 1991.⁴

Merger and movement also took place among Conservative congregations. Tifereth Israel and Sons of Israel merged on April 6, 1949. Initially, the merged synagogue kept two houses of worship. When Rabbi Leo Geiger became the rabbi for the combined congregations in 1949 he encouraged the congregation to construct a new building on New Scotland Avenue. Like Rabbi Wolk, the death of Rabbi Geiger on April 12, 1952 sent the community into mourning as "the Christian clergy, civic government, the Jewish community and congregation" remembered the esteemed

⁴ *Albany Times Union*, August 16, 1964; Congregation Beth Abraham-Jacob, March 9, 1991; Cashman, "Congregation Sons of Abraham," "Congregation Beth Abraham-Jacob," 136-137; *Albany Knickerbocker News*, April 5, 1965, Synagogue File, Albany Public Library. Also, see *Knickerbocker News*, April 4, 1958; *Albany Times Union*, March 21, April 9, 1965.

religious leader.¹ The cornerstone was laid on June 20, 1954 for the new building and under the leadership of Rabbi Herman Kieval the synagogue was completed. The community saw the procession of Torahs on November 28, 1954 from the 404 Patridge Street building of Tifereth Israel to the New Scotland synagogue. Temple Israel's dedication celebration included a week of activities in January 1956.² Similarly, Ohav Shalom moved from its 441 Washington Avenue synagogue in 1961. From 1961-1964 Ohav Shalom held services at 268 Central Avenue until the completion of construction on the Krumkill Road building in 1964. The two synagogues of Conservative Judaism, while retaining their distinct identities, have cooperated on joint thanksgiving services.³

Two other congregations developed in the 1960s and 1970s in Albany. A group of religiously observant Jews wanted to meet together in an informal religious community. In 1965 they joined to form Shomray Torah, (Guardians of

¹ Cashman, "Temple Israel," 142; Albany Times Union, November 28, 1954.

² Ibid; Albany Times Union, January 29, 1956.

³ Albany Times Union, August 30, 1964; Frydman-Kohl, "Ohav Shalom," 146-47.

the Torah) a shtiebel, "a small house of prayer." They met in a house on Elm Street before moving to New Scotland Avenue. Numbering about 40-45, this group meets to pray in a religious community following Orthodox traditions.⁴

A conflict over continuing the contract of Rabbi Alvin Roth, who served Beth Emeth as a rabbi for fifteen years, led the congregation to not renew it when it expired in 1972. Some members of the congregation raised questions about the reasons for Roth's dismissal, and decided on December 12, 1971 to form a new Reform congregation, B'nai Sholom. Rabbi Roth served as the first rabbi. Since 1971, the congregation attracted younger members of the community and new Jewish residents interested in an equalitarian Reform religious community.⁵ In 1979 B'nai Sholom built a synagogue on Whitehall Road.

⁴ Cashman, "Albany's Synagogues," 120, Discussion with Rabbi Rubin, January 2003.

⁵ Ibid; Albany Times Union, April 3, 1971, June 3, December 20, 1971; Knickerbocker News, April 3, June 8, 1971; Albany Jews file, Albany Public Library. The writer of this essay is a member of B'nai Sholom.

Starting in November of 1991 a group interested in traditional Conservative Judaism, but wanting a small egalitarian community joined together. Known as the Havurah Minyan of the Capital District, this minyan began holding services in April 1992. They meet once a month for Sabbath services and in 1997 started High Holiday Services. Lay persons lead the group, and the members enjoy the informal atmosphere and shared religious responsibilities.

The history of the congregations in the Jewish community of Albany parallels that of most other Jewish communities. Splits, consolidation, and the movement of population is an inherent part of the American Jewish experience. From the creation of the first Jewish community in the 1830s to the Havurah Minyan of the 1990s Albany Judaism is about adapting to new circumstances while retaining traditional values. The congregations in Albany represent how Jews have responded to the tension between tradition and modernity and between organizational structure and religious intimacy.¹

¹ Telephone conversations with members of the Havurah Minyan, January 17, 2003; Albany Times Union, October 1, 1997.



Stained glass memorial for Holocaust victims and Ark Curtain

KADDISH FOR PRESIDENT LINCOLN

Jewish immigrants throughout American history have identified with their new country and sought acceptance as Americans. When major events happened, wars or national tragedies, Jews joined with other Americans to show their loyalty to their adopted country. When the Civil War split the country apart Albany's Jews enlisted in the Union Army. Silas Rosendale, for example, "enlisted as a private" in the Forty-Eight New York Volunteers "and was wounded at the first battle of Chancellorsville."¹ Moses Stern joined the One-hundred and Seventy-Eight New York Volunteers along with several other Jewish residents of Albany, and they fought in campaigns in Louisiana. Dr. Joseph Lewi served on the Commission of Physicians, and Dr. Herman Bendell participated as a surgeon "in nearly all the battles of the Army of the Potomac."² Today, the Jewish War Veterans of Albany reminds us of the participation of Albany's Jews in every American war since the Civil War.

¹ Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 319.

² Ibid, 310.

When Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in April 1865 Congregation Beth El met on April 18th and agreed to hold three services on April 20th in honor of the fallen president. The synagogue would be "draped in deep mourning for the space of thirty days."³ Resolutions adopted by the congregation included: "it is our duty as Israelites to abhor crime, and as citizens of the United States to love and respect the President, as the Chief of Magistrate of this, the glorious country of our adoption."⁴ At Anshe Emeth, Rabbi Max Schlesinger delivered a tribute to President Lincoln on April 19, 1865. Three representatives of the German Literary Society, Jewish and members of Anshe Emeth participated in a funeral parade held for the late President Lincoln when Lincoln's funeral train stopped in Albany in late April. Albany's Jews, like those in Troy, participated in the funeral honors for Lincoln to show their loyalty as Americans to their adopted country.⁵

³ Albany Atlas and Argus, April 21, 1865.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Tribute of Respect By the Citizens of Troy to the Memory of Abraham Lincoln (Albany: J. Munsell, 1865), 157.

The reaction to Lincoln's assassination revealed two themes in 19th Century Albany Jewish history – the desire of Albany's Jews to identify as Americans and their self-identification as Israelites. Both Albany's Jews and Gentile political leaders referred to Jews as Israelites.¹

In other national tragedies, Albany's Jews demonstrated their loyalty as Americans. When Charles Guiteau killed President James Garfield in 1881, Dr. Max Schlesinger gave a tribute at Anshe Emeth to Garfield, "the good, the noble, the illustrious" as a large crowd of Albany's Jews listened.² Congregations in Albany, Troy and other communities joined in a national day of mourning for Garfield. Twenty years later when another assassin, Leon Czolgosz, mortally wounded President William McKinley, hundreds of synagogues on the Lower East Side of New York, full because of the Jewish High Holidays, prayed for the late President. In Albany, Rabbi Alexander Lyons of Beth Emeth delivered a special prayer for McKinley on Erev Rosh Hashanah for the recovery of the president from his wounds, and when he died Beth

¹ Albany Atlas and Argus, April 22, 24, 1865.

² Albany Argus, September 29, 1881.

Beth Emeth joined with the congregation of Trinity Methodist Church in a commemoration of McKinley as all churches and synagogues held memorial services.³ More than 2,000 people attended the service at Beth Emeth. At Beth El Jacob, Reform and Orthodox Jews held a joint service to remember the President with "a special prayer in Hebrew," delivered in honor of McKinley and his successor, Theodore Roosevelt.⁴ When national tragedy struck Albany's Jews ignored the differences between Reform and Orthodox and joined together as American Jews to pay respect to the American President. Similarly, after Warren G. Harding died of natural causes in 1923 all the congregations in Albany held a joint memorial service at Sons of Abraham on August 10th.⁵ Holding services at Sons of Abraham for President Harding recognized Jewish immigrants who wanted to identify as Americans, sharing in the good and bad this country endured in times of crises and national tragedy. It allowed American born Jews and recent immigrants to share a common identification as Jews and Americans.

³ Knickerbocker Press, September 14, 1901.

⁴ Ibid, September 20, 1901; Albany Times Union, September 20, 1901.

⁵ Knickerbocker Press, August 10, 1923.

World War I brought the same response from Albany's Jews who rallied to support the American role in the war in 1917 – 1918. At least 338 Jewish men from Albany served in the military and seven died in the war.¹ Several of the men in the military belonged to the YMHA baseball team, and kept in contact through the Albany Branch of Jewish Welfare Board. Private Julius Friedman, stationed in Georgia, missed the sounds of "our club Victrola," while Jacob (Jack) Patlen stationed in Georgia rejoiced that the Albany YMHA defeated the Schenectady team. "I would like a box score," Jack Patlen wrote, "because my heart is in the old game."² Using baseball terminology, Morris Barash on the frontlines in France in the summer of 1918 wrote that the German airmen, "Jerry's" "pays us his daily visits with his deadly bombs, but we are all pretty good

¹ Beth Emeth Year Book, 1914-1922 (Albany: Beth Emeth, 1922), 65-73; Copies of the yearbook are available at the Beth Emeth Archives and Albany Public Library; Congregation Beth Emeth, 1838-1938 (Albany: Beth Emeth, 1938); Copies are available at the New York State Library, Beth Emeth Archives, and Collections of the Jewish Historical Society of Northeastern New York, which will be housed at Special Collections, SUNY Albany.

² A.P. Lewis to "Dear Brother," July 11, 1918, Albany Branch Jewish Welfare Board, Collection of Rabbi Israel Rubin.

baseball players so we should worry."³

Symbolizing the identification of the Jewish community with the war effort Rabbi Samuel Goldenson of Beth Emeth suspended an American flag "over the pulpit and remained there until peace was effected."⁴ The YMHA and YWHA joined together in the Welfare Board to help Jewish Albanians stationed in other parts of the country or in Europe. They also assisted Jewish men, from Albany or elsewhere, stationed in the Capital District. As men left for service the Welfare Board honored the men with comfort kits and sweaters, and a reception at the Hebrew Educational Institute.⁵ Congregations raised money to buy war bonds and participated in patriotic activities to show support, such as Rabbi Goldenson's participation in a city wide event to send off a group of 371 Albany men to military service.⁶ When the war ended Temple Beth Emeth held a joint Thanksgiving service with

³ Ibid. There were also comments from Bernard Blum, stationed in Base Hospital Unit 33, Portsmouth, England. Also, see Knickerbocker Press, November 30, 1918 for Howard Madlebaum.

⁴ Congregation Beth Emeth, 1838-1938.

⁵ Knickerbocker Press, April 5, 1918.

⁶ Ibid, June 27, 1918.

the First Unitarian Church, starting an ecumenical tradition of the Reform congregation.¹ The congregation also joined with the Second Presbyterian Church in a Joint Victory Service.² All the Jewish Congregations and organizations held a joint memorial service in May 1919 to honor the seven Jewish men who died in the war.³ In 1921 Memorial Day services honored those who died during World War I as all Albanians participated. Services included "the reading of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religious rituals."⁴ These public events recognized Jews as Americans, reassuring Albany's Jews of their place in American society, and the 1919 memorial service reinforced the community's identity as both Jews and Americans. A tragic symbol of this joint identification occurred at the outbreak of World War II, when the first Albanian to

¹ Albany Evening Journal, November 27, 1918.

² Ibid, November 16, 1918. For additional information on the Joint Welfare Board of the YMHA and YWHA, see Mary Snyder to "Brother," April 6, 1918; Harry Cutler to A.P. Lewis, August 25, 1919; Minutes, Welfare Board, June 26, 1918, Collection of Rabbi Rubin.

³ Knickerbocker Press, May 28, 1919.

⁴ Knickerbocker Press, May 27, 29, 31, 1921.

die in the war was Charles M. Stern, Jr., a member of Congregation Beth Emeth, who died at Pearl Harbor.⁵



Holocaust Memorial

⁵ Albany Times Union, December 9, 17, 1941. Also, see copy of the killed in action story at Beth Emeth Archives.

Anti-Semitism

In addition to concern about identifying as Americans Albany's Jews saw anti-Semitism as a rejection of their identity as Americans and Jews. Political anti-Semitism did not develop as an issue in Albany. In 1877, the Grand Hotel in Saratoga Springs denied admission to Joseph Seligman, a major Jewish banker. This symbolized the emergence of social anti-Semitism by the Protestant elite who wanted to distance themselves from the increasingly upwardly mobile German Jews. For decades the Fort Orange Club, Albany Country Club, and the University Club practiced social anti-Semitism and barred Jews. German Jews responded by creating the Adelphi Club in 1873 and the Colonie Country Club in 1914. Conservative and Orthodox Jews of East European origin established the Shaker Ridge Country Club in 1930.¹ Jews who could not get into Masonic lodges started a separate Washington Lodge. For a time, restrictive covenants prevented German Jews from living on certain streets in Pine Hills.

¹ Kennedy, *O Albany!*, 225-26; Ira Zimmerman, *Anti-Semitism in Albany, 1933-1945* (Unpublished paper, 1975), 5-6, Albany County Records Office.

Educational institutions, like Albany Academy for Girls and Albany Medical College, adapted a widespread practice of the 1920s and 1930s, limiting the enrollment of Jews. As part of a national trend Protestant students and alumni wanted to limit Jewish enrollment.²

The rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s and German American Bund in the 1930s gave rise to concerns about new manifestations of anti-Semitism. The Jewish War Veterans post in Albany was formed in 1935 and took a lead role in combating the activities of the Bund, including playing an instrumental role in getting Troy city officials to stop a Bund meeting in Germania Hall in March 1938. In fact, in response to concerns about an upsurge in anti-Semitism local Jewish organizations created the Albany Jewish Community Council in November 1938 (now the Federation).³

Entrance into World War II produced a collapse of the Bund and social anti-Semitism gradually declined after the war. Since World War II isolated incidents of vandalism have been the primary public manifestations of

² Zimmerman, "Anti-Semitism," 6-8.

³ *Ibid.*, 9-11.

anti-Semitism. For example, in 1981, vandals defaced the shoe repair shop of Michael Shkaf, a Russian Jewish immigrant, and the Bagel Baron, owned by Joe Lewis, with anti-Semitic stickers, both stores located on New Scotland Avenue.¹ These were minor incidents. Actually, Ohav Shalom's Rabbi Naphtali Rubinger expressed a concern in the 1960s that has current implications. In 1963 Rabbi Rubinger voiced concern that public institutions appeared "geared to discourage" Jews "from observing the faith of their fathers."² In the 1920s and 1930s social and economic discrimination was a reality for Jews in Albany as elsewhere as Protestants sought to limit the socio-economic mobility of American Jews. Rabbi Rubinger expressed another kind of concern – how Albany's Jews can feel American while trying to maintain a separate identity as Jews.

¹ Knickerbocker News, August 29, 1981.

² Messenger, October 19, 1963, Records of Ohav Shalom.

Solidarity of all Israel

Jews of Albany felt an obligation to help those in jeopardy in other countries and support efforts to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine. As early as November 1853 Albany's Jews held a meeting at Anshe Emeth to denounce the behavior of the Austrian government in its treatment of its Jewish subjects. The leaders of the meeting included Rabbi Wise, Dr. Joseph Lewi, and Jacob Hamburger. This meeting by recent Jewish immigrants set the stage for how the Jews of Albany would repeatedly demonstrate against the oppression of Jews.³ A few years later, the Mortara Affair, in which the Catholic Church in Italy allowed the abduction and involuntary conversion of a child, Edgar Mortara Levy, led to widespread protests in the United States including two meetings in December 1858 in Albany.⁴ Protestant political leaders joined with Albany's Jews to express their outrage. A year later

³ Trenton True American, December 5, 1853; Newark Daily Advertiser, December 1, 1853.

⁴ Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 324 citing Albany Evening Journal, December 24, 28, 1858.

when Morocco expelled part of its Jewish community Albany Jews raised money for the relief of the exiled Jews.¹ A decade later, in response to the conditions of Romanian Jews the Gideon Lodge of B'nai B'rith and especially Simon W. Rosendale, encouraged the United States to send a diplomatic emissary, Benjamin Peixotto, to pressure the Romanian government.²

During the 20th Century, Albany's Jews continued to identify with the problems of Jews abroad. In May and June 1903 American Jews protested against pogroms in the Russian Empire. Jews attended a public meeting on June 7, 1903 at the State Street Presbyterian Church to denounce the behavior of the Russian government.³ Since many of Albany's Jews were recent immigrants from the Russian Empire, and many had fled a previous wave of pogroms in 1881 this issue meant a great deal to the Jewish community.

During World War I, American Jewry organized relief efforts for Jews displaced by the war and to aid

¹ Ibid, 327.

² Ibid, 328-29.

³ Knickerbocker Press, June 8, 1903; Cyrus Adler, Voice of America on Kishineff (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1904), 1.

Jewish settlements in Palestine. American Jews established the American Jewish Relief Committee that became a part of the Joint Distribution Committee to distribute aid to foreign Jews. President Woodrow Wilson recognized January 27, 1916 as Jewish Relief Day. In Albany and Troy Jews created a committee to solicit and collect donations for Jewish relief. The Albany Committee, headed by prominent notables, such as Rabbi Max Schlesinger, Albert Hessberg, Benjamin Mann, and Leonard Waldman, collected about \$10,000. Contributions came in from Jewish organizations, like local 320 of the Workmen's Circle, Poale Zion, Hebrew Tailors Association, and Washington Lodge of the Masons. Members of Reform and Orthodox congregations joined in support of the campaign to help European and Palestinian Jews.⁴ Throughout the war Albany's Jews raised funds to help Jews displaced by the fighting in Europe. In the 1919 campaign to aid war suffers "every congregation, Orthodox and Reform, and every organization without exception participated in the Drive" as the Albany Jewish community raised \$109,000.⁵

⁴ Albany Times Union, January 16-29, 1916; Knickerbocker Press, January 23-28 1916; Albany Evening Journal, January 22-28, 1916.

⁵ Beth Emeth Year Book, 1914-1922, 73-76.

Events of the 1920s to 1940s solidified the identification of Albany's Jews with the plight of Jews in Palestine and Europe. Chaim Weizmann, Zionist leader, spoke in Albany in January 1927 as part of a campaign, the United Palestine Appeal, to bring Jews to Palestine. Judge Isadore Bookstein chaired the campaign to raise money for Palestine.¹ Repeatedly, in the 1920s and 1930s Albany Jews endorsed aid to the Zionist cause in Palestine. News of Kristallnacht (November 9-10, 1938) led Albany's Jews to rally in support of Germany's Jews and merchants on Central Avenue proposed a boycott of German goods. The Albany branch of the American Jewish Congress called a meeting at Sons of Israel on Federal Street "which brought such a crowd that hundreds were turned away."² Protestant religious leaders in Albany and Troy joined in the denunciation of Germany's treatment of Jews. Then, in December of 1942, as the first evidence of the Holocaust became known, the rabbis of each of Albany's synagogues united in a memorial service at Sons of Abraham on December 2nd to commemorate the first million

¹ Knickerbocker Press, December 19, 1926, January 17, 1927; Albany Times Union, January 15, 17, 18, 1927.

² Knickerbocker News, November 17, 1938. Also, see November 14, 16, 1938.

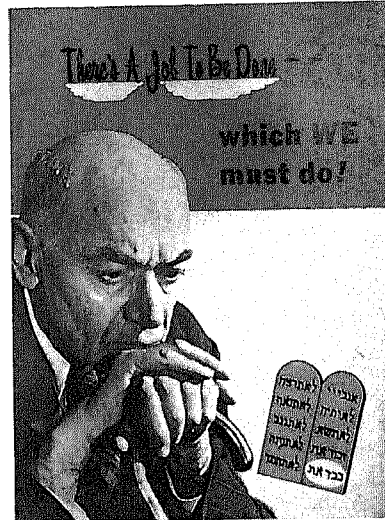
and a half Jews killed by the Nazis.³

Since World War II, Albany's Jews demonstrated solidarity with Israel and the plight of oppressed Jews in the Soviet Union. For example, in May 1948 Mizrahi men's and women's organizations sponsored a mass meeting to celebrate Israeli independence. After 1948, Albany's Jews repeatedly celebrated Israeli independence. In the 1970s Albany's Jews protested against the treatment of Soviet Jews.⁴ As an example, 200 Jews gathered at the Jewish community center on Simcha Torah to "express solidarity with Soviet Jews." Solidarity included help with the settling of Jewish war refugees in Albany between 1945-55. In 1949 alone Jewish Family Services settled 59 families in Albany, and in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Soviet Jews moved to Albany. Jewish Family Services resettled a hundred Soviet Jews between 1979-1988, and 1,300 since 1988. As the above suggests the Albany Jewish community identified with the problems of

³ Albany Times Union, December 3, 1942; Knickerbocker News, December 3, 1942.

⁴ Albany Times Union, October 11, 1971. Also, see, May 11, 1948; Knickerbocker News, April 26, 1966; Albany Times Union, January 24, 1973.

their brethren abroad. Since World War II war refugees and Jews escaping persecution in the Soviet Union re-settled in Albany. A recent example of this solidarity occurred on Tisha B'av 2002 when Congregations Temple Israel, Ohav Shalom, and Beth Abraham-Jacob held vigils for the Israeli victims of violence in July 2002.¹



"There's a Job to be Done"

¹ Albany Times Union, July 17, 2002.

Community Institutions

Over the years Jewish residents organized institutions for social, fraternal, and philanthropic purposes. Between 1843 and 1859 each of the synagogues organized burial societies and mutual aid societies for the ill. In 1843 the Society for Brotherly Love became the first society in Albany created to provide mutual aid for the ill and assist with burials, modeled after Khevre Kaddisha (holy society) of European communities "that performed the prescribed rituals surrounding death" from purification of the body to the burial.² Soon each synagogue had their own Khevre Kaddisha. For a time the Society For Brotherly Love acted as an independent association that took responsibility to aid Jewish immigrants and poor Jews passing through Albany. By 1847 a Ladies Benevolent Society existed with a separate School Fund Society "to pay for the schooling of poor Hebrew children."³ In 1855 the synagogues united their societies to aid the

² Diner, Time for Gatherings, 93; Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 278; Beth Emeth Congregation Year Book, 1910, 65.

³ Hoffman's City Register, 1847, 28. Records of the Society of Brotherly Love are in the Beth Emeth Archives.

poor and sick into Hebrew Benevolent Society of Albany (September 20, 1855) and it quickly won recognition in the general community for its charitable work.¹

B'nai B'rith, the first secular Jewish organization, started in New York in 1843 by German Jews. It served as a social, fraternal, civic, and mutual aid society typical of the lodges and fraternal organizations in the United States in the mid-19th Century. A chapter, Shiloh Lodge was founded in December 1853. All transactions were in German which by 1870 alienated younger members who established the Gideon Lodge on March 27, 1870. The Shiloh Lodge established an educational academy that combined Hebrew and secular studies in 1866, but it folded in 1869 due to lack of money, and the German lodge collapsed in the early 20th Century because of the passing of the German immigrant generation.²

¹ Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 279. It may have started in 1848 according to Rubinger and Silver, "Jews in Albany," 241.

² Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 282; *Beth Emeth Year Book*, 1910, 69. The 1910 yearbook mentions it as though it was still active, but the Shiloh Lodge collapsed by 1915 because only the Gideon Lodge is mentioned in 1915. The Albany Directory for 1902 and 1907 lists the Shiloh Lodge.

Prior to the Civil War Albany's Jews founded or participated in a number of German language societies. German Literary Society, organized in 1848, remained heavily Jewish. The Literary Society organized a singing society, Albany Liederkrantz, in 1849. German Jewish immigrants belonged to a half a dozen other societies that included larger number of non-Jewish Germans, like Albany Turin Verein and German Harmonia Lodge. Up to World War I German Jews identified with German culture and social institutions.

Women's associations served the same functions and provided for the same communal responsibilities. They took care of the sick and acted as burial societies for women. The Ladies or Women's Benevolent Society took on charitable functions. By the late 1860s Purim balls became a vehicle for raising funds for charity, and Albany's Jewish women sponsored one in 1869. In the 1880s the Ladies Sewing Society held entertainments to raise funds for the poor in the Jewish community, as for example, the one it organized in 1883.³

³ Hebrew Ladies Sewing Society Benefit, February 6, 1883, Albany Public Library.

Women also founded fraternal organizations similar to B'nai B'rith that combined fraternal, social and self-help activities. The United Order of True Sisters, founded in New York City in 1846, spread to Albany where women established a chapter on August 4, 1857 which still exists.

A group of women organized the Albany chapter of the Council of Jewish Women on December 8, 1895 and by 1903 it had 125 members. Formally organizing in October 1905 it became a philanthropic, educational, and social group which concentrated on religious education for the children of East European Jewish immigrants during the first decade of the 20th Century. After World War I the council aided displaced Jewish families settle on farms in Nassau. Council women engaged in various charity and philanthropic work for another seventy years. An auxiliary of younger women created the Clara de Hirsch Society founded in 1890 for charitable purposes.¹ For years it did family relief work and visitations.

Traditional Judaism requires ritual purification by women in a ritual bath, Mikvah. Records do not confirm when the first congregations built a Mikvah, but one or

¹ Knickerbocker Press, June 7, 1903; Albany Times Union, March 4, 1960.

more of the congregations opened a Mikvah on South Ferry Street. A facility at 190 Elm Street replaced it, and in 1993 the Orthodox women's organization, B'Nos Israel took responsibility to manage a new facility built near the Jewish Community Center.

Responding to the upsurge in social anti-Semitism German Jews created the Adelphi Club in 1873. Originally established as a social and educational group for upwardly mobile German Jews this became the alternative to the Fort Orange or University clubs. By 1912 it dropped the educational functions and created the Colonie Country Club eliminating the Adelphi Club identity in 1928. Jews unable to get into the prestige clubs or the Colonie Country Club purchased land in 1930 for the Shaker Ridge Country Club.¹

Concern about the elderly poor led to the formation of the Jewish Home Society on November 6, 1875. Formally incorporated on December 7, 1875 the society sought to raise funds to care for the elderly. Between 1875-1902 the members held events to raise money and

¹ Kennedy, O. Albany!, 225-26; Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 288; Undated article by Bill Kennedy in the Times Union, Jewish Population Albany file, Albany County Records Office.

took care of individuals in need. The Jewish Home Society continued to care for the elderly, but without a fixed facility. In 1930 a group of women decided time had come for an old age home, but it took until 1941 to purchase property at 366 Western Avenue as the Jewish Home Society and the Daughters of Sarah merged. On May 11, 1942 it opened. The home for the aged moved to Troy in 1949, but moved back to Albany in the 1970s into a facility on Washington Avenue extension.¹

Two other housing choices for senior citizens were constructed. B'nai B'rith's Gideon Lodge sought federal funding for non-profit housing in January 1971. Construction on B'nai B'rith Parkview Apartments on Hudson Avenue began in 1972 and it opened for residents on July 23, 1973. The Gideon Lodge and the Gideon Chapter of B'nai B'rith women kept a close relationship with the Parkview providing support services.²

¹ Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 290-295; Applebaum, "Jewish Community," 5-6; Silver, "Jews in Albany," 241-42.

² B'nai B'rith Gideon Lodge, No. 140. Celebrate the 120th Anniversary (1870-1990), 6-7, Historical Files of B'nai B'rith, Jewish Historical Society; "B'nai B'rith Parkview Apartments Celebrates 25th Anniversary," 25th Anniversary Scrapbook, Records of Parkview Apartments.

Albany Jewish Community Council worked with B'nai B'rith to help make Parkview a reality. Inspired by Sam Tabachneck and Morris Simonowitz, Congregation Ohav Shalom built senior citizen housing in 1974 next to the synagogue permitting easy access to social and religious services.

Because of the increase in the Jewish community in the late 19th Century Jewish immigrants founded their own fraternal societies. On September 15, 1872, the B'nai Mordecai Lodge of Keshet Shel Barzel, Chain of Iron, was formed. While B'nai B'rith appealed to German Jewish males, Keshet Shel Barzel attracted primarily Polish Jews, and the national organization came into existence in 1860. Another fraternal organization Free Sons of Israel established in 1849 chartered a local chapter on April 5, 1874, known as the Arnon Lodge, and it tended to appeal to American born Jews and Germans. . The arrival of Russian and Polish Jews after 1881 led to a new group of fraternal societies appearing in the 1890s. A chapter of B'rith Abraham appeared in 1887 and its national organization was founded in 1860. Initially, it appealed to Reform Jews but the chapter in Albany, (formally established in August 1891) consisted of Russian Jews. Chapters of Sons of Benjamin (between 1897-1901, Albanian

Lodge and Capital City Lodges), Assembly of Israel (Lodge No. 148, December 8, 1895), Young Men's Montefiore Association (December 26, 1896) were founded along with a local group, the Hebrew Tailors Society, a mutual aid and benevolent society. These grassroots Jewish organizations created a sense of community and fostered social responsibility, fellowship, and Jewishness. They "combined the ideals of mutual benefit with social and recreational functions."¹

Russian and Polish Jews also created radical and Socialist groups. For example, a local deli owner, Leon Malmed, played an active role in a Jewish anarchist society, "Germinal Group" in Albany, and established a close relationship with famous anarchist Emma Goldman who spoke in Albany several times between 1906-1918.²

¹ Diner, *Time for Gathering*, 109; Albany Directories for 1902, 1907, and 1915; *Beth Emeth Congregation Year Book, 1910*, 69-70, Beth Emeth Archives; Silver, "Jews in Albany," 241-43; Rubinger, "Albany Jewry," 296; Book of Incorporation Papers, Books V and VI, Albany County Records Office; Albany *Times Union*, June 11, 1903.

² Emma Goldman to Leon Malmed, February 1906, Emma Goldman Papers, University of California at Berkeley; *Knickerbocker Press*, April 2, 1906.

On April 1, 1906 the local police stopped a talk by Goldman. A small group of Jewish anarchists were active between 1900-1920. Socialists organized the Workmen's Circle on May 14, 1904. Members of the group met secretly and distributed literature "in the dead of night."³ Two branches existed in Albany, and the organization promoted socialism and Yiddish language and culture. In 1909 it bought a cemetery and in the 1920s and 1930s ran a Yiddish language school at their building on Ash Grove Place.

Zionism became another major element in the Jewish experience. By 1900, a local Zionist organization, a branch of Chovevei Zion was established. A fraternal Zionist group, Max Nordeau Lodge opened on September 16, 1900 and in 1914 Sons and Daughters of Zion and branches of Mizrachi. In December 1912 socialist Zionists held a convention in Albany reflecting the organization of a local chapter in 1906 of Poale Zion and the Farband Labor Zionist Order in 1912. By the 1920s the Zionist Organization of America organized chapters including a

³ Silver, "Jews of Albany," 244-45; The YIVO Institute in New York City contains some of the records of the Albany Workmen's Circle branches.

Hadassah Chapter in 1923. Since its formation, Hadassah supported medical, vocational, and land reclamation projects in Israel. In the 1960s, Hadassah had two chapters, Bas Ami and Ziona, with 1,000 members. Chapters of Zionist oriented Pioneer Women which promoted social service projects in Israel and ORT which raised funds for vocational education projects, were established in Albany.¹

In 1910 a Hebrew Educational Institute opened in Albany to promote Hebrew and Bible study. It became a Jewish center where other groups came to meet. On October 4, 1915 a group of young men meeting at the Hebrew Educational Institute formed the Young Men's Hebrew Association to promote social and recreational activities. In December YMHA organized a basketball team which emerged as an important social experience as did the YMHA's baseball team.²

¹ Silver, "Jews of Albany," 245-46; Hadassah Region History of the Upper New York State Region, 1998, Collection of Dorothy Ganz; Albany Times Union, January 1, 1913; Knickerbocker Press, December 31, 1912; Albany Argus, December 29, 1912; Albany Evening Journal, December 30, 1912; Albany Times Union, March 9, 1963.

² Albany Times Union, October 13, December 6, 1915.

In December 1915 Jewish women started the YWHA. The YMHA sponsored dances at the Albany Yacht Club where young people went to socialize. In the 1940s the Hebrew Institute closed its doors, but the two Ys gave birth in 1925 to the Jewish Community Center. The Jewish Y movement "combined literary activities with sports, edifying lectures with exercise and fun."³ Located on 111 Washington Avenue the Jewish Community Center began to replace the Hebrew Educational Institute as a meeting place for Jewish groups.⁴ Formally incorporated on April 16, 1926, the Jewish Community Center eventually outgrew its location and moving with the Jewish community it built a new headquarters on Whitehall Road in 1960.

³ Diner, *Time for Gathering*, 107.

⁴ Albany Times Union, May 25, 1925; March 11, 1976.

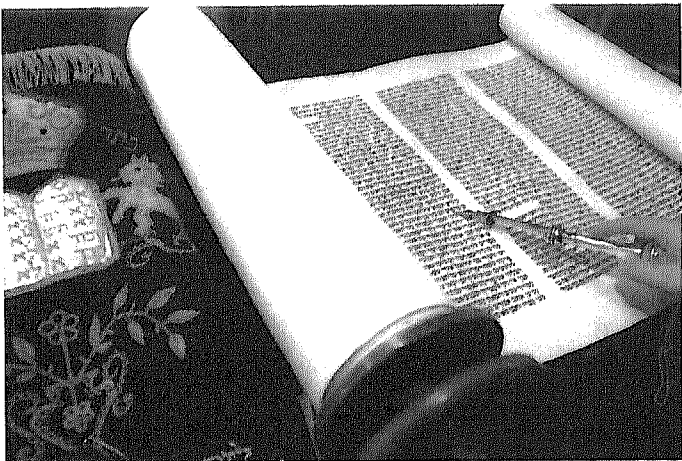
By 1931 the Jewish community needed an agency to address social problems and family issues leading to the creation of Albany Jewish Social Services in 1931. It helped resettle Jewish refugees in Albany between 1945-1955, and starting in the late 1970s helped Soviet Jews adapt to their new home. Now called Jewish Family Services it is located on Madison Avenue.

Self-defense organizations to combat anti-Semitism go back to the Albany branch of the Alliance Israelite Universelle in 1865 and the activities of the Gideon Lodge in the 1870s. Chapters of the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, and the Anti-Defamation League developed in Albany in the 20th Century. When the Jewish War Veterans started in 1935 it defended the community against the anti-Semitic Bund. Today, it is a patriotic, social service and philanthropic organization. Three years later, the creation of the Albany Jewish Community Council led to an umbrella organization for the Jewish community. Today called the United Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York, the Federation represents the Jewish community and encourages programs in Jewish and Holocaust education. It promotes philanthropic endeavors within the Jewish community and supports programs for the elderly.

In addition to the Sunday schools located at each of the synagogues, Maimonides Hebrew Day School provides an Orthodox religious education. Bet Shraga Hebrew Academy combines Judaic and secular education for families from Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox traditions. Opening in the fall of 1963 as the Hebrew Academy of the Capital District the school changed its name to Bet Shraga after the inspiring first principal Shraga Arian. Both seek to impart a love of Judaism in a new generation. Chabad-Lubavitch Center, directed by Rabbi Israel Rubin, encourages Jews of all traditions to seek a better knowledge of Judaism. At SUNY Albany, Shabbos House, led by Rabbi Mendel Rubin, and his wife Raizy, promotes Jewish religious awareness. Using a different approach, Hillel Foundation, and its Director David Liebschutz, emphasizes connecting college students to their Jewish identity through cultural, educational, social and religious programs. All these efforts share a common desire to connect people to their Jewish identity, and raise the Judaic awareness of children, college students and adults.

This is not a comprehensive survey of all Jewish institutions in Albany over the last 150 years, but this essay gives a survey of communal institutions that have played a

role in solidifying Jewish identity and helped Albany's Jews adjust to American society while maintaining their identity as Jews. The many different societies and organizations helped Jews find a place in American society and brought the immigrants and their children together as Jews and Americans. Many of these groups began as grassroots organizations filling a need of Jewish immigrants to recreate a sense of community, helping immigrants make the transition from strangers in a strange land to Americans.



Reading the Torah scroll at Shomray Torah

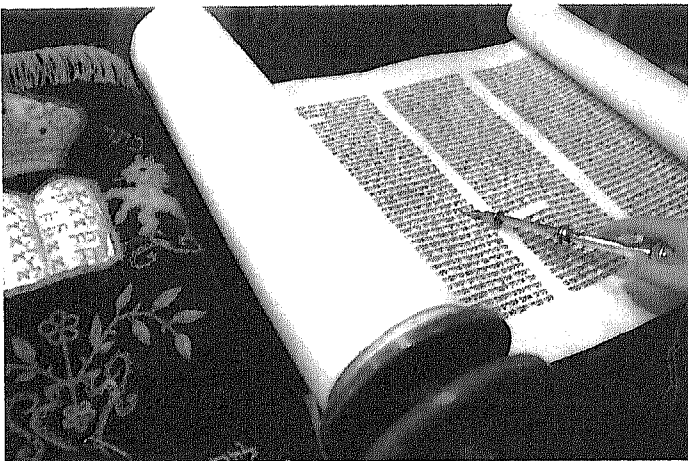
LOVE PEACE AND PURSUE IT: AN APPRECIATION OF CONGREGATION OHAV SHALOM IN ALBANY, NEW YORK

By Rabbi Dan Ornstein
Congregation Ohav Shalom

“Be one of the Disciples of Aaron, (the high priest of ancient times and Moses’ brother), by emulating him. Be a lover of peace and pursue peace, love all people and bring them close to the Torah, (the word of God.) (Ethics of the Sages, 1:12)

These words of the Jewish sage Hillel, of first century BCE Palestine, capture the essence of this great Jewish congregation which has been an Albany institution since 1911. Ohav Shalom takes its name from the latter part of Hillel’s statement in the Hebrew, “Ohev Shalom,” being a lover of peace. Grammatically, the name is an inaccurate rendering of the original Hebrew, possibly the result of a mispronunciation common to the Yiddish speaking Jews who founded the community. However, in keeping with the congregation’s tradition of creating new, lasting traditions, no one would consider changing the name which is a beloved part of the communal lore. However, in keeping

role in solidifying Jewish identity and helped Albany's Jews adjust to American society while maintaining their identity as Jews. The many different societies and organizations helped Jews find a place in American society and brought the immigrants and their children together as Jews and Americans. Many of these groups began as grassroots organizations filling a need of Jewish immigrants to recreate a sense of community, helping immigrants make the transition from strangers in a strange land to Americans.



Reading the Torah scroll at Shomray Torah

LOVE PEACE AND PURSUE IT: AN APPRECIATION OF CONGREGATION OHAV SHALOM IN ALBANY, NEW YORK

By Rabbi Dan Ornstein
Congregation Ohav Shalom

“Be one of the Disciples of Aaron, (the high priest of ancient times and Moses’ brother), by emulating him. Be a lover of peace and pursue peace, love all people and bring them close to the Torah, (the word of God.) (Ethics of the Sages, 1:12)

These words of the Jewish sage Hillel, of first century BCE Palestine, capture the essence of this great Jewish congregation which has been an Albany institution since 1911. Ohav Shalom takes its name from the latter part of Hillel’s statement in the Hebrew, “Ohev Shalom,” being a lover of peace. Grammatically, the name is an inaccurate rendering of the original Hebrew, possibly the result of a mispronunciation common to the Yiddish speaking Jews who founded the community. However, in keeping with the congregation’s tradition of creating new, lasting traditions, no one would consider changing the name which is a beloved part of the communal lore. However, in keeping

with the congregation's tradition of creating new, lasting traditions, no one would consider changing the name which is a beloved part of the communal lore. However one pronounces it, this name symbolizes the core values of the congregation: bringing love and peace into the world through studying our ancient Jewish wisdom and applying it to the challenges of today. Further, as a member of the Conservative Jewish denomination in North America, Ohav Shalom seeks to fulfill the movement's motto of balancing tradition with change and blending the ancient with the modern.

A Chronological Overview

A fair amount has been written about the history of Albany's Jews, though most of it focuses on the overall community and not the histories of individual congregations. Even the chapter on the Jews in William Kennedy's *O Albany!* emphasizes the development of (Reform) Congregation Beth Emeth almost exclusively, as a case study in the tensions between reformers and traditionalists in early American Jewish life. Local histories by the congregations themselves are a primary source of background information, and Ohav Shalom is no exception. One of the richest resources for Ohav's early history is the

dedication book produced by the congregation to celebrate the move to its present campus at 113 New Krumkill Road in 1964. The historical summary found there was pieced together from oral testimonies that the congregation relied upon due to a fire that damaged records in 1949. It provides a rather simple chronology up to 1963 or 1964. In 1911, presumably as Jews began the slow transition from the south end of Albany to "uptown," neighborhoods, a group of families began to worship together in different homes. The congregation officially incorporated in 1915, and acquired cemetery property in 1916. Led by Lena Lacholter Steinberg, the women's sisterhood group known as the Daughters of Ruth was founded in 1916. (A beautiful portrait of her along with the founding charter of the group still hangs in the synagogue library today.) In 1922, the congregation acquired its first property at 441 Washington Avenue, where it remained until it began building its present site in 1961. (If you go to 441 Washington today you will find a six pointed Jewish star Missionary Baptist church; this is the last vestige of Ohav's presence at that site.) Discussions about this building project began in 1956 under the visionary leadership of late Rabbi Naftali Rubinger, who was the rabbi at the time. Funding and groundwork for the building came

about through the leadership and strong communal connections of the late Sam Tabachneck, the late Morris Simonwitz, and Bernard Ellenbogen, then the congregation's lawyer. These endeavors were the natural results of the membership's decision in a close 1949 vote not to merge with what later became Temple Israel. That steadfast sense of independence has allowed both congregations to evolve into two Jewish communities with unique gifts to offer everyone.

The dedication book ends its overview at 1964, but an article by Rabbi Barukh Frydman-Kohl in Roberts and Cockrell's, *Historic Albany: Its Churches and Synagogues*, provides us with additional information. The congregation officially became part of the Conservative movement in 1968 after many years of denominational independence. In 1974, under the leadership of some of the same people who built the new campus, Ohav Shalom completed a five million dollar senior housing project next door to the synagogue. Ohav Senior Apartments were intended in good part for independent older adults who were the parents and extended family of congregational members. The facility would give them the opportunity to be near family as they got older.

Apparently it was also hoped that it would provide the congregation with a steady supply of, (at that time exclusively), men for the required quorum of ten which is necessary for public daily and Sabbath prayer. Between 1986 and 1987, Ohav Shalom completed another building project, this time the addition of a larger building for the religious school. A preschool was successfully established in 1990, further expanding the range of services offered to a rapidly growing, younger population. Rabbi Frydman-Kohl presided over the congregation between 1976 and 1993. Under his dynamic leadership the congregation grew to five hundred families and Ohav became an important center for outreach and Jewish spiritual life. In 1995, after many years of debate, Ohav Shalom made the historic decision to become fully gender egalitarian in its worship and ritual life, following a trend among liberal American Jewish religious denominations. This development strengthened what was then, and continues to be, a growing grassroots emphasis on lay empowerment and leadership in the religious life of the synagogue. It was also facilitated by the large population of families whose children attended the Hebrew Academy of the Capital District, the local Jewish parochial school. These families possessed and taught others many ritual skills that continue to be useful to

the congregation. In 1996, Ohav Shalom began the restructuring of its religious school program. Emphasis was placed on family religious education, stronger accountability of faculty, and the use of highly creative approaches to teaching. The restructuring has had great, positive impact on the life and vision of the congregation.

The Soul of Ohav Shalom.

A detailed historical or organizational analysis of the congregation is well beyond the scope and interest of this essay. However, a description of how Ohav Shalom embodies the love of peace mentioned about is in order. Ohav's current location is at the corner of New Krumkill Road and Route 85, which is a meeting point of Albany, Guilderland, and Bethlehem. This nexus point symbolizes the community's successful efforts to blend the culture of the city with the growing demands of suburban Jewish families. Ohav, like its sister Conservative congregation Temple Israel, is blessed with a relatively large number of religiously observant Albany families. . They can be seen walking to and from worship on Saturdays and holidays, times when some Jews refrain from driving and other weekday activities. Practices such as these create a

distinctively homey and traditional environment which is not easily replicated in the "car culture" of the suburbs. At the same time, the congregation is also blessed by member households that spread well beyond Albany as far as Cobleskill. They bring diversity, commitment and vital resources to the life of the community. Creating a nourishing spiritual home for diverse Jewish populations in a supportive and respectful setting is one of the synagogue's main missions. Great effort is put into bringing the religious school and parochial school populations together as one community. As the supplementary education program of the religious school has improved, more of its families have deepened their sense of ownership of religious and ritual life. Emphasis is placed on outreach to gay and lesbian Jews, intermarried families, singles, people considering conversion to Judaism, those with disabilities, the bereaved, and the sick. Process and democratic consensus define the congregation's internal dynamics, a phenomenon that may well go as far back as the first decade of its existence when lay participation without hired clergy was at its strongest.

The Ohav family is proud of its preschool, religious school, youth activities and adult studies programs. It is proud of its outreach efforts and its emphasis on the

on the individual's religious empowerment. It is proud of its strong lay leadership in religious and secular matters. It is proud of its growing social action program and presence in the affairs of the community. It is proud of its strong intergenerational relationship with the varied resident population of the senior apartments. It is perhaps proudest of the value it places on the spiritual journey of each person and household connected with it. Congregation Ohav Shalom is a "makom Torah," a place in which Judaism embraces the Jewish spiritual seeker, helping that person to grow in soul, wisdom, and compassion in his or her own ways. This is surely an important way of loving and pursuing peace and spreading love to all people.

So much remains to be said about this important house of worship, and so many important people and stories need to be remembered. Hopefully, essays such as this one will contribute in some small way to preserving the history of Congregation Ohav Shalom and the remarkable capital district Jewish community in which it resides.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Congregation Ohav Shalom, Dedication 1964, Albany, 1964.
2. Morris, A. O. Gerber, A Pictorial History Of Albany's Jewish Community, Albany 1986.
3. William Kennedy, O Albany!, New York, 1983.
4. Anne Roberts and Marcia Cockrell, eds., Historic Albany: Its Churches and Synagogues, Albany, 1986.

PARTICIPANTS

Bob Gluck is a composer/performer of interactive sound installation and performance and electroacoustic soundscape composition. His current work includes the sound installation 'Sounds of a Community', in which visitors trigger and shape recorded sounds by interacting with electronic musical sculptures, and performances featuring home-built interactive instruments. Gluck's recording, 'Stories Heard and Retold' (1998, EMF 008), is a series of sonic collages relating to Jewish life. His musical training is from the Julliard, Manhattan, and Crane schools of Music, SUNY Albany, and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. His music has been performed in Austria, Berlin, Boston, New York ... His work has been discussed and reviewed in the Computer Music Journal, Moment, The Forward, Reconstructionism Today, Hadassah Magazine... Gluck teaches Electronic Music and Judaic Studies at The University at Albany, and he serves as Associate Director of the Electronic Music Foundation.

Herbert Holland is an Albany native and educator who grew up in the South End when it was still Albany's Lower East Side.

Rabbi Dan Orenstein is the rabbi of Congregation Ohav Shalom and a writer living in Albany.

Dr. Abe Sherer is an Albany native and recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from the United Jewish Federation of Northeastern, NY.

Beth Strum holds an MFA in Museum Studies from Syracuse University. She was Registrar at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, and has taught courses in art history at Syracuse University, The College of St. Rose and, for 14 years, at The Sage Colleges.

Harvey S. Strum, Ph.D., is a Professor of History and Political Science at the Sage Colleges. He is chair of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (Liberal Studies) and is Program Coordinator for Social Sciences and Social Studies. Author of more than sixty articles and thirty reviews, Dr. Strum is best known for his expertise in Immigration, Ethnic, and Jewish History. Recently, as part of the Albany Heritage Series, Professor Strum gave a presentation, "An Albany Ship for Ireland: Irish Famine Relief."

Zoe B. Zak is a performing and recording artist, and head of Sister Z Music, an "inner world music" record label. She performs regularly with her current ensemble, Zak and Sons. Her background includes jazz and blues, as well as avant garde piano improvisation. Zak's recordings include 'Zoe B. Zak' (1998), with the six piece Zoe B. Zak Ensemble, and 'Come, My Friend' (2001), traditional music for the Sabbath in beautiful and sometimes surprising settings. Zak has also co-produced and performed on many other recordings.

Walter P. Zenner, Ph.D. is Professor Emeritus of anthropology and Judaic studies at the University at Albany, SUNY. He is the author and editor of numerous books including: *Jewish Societies in the Middle East: Community, Culture, and Authority* (University Press of America, 1982), *Urban Life: Readings in Urban Anthropology* (Waveland Press, 1996), *Persistence and Flexibility: Anthropological Perspectives on the American Jewish Experience* (SUNY, 1988), *Minorities in the Middle: A Cross Cultural Analysis* (SUNY, 1991), and *A Global Community: The Jews from Aleppo, Syria* (Wayne State University Press, 2000.)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This exhibit and its associated programs are made possible with generous support from :

- **The New York Council For The Humanities**
- **New York State Council On The Arts**, Decentralization Program, administered by the Community Arts Connection of the Albany/Schenectady League of Arts.
- **Meet The Composer, Inc.**, whose funding is provided by the New York State Council on the Arts, ASCAP, the Virgil Thomson Foundation, the Eleanor Naylor Dana Charitable Trust, and the National Endowment for the Arts
- **Department of Liberal Studies of The Sage Colleges**



The organizers of this exhibition would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for sharing objects and knowledge:

Joe Adler; Albany County Hall of Records; Albany Institute of History and Art; Albany Jewish Community Center; Albany Jewish Family Services; Albany Public Library; American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH; Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith; Jay Baron; Bet Shraga Hebrew Academy; B'nai B'rith Parkview Apartments; Rabbi Moshe Bomzer; Bobbie Rubin Bowden; Virginia Bowers; Kate Burns; Sandra Carr; Rabbi Donald Cashman; Sam S. Clevenson; Marianne Cohen; Phyllis Cohen; Congregation Beth Abraham-Jacob; Congregation Beth Emeth; Congregation B'nai Shalom; Congregation Ohav Shalom; Daughters of Sarah Nursing Home; Emma Goldman Papers, Berkeley, CA; Tom Fagan; Sanford Feldblum; Les Fisher; Leah Gaies; Ellen Gamache; Dorothy Ganz; Flora Geller; Liz Gellis; Morris Gerber; Leo Greenbaum; M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections, University at Albany; Anita Goldman; Arnold Grushky; Hadassah Archives at the American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY; Hartgen Archaeological Associates; Havurah Minyan of the Capital District; Herbert Holland; Holocaust Survivors and Friends Education Center; Joann Hoose; Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York; Jewish Historical Society of Northeastern New York; The Jewish World; Mr. and Mrs. Myer Kagan; Steven Kandler; Robert Kayne; Brian Keough; Mark Koblenz; David Leibschutz; Mitchell Levinn; Joel Levy; Nahum Lewis; Paul and Shirley Lieb; Morris Losice; Rabbi Beverly Magidson; Rebecca Marvin; Anita Merins; Bobbi Moses; Addie Muhlfelder; Nancy Murphy; New York State Archives; New York State Manuscripts and Special Collections; New York State Museum; Rabbi Daniel Ornstein; Marsha Penrose; Anne Pfeffer; Martha Picker; William Rockwood; Rabbi Israel Rubin; Simmy Rubin; Claire Segal; Donald Segal; Richard Seiden; Shelly Shapiro; Gilda Sherman; Shomray Torah; Beverly Shor; Rabbi Scott Shpeen; Rabbi Paul Siltan; Fred Simon; Patricia Snyder; Michael Spain; Spector's Clothing; Fred Strum; Scott Stull; Joyce Talb; Gene Tarler; Temple Israel; Norm Tilman; Times Union, Lorrain Tiven; Israel Tzvaygenbaum; Jan Weitzman; Craig Williams; YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, NY; Walter Zenner; Irving Zorn.

PHOTO CREDITS

- Cover Photo taken by JoAnn Fisher Hoose
- Page 5 Remnants of a plate, 1780-1800. Courtesy of the Hartgen Archaeological Associates
- Page 10 Sheinfeld Jewelry Sign. Courtesy of the New York State Museum
- Page 12 Levy Solomons' fire bucket. Courtesy of the New York State Museum
- Page 14 Torah Crown 19th Century. Courtesy of the Congregation Beth Abraham-Jacob
- Page 19 Chupah (wedding canopy) early 20th Century. Courtesy of the Congregation Beth Abraham -Jacob and
1947 Wedding dress of Hildreth Newhof Reiss married in the Lancaster Street Beth Emeth synagogue. Courtesy of Jan Weitzman
- Page 25 Stained glass memorial for Holocaust victims related to the Karlin, Taitz, and Levin families of Albany. Courtesy of Daughters of Sarah Nursing Home
- Page 29 Holocaust Memorial at Temple Beth Emeth Cemetery, photo taken by JoAnn Fisher Hoose
- Page 34 "There's a Job to Be Done" Fundraising brochure for the Jewish Home for the Aged, before 1948. Courtesy of Nahum Lewis
- Page 41 Reading the Torah scroll at Shomray Torah photo taken by JoAnn Fisher Hoose
- Page 50-51 Installation shots taken by Jim Richard Wilson, Gallery Director

JEWISH HISTORY AND COMMUNITY IN ALBANY, NY
FEBRUARY 3 - MARCH 2, 2003

Reception: Thursday, February 6, 2003
4:30 pm - 6:30 pm

Panel Presentation : Monday, February 17, 2003
6:00 pm -7:30 pm

Bob Gluck Performance, featuring Zoe B. Zak: Wednesday, February 26, 2003
7:00 pm - 8:30 pm

Exhibition Hours: Monday-Friday 10:00 am - 4:30 pm
Monday-Thursday evening 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Sunday afternoons Noon - 4:00 pm

voice: 518/292-7742 - web: www.sage.edu/SCA/opalka - e:mail: wilsoj2@sage.edu - fax: 518/292-1903