

Washington's oldest synagogue remembers

Special to The Chronicle

The first century of Beth Israel Congregation, the oldest Jewish congregation in Washington County, held more than promise for the immigrants who found a new home in Washington.

The years saw a continued commitment to Judaism and G-d, and a strength of purpose which led its members into a world which was enriched by their endeavors.

Beth Israel has had only 10 spiritual leaders since its inception, the shortest tenure was only nine months, but the longest -- and the first -- was that of Rabbi Jacob Goldfarb who served for 50 years.

Rabbi Goldfarb, a native of Lithuania, was barely in to his 20s when he immigrated to the United States and found his way to Rabbi Moshe Shimon Sivitz, spiritual leader of the Orthodox Jews in Pittsburgh. It was Rabbi Sivitz who sent him to Washington where the Jews were preparing to begin a congregation.

Jacob Samolsky, the congregation's first president, sent to London for his niece, Zelda Simon, who had moved there from Vilna 10 years earlier. The match between Zelda and the young rabbi was a good one.

The couple had seven children, the youngest of which, Samuel, now 80, is an attorney in Washington. Also a Washington attorney is Howard Goldfarb, the son of Rabbi and Mrs. Goldfarb's eldest child, Meyer.

Recounted in the book, "The House of Israel, A Home in Washington: 100 Years of Beth Israel Congregation," are stories of the founding families.

The director of rituals at Beth Israel, Morris Cohen, is a son of the youngest of the congregation's charter members, Sam Cohen.

Beth Israel members have held places of note. In fact, in the same year, the president and vice president of the Washington County Bar Association and the president of the Washington County Medical Society were all active members of Beth Israel.

Currently the vice president of the board of Washington Hospital is member Martha Yorkin Berman. Mrs. Berman's husband, Dr. Bernard Berman, was the first cardiologist to practice in Washington. He was also the first delivery of Dr. Sam Ruben, the first Jewish physician in Washington.

Dr. Berman, who died 11 years ago, was recently honored by the hospital by naming the newly established heart catheterization laboratory in his memory. At his death, he was at work on a book on Jewish medical ethics.

Dr. Harry Cohen, a dentist who served as usher for the congregation for 40



BETH Israel Confirmation class in 1907 with Rabbi Jacob Goldfarb, seated center, are, from left: Lillian Kauffman, Lillian Grossman, Sylvia Grossman, Annett Samolsky; standing, teacher Frank R. S. Kaplan, Meyer Goldfarb (eldest child of Rabbi Goldfarb), Frances Groginsky and Morris Slotsky.

years, had a passion for sports. In fact, he wrote three Major League Baseball rules, in addition to being a founder of Pony League Baseball for children.

Annette Miller Richman, the first Jewish woman in Washington to drive a car, continued with her plans to travel abroad when her husband's business suddenly prevented him from taking the trip. It was 1936 and she stopped in England for the coronation of King George VI before visiting Palestine where she observed the works of Hadassah. Upon returning home, she founded the Washington Chapter of Hadassah.

David Cohen, a son of one of Beth Israel's earliest members, grew up at Beth Israel where both the music and the service were of inspiration. His early love of the melodies of Judaism led him to his study of music. As an adult, he moved to Sarasota, FL where he became a prominent businessman, was elected mayor, and served for 29 years as concertmaster of the Sarasota Symphony Orchestra.

Dr. Henry Enoch Kagan began his life as a member

of Beth Israel, where his love of Judaism led him to further learning and change. He was ordained, following graduation with highest honors from Hebrew Union College, and became a rabbi at several congregations, including assistant rabbi at Rodef Shalom Temple in Pittsburgh, before taking the pulpit at Sinai Temple in Mount Vernon, NY.

Rabbi Kagan, who also became a licensed psychologist, served as a consultant on Judaism to the United States Joint Commission on Mental Health, technical consultant to the 1960 White House Conference on Children and Youth, pastoral psychology professor in the Graduate School of Pastoral Counseling at Iona College, a Roman Catholic Institution; special consultant to the Ecumenical

Council of Vatican II and to Augustin Cardinal Bea, who drafted the Roman Catholic Church's 1965 declaration on "The Attitude of the Church on Non-Christians."

The Centennial is dedicated to the memory of Ben Richman, a life-long member of Beth Israel, who served 25 years as its president, and was a respected member of the Washington business community. Richman, who was a great part of the heritage of the congregation, died earlier this year.

General chairman of the reunion weekend is Robert Ceisler.

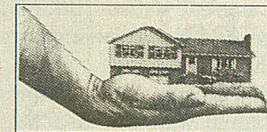
All are welcome to attend the events on Oct. 11-13. Shabbat services will begin at 8:15 p.m. Friday, with an original service written and conducted by Beth Israel spiritual leader, Rabbi Albert

Goldman.

The 10 a.m. Saturday service will be followed by a kiddush luncheon in the synagogue social hall. There also will be a banquet at the Holiday Inn, Meadow Lands, Saturday evening with cantorial soloist Catherine Bomstein entertaining.

An 11 a.m. Sunday service will be conducted at the Beth Israel Cemetery while a children's party will be held at the synagogue. A luncheon at Beth Israel will follow. For more information, call the synagogue office at 225-7080.

Also, copies of "The House of Israel, A Home in Washington" may be ordered by sending a request to Beth Israel Synagogue, 265 North Avenue, Washington, PA 15301. The cost of the book is \$25 plus postage and handling.



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Just a third of new olim working

TEL AVIV (JTA) -- Unemployment among immigrants increased significantly in 1990 and only a third of the new arrivals found jobs during the second quarter of 1991, according to a survey conducted by the Labor Ministry's Employment Division and recently released.

Among 200,000 olim age 15 and over who arrived in Israel since the beginning of 1990, only 54,000 are employed, the ministry reported. At the time of the survey, 33,000 were actively seeking jobs.

The immigrant unemployment rate, which was 30% in the first half of 1990, rose to 44% in the second half of the year. So far this year, it is 32%.

Meanwhile, the immigration of Ethiopian Jews has resumed at the rate of about 200 a week, as a result of the new Ethiopian government's policy of allowing citizens to emigrate freely.

JAgency ready to evacuate Yugoslav Jews

TEL AVIV (JTA) -- Contingency plans have been drawn up to transfer the Jewish community of strife-torn Yugoslavia to Israel, according to Uri Gordon, head of the Jewish Agency's Immigration Department. "The establishment here is prepared. But it depends on the Jews there," he said.

Yugoslavia is in the throes of civil war. Fighting has been especially fierce in the secession-minded republic of Croatia, home to about 2,000 Jews, most of whom live in the capital, Zagreb.

Gordon estimated the total Jewish population of Yugoslavia to be about 5,500, of whom 1,500 live in the national capital, Belgrade; 1,200 in Zagreb; and 1,300 in Sarajevo, capital of the province of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

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