

(This history of the Jewish community of New Castle was prepared for distribution to members of both local congregations through the generosity of a member of the community. In a recently published version, several paragraphs were transposed and several were deleted. September 1980.)

#### Four Generations of Jews Contribute to City

The Jewish community of New Castle grew with the arrival of European immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and then declined along with the city's population in the 1960s and 1970s.

Three generations of Jews have contributed to the city's business and professional ranks, and a fourth generation is coming of age, but the number of families that support the two local Jewish congregations has dwindled since its peak in the 1950s. The principal reasons are the same as for the community at large in this city and many others in the Northeast--fewer children are being born and fewer are returning home after college.

An earlier factor in the population decline was World War II, in which seven Jewish men from New Castle--out of about 100 who served--died. In addition, some who survived did not return here. One who did return was Dr. Joseph Ginsberg, who survived the Bataan death march.

As the Hebrew year 5741 begins, Tifereth Israel Congregation, at Moody and Logan Avenues, has 135 family memberships, compared with 180 in 1949. Many of the present memberships are held by widows, widowers and other singles.

Temple Israel, at Moody and Highland Avenues, has 60 family memberships, compared with 120 in 1951. The combined total of memberships today more clearly indicates the total number of Jewish families in the community than did the figure years ago, when many families belonged to both congregations. Only a handful do today.

The population decline is especially apparent in the community religious school where only 35 are enrolled. The school has been operated jointly by both congregations since 1973. More than 200 students were enrolled in the 1950s, when each congregation operated its own school.

Although virtually every Jewish family in New Castle is affiliated with a congregation, attendance at sabbath festival services for adults has declined. This is due not only to the population decline but also to the fact that Jewish life in America's small towns no longer revolves around the synagogue to the extent to which it did in earlier generations, when most members lived within walking distance of the synagogue. Members of the Jewish community today have become active in other organizations and pursuits and have become more assimilated into the community at large.

Despite the dwindling numbers, faithful members have kept both local congregations alive and also operate such auxiliary groups as sisterhoods and men's clubs. Members of the Jewish community are also active in the National Council of Jewish Women, Hadassah, Jewish Ladies Relief, B'nai B'rith and Zionist Organization of America. Local residents also conduct drives for the United Jewish Appeal, Israel bonds and other causes.

Mrs. Marcus (Nell) Feuchtwanger was the first president of the local section of the Council of Jewish Women, which was an outgrowth of the Jewish Ladies Aid Society. Mrs. Louis (Florence) Kohn was the founder and long-time president of the local chapter of Hadassah. The local B'nai B'rith lodge is named in memory of Nathan J. Love, local businessman who was active in Jewish and civic affairs. Each of these organizations dates back more than 50 years here.



And not everyone leaves town. Great-grandsons of Iman Samuels, founder of I. Samuels and Son, distributor of leather goods and shoe supplies, are employed in the family business on Long Avenue. Other businesses similar or related to those established or purchased by their families employ the grandchildren of Albert Caplan, Simon Blau, Edward Fisher, Louis Kohn, Meyer Levine, Jacob Marlin, Morris Moresky, Jacob Perelman, Emanuel Shenkan, Harry Waldman, Samuel Weiner and Harry Wolfe and the great-niece of Sam Klafter.

The first generation of Jews in New Castle--mostly merchants, peddlers, butchers, blacksmiths and other tradesmen--produced an extraordinary second generation of at least 34 professionals in 24 families. These include:

Fourteen doctors--brothers Julius and Meyer Bloom, Leonard Friedman, Joseph Cinsberg, Nathan Ginsburg, Louis Kohler, Lester Lebo, Herman Levine, brothers Abe and Jules Newmark, brothers William J. and Zelig Nathan Stutz, William Winick and Gerald Zieve.

Nine dentists--George Alpern, Samuel Fisher, Hyman Frank and his brother Capt. Meyer Frank (who died in World War II), Philip Ginsburg, Ben Moresky, Herman Plant, Alec Ruzewich and Leonard Stutz.

Two pharmacists--Henry Ginsburg and Maurice Mervis.

Seven lawyers--Max Braunstein, Harry Frank, David Levin, Gilbert Levine, Sherman K. Levine, Mark Rabinovitz and Joseph Solomon.

Two rabbis--Maurice Bloom and Baruch (Ben) Braunstein.

Dr. Ralph Markley attended New Castle High School for one year and was graduated in Homestead, where his family had resided, before he returned to New Castle and established permanent residence. His brothers Maurice and Julius, operated the State and other theaters here.

The total number of third-generation professionals produced by the 24 first-generation families listed above is unknown, due to the fact that so many have moved out of town. However, at least 13 have been accounted for, including sons of Atty. Gilbert Levine and Atty. Joseph Solomon who practice law here. The third generation of other Jewish families also has produced various professionals.

The teaching profession attracted numerous members of the second and third generations and now includes several college professors from New Castle. At least one, Howard Solomon, son of Mr. and Mrs. Ephraim Solomon, is a dean, at Tufts University.

Various members of the Jewish community have been civic leaders. Among the most prominent are Jack Gerson and Alec Samuels. Gerson, 88, veteran of World War I and a retired jeweler, belongs to 20 organizations and serves on five boards. Samuels, 77, still active in the family business where he has worked since childhood, holds the oldest active membership in the YMCA and serves on that board among others. He has been a member of the Rotary club 47 years and served almost 30 years as president of the Lawrence County Motor Club and almost 20 years as president of the Lawrence County Baseball League. He was also named man of the year by the Optimist Club.

Among the Jewish residents elected to public office were Samuels, Arnold Satz and Dorothy Rosenthal, all of whom served on the New Castle School Board, and Lee Silverman, who is on the Meshannock board. Joseph Solomon and Sherman K. Levine served one term each as district attorney of Lawrence County and George Sigler is in his fourth term as sheriff.

Solomon, who also served many years as solicitor for the school board, is retired in Florida. When Levine, also a former county solicitor, died in 1976, The News observed in a page-one tribute that a "legal giant" had passed from the scene. His daughter Susan carries on the family tradition as a law professor in California.

Closely linked with the development of the Jewish community was the first Jewish physician in New Castle, Dr. Eliah Kaplan, who died in 1963. His wife, who died in 1979, was the former Ina Rabinovitz. Her father, Nathan, was the second president of Tifereth Israel. Her brother Mark was an attorney here.



One of her sons from a previous marriage was adopted by Dr. Kaplan and reared here as Bernard Kaplan. Californians later came to know him as the flamboyant financier Bart Lytton, who died in 1969. A son of Dr. and Mrs. Kaplan, Lt. Joshua Hillel K Kaplan, died in World War II.

As a young man early in this century, Dr. Kaplan taught Hebrew to children of the fledgling Tifereth Israel congregation when it was located in a building on Moravia Street. He also lectured to adult groups there. On Sept. 5, 1909, the congregation dedicated a new synagogue that had been built on South Jefferson St. and which would be its home for the next 48 years.

The congregation was incorporated on Nov. 17, 1894, when Lawrence County Court approved the application for a charter that was submitted by Benjamin A. Winternitz, who is remembered as an outstanding attorney and the first Jewish lawyer in New Castle. The first president of the congregation was Max Weinberg, at whose home early Jewish settlers had held services in the 1870s.

The first synagogue was a small wooden structure on Home Street, where services were held until the move to Moravia Street. Weinberg's daughter Florence (Mrs. Maurice Slavovsky) became the first sisterhood president in 1934 and has continued as honorary president.

Two of the 11 incorporators of the synagogue--Samuel D. Fisher and Isidor Kraus--had sons who became charter members of Temple Israel. Fisher was the father of Michael, Edward and Daniel Fisher. Edward Fisher, the surviving brother, is an active member of both congregations. The World War I veteran, now 87, puts in a full day's work for the Fishers Big Wheel stores, which were preceded by the Fisher Brothers stores, which he helped found in 1914. His son-in-law, Marshall Hess, is president of the Big Wheel. The Community Mental Health Center is named for Edward Fisher and his late wife, Fay.

Isidor Kraus was the father of Maurice Kraus and the grandfather of Charles and Stanley Kraus of New Castle. Among the founders of the synagogue were Bear Grossman and his son Simon, who were respectively the grandfather and uncle of Wilbert Grossman of New Castle; Harry Edelstein, grandfather of Mrs Jean Tompkins of New Castle; and brothers S.H. Levine and Charles Levine, grandfather and great-uncle, respectively, of Charles Kohler of New Castle.

At the time the synagogue was built on South Jefferson St., almost all Jewish families lived on the South Side. Reynolds Street, near the synagogue, was predominantly Jewish. Jewish businessmen owned shops on Moravia Street and Long Avenue. Today, most of those buildings on Moravia and Long are gone, and so are the houses on Reynolds. Only a few Jews remain on the South Side. One who still lives and works there is Julius "Ty" Cobb, who has operated a barber shop on Long Avenue since coming over from Lithuania almost 70 years ago. He will be 89 in October.

As the Jewish population moved to the North Hill--and later to Neshannock Township--the Tifereth Israel congregation made plans to relocate. President Samuel Schwartz appointed Dr. Nathan Ginsburg and Edward Haims as co-chairman of a building fund committee in 1946, and in 1953 the Kirk property was purchased. Nathan Land was president at the time.

In 1957, with Haims as president and Abe Fisher as chairman of the building committee, construction of a new synagogue was begun. It was completed in time for high holy day services to be held in the main sanctuary in September 1957. The building was dedicated on May 18, 1958. The guest speaker at the dedication banquet was Rabbi Maurice Bloom of New York, a son of the congregation.

The congregation, established by Orthodox Jews, had gradually become what Rabbi Joseph Spector calls "traditional Conservative", adding more English to the service and permitting men and women to sit together. In the building on South Jefferson St., women were required to sit in the balcony. There is no balcony in the present synagogue.

Meanwhile, two other Jewish congregations had come to being. One, known as Beth Sholom, lasted only a few years in the 1920s. It was composed of a small



group of persons who met in a house on the North Hill and who favored the establishment of a Conservative congregation, according to one of its members, Louis Sandler, retired Johnson Bronze Co. executive who will be 87 in October.

The other congregation was Temple Israel, which was established in 1926 by members of the community who wanted to practice Reform (liberal) Judaism. Early meetings were held in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Kline. Instrumental in establishing the congregation was the first president, Marcus Feuchtwanger, who served until 1944.

A charter was granted in March 1927, and ground was broken for a temple in April 1927. Kline was chairman of the building committee and Norman Ehrlich was chairman of the finance committee. The temple was dedicated to the memory of Rabbi J. Leonard Levy of Rodef Shalom Temple in Pittsburgh in ceremonies held Nov. 4-5-6 in 1927. Among the guest speakers was Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver of Cleveland.

Temple Israel had 20 charter members, and there were 44 members on the rolls at the time of the dedication. The slate of officers at the dedication included J.F. Perelman, first vice president; Jacob Cosel, second vice president; Abe Levine, secretary, and Sam Klafter, treasurer. Most of the members of the new congregation were businessmen, but the list also included two prominent industrialists, Jonas Kaufman, president of the New Castle Metal Products Co., and Mark Rosenblum, secretary-treasurer of the Standard Wire Co.

The current president of the temple is Robert Ziman. Sidney Shenkan, a third-generation family member, was president when the congregation observed its 50th anniversary on Oct. 24, 1976. Cited then as surviving charter members were Mr. and Mrs. William Cosel and Edward Fisher. William Cosel died Aug. 5, 1980.

Others in the Cosel family who were charter members were William's father, Jacob, and William's cousins, Robert Cosel and Mrs. Nanette Cosel Linville, widow of Dr. Montgomery Linville. Max Cosel, father of Robert and Nanette, had been a Civil War prisoner at Andersonville and was an early Jewish settler in New Castle. William Cosel was a decorated veteran of World War I.

When Mrs. Linville died in 1946, she left a bequest to the Council of Jewish Women that was used to establish the Council Corner in the New Castle Public Library. Interest from that bequest is still used to supply books. Another collection there honors the memory of Lt. Joshua Hillel Kaplan.

Mrs. William Cosel, the former Miriam Marlin, attended an early community religious school and was one of 11 girls in the first confirmation class, in 1912. She is one of four Jewish women in New Castle to be honored as women of the year by Beta Sigma Phi sorority. The others are Mrs. Alec Samuels, Mrs. Robert Strauss and Mrs. Dale Perelman.

The first of Temple Israel's five rabbis was Jacob B. Menkes, who served from 1927 to 1931. Dr. Iwan J. Gruen assumed the pulpit on Oct. 25, 1945, and will observe his 35th anniversary next month. Rabbi Gruen, a native of Berlin, received his Ph. D. from the University of Berlin in 1923. His first pulpit was in Frankfurt, Germany. He served as rabbi in the Free City of Danzig from 1927 to 1939, when he came to America. In 1962 he was awarded an honorary doctor of divinity degree from Hebrew Union College. He will be 80 on Oct. 4.

Rabbi Joseph Spector, formerly of Oak Ridge, Tenn., has been spiritual leader of Tifereth Israel since succeeding his good friend, the late Rabbi Alexander Gelberman in August 1973. Rabbi Spector, the son of a rabbi, is serving his first pulpit after a career in government.

Rabbi Gelberman served the congregation at the time of its 75th anniversary celebration on Nov. 16, 1969. The president was Abe Cohen, now the religious chairman. The current president is Earl Cohen. Previous long-term presidents were S.H. Levine, who served from 1908 to 1921 and four other years, and Maurice Samuels, 1934 to 1945.

Among the former rabbis of Tifereth Israel were Morris Newmark and Julian Shapo, fathers, respectively, of Dr. Abe Newmark and Mrs. Simon Skole of New Castle.