

TEMPLE ISRAEL  
HISTORY 1951-1976

"To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven." In this historic Bicentennial year 1976, also 5737, the semi-centennial celebration of Temple Israel's founding is reason for exuberant acclaim and time for rejoicing for Jews in the Reform movement.

In 1926 under the leadership of Marcus Feuchtwanger, the congregation came into being in memory of Rabbi J. Leonard Levy of Pittsburgh and dedicated to God. Renowned Rabbis consecrated each phase of Temple building with the awareness of facing the holy Ark in the direction of Jerusalem.

From its inception in 1926 with 14 families, 120 in 1951 now numbering 76, the congregation has been insoured by five Rabbis. The present incumbent, Dr. Iwan J. Gruen will mark thirtyone years with Temple Israel and fifty years in the Rabbinate.

Born in Berlin, Dr. Gruen was educated at the University of Berlin and the Liberal Rabbinical Seminary of Jewish Learning where he studied with famed Leo Baeck and Rabbi Ismar Elbogen and was ordained in 1926. He has occupied pulpits in Wausau and Oshkosh, Winconsin and Decatur, Illinois. In 1957 he was named Rabbi Emeritas by the Federal German Government.

A follower of Neo-Traditionalism which emphasises liberal and progressive Jadaism, Dr. Gruen is free to disavow the obsolete and reclaim true Judaism. For his profound knowledge and practice, his sensitivity to ecumenism, a Doctorate of Divinity was conferred upon him by Hebrew Union College- Jewish Institute of Religion in 1962. His wife Gertrude shares his compassion for all humanity.

Four generations in Temple membership have planned, constructed, prayed, studied and socialized through religious exchange. A charter member and president in 1944, Jacob Perlman would have treasured the knowledge that his son Lawrence would lead the congregation in 1959; as would charter member Emanuel Shenkan succeeded by his son, Alvin in 1954 and grandson Sidney currently in the president's chair; also that Nathan J. Love, president in 1947 would offer two young presidents, Morton in 1967 and Howard in 1971.

Since the beginning eighteen presidents dedicated to a spiritual mission have served faithfully and energetically. Marcus Feuchtwanger, J.F. Perelman, Abe Gonick and N.J. Love bequeathed a mortgage free holding, free of all indebtedness, a clear title to be preserved and strengthened.

Since 1951 inaugurated a Jubilee year, a 25th. anniversary weekend was commemorated with Rabbis Solomon B. Freehof and Max Heller, the visiting dignitaries.

To the presidents of the 1950s, Abe Levine, honorary life member of the Board, James Meyers, Alvin Shenkan, Louis Sandler and Ralph Friedman goes the credit for Temple beautification.

1. Redecorating the sanctuary including the sacred Ark
2. Installation of overhead, indirect lighting.
3. Enhancing the Temple grounds. It is interesting to note that in the initial landscaping a Maple tree planted by the New Castle Section, National Council of Jewish Women in honor of their first president, Nell S. Feuchtwanger, wife of Marcus is still resplendent in greenery at Highland and Moody.
4. Initiation of the Congregational dinner.
5. Activating of the Temple Youth Group.
6. Printing of a Memorial booklet for Yom Kippur.
7. The purchase and consecration of burial groundson Fording Road. In the beauty of holiness, the cultivation of trees and shrubbery created a Memorial Park of exceptional beauty. The first interment was that of Hyman Wolfe who labored in this effort.
8. Pulpit exchange with the Reverend Henry Strock of Northminster U.P. church. One requirement of his successor was a willingness to continue this exchange. The Reverend John W. Sloat and Rabbi Gruen will mark 14 such reciprocities, Similar religious interaction includes exchange with the First Christian, Highland U.P., First United Methodist and St. Joseph the Worker churches.
9. The celebration of the Gruen's 25th. wedding anniversary was a social highlight.
10. The ground breaking ceremony for an additional sector to house 4 classrooms with Hilda Fisher scooping the first shovel of earth is a nostalgic remembrance. Building a new wing seemed to be an incredible venture.

A new generation of leaders in the 1960S emulated their predecessors in steering the congregation through trying times. At the helm were Lawrence Perelman, Forrest Raffel, Jay Weiner, Ronald Lasday, Morton Love and Stanley Kraus. At a peak time in Temple growth, when families were moving to the suburbs, a long range building program for the erection of a new house of worship was considered.

Twenty acres of desirable land in Neshannock Township were purchased and dedicated in 1962. A changing world decreed otherwise. The economic depression, a declining Jewish population, college trained youth seeking careers in metropolitan areas proved there was no longer need for expansion. However the modernfour classroom addition proved to be a solution to the religious school enrollment. My the land purchase be a profitable investment.

Highlighting the many accomplishments of this decade were:

1. Enlargement of the podium to accomodate the Confirmation class.
2. Installation of a two manual Baldwin electronic organ.
3. New modern seating and deep-pile carpeting.
4. Blue leather covered chair in the vestry room. An interesting accentin refurbishing the vestry is an artistic display of portraits, family style which include separate family groups.
5. Comfortable air conditioning.
6. Purchase of a residence on Moody Avenue as a parsonage for the Rabbinical family.
7. Equal franchise granted to women. Named to the Temple Board were Janice Perelman, Audrey Kohan and Jean Lasday.

Throughout the years the RELIGIOUS SCHOOL has been promoted on a reverent and intellectual advancement basis. Staffed by trained educators, classes are taught in accordance with the principles of Reform Judaism. In the early days, the enrollment numbered 39 pupils, a good number from non-affiliated families; in 1951, pupils numbered 88; while 45 constituted the figure in 1965.

A shocking tragedy terminated the role of principal of the school of Katherine Levine who with her husband, Charles met death in an automobile accident. A wide community was saddened.

The Jewish census in decline again effected change. When an Orthodox Synagogue, built in the Temple neighborhood adopted a Conservative stance, then as is happening in other cities, a combined Religious School solved a mooted question. Since 1973 classes are being held in both buildings. Presently the enrollment consists of 18 children from the Schule, 18 from the Temple and 11 from Ellwood City.

Meanwhile Hebrew is being <sup>taught</sup> by Rabbi Gruen to Temple children in preparation for Bar and Bath Mitzvah. Confirmands, also are under his guidance. To witness the performance of these consecrated students is to recognize the sensitivity of a distinguished teacher and preacher.

Available to pupils in the school for application and excellence are: 1. The Jackie Gonick Award.

2. The Nathan J. Love Campership to the Betty and Joseph Harlan Camp.
3. The Michael Fisher Memorial Fund which has funded group advantages.

The 1970s also produced enterprising, young, informed officers reflecting the image of leadership, namely: Howard Love, Earl Kaye and currently Sidney Shenkan.

Through the fifty years, many members and friends have made lasting and sacramental gifts like stained glass windows, Torah Scroll accoutrements, Memorial plaques, menorahs, prayer books and copies of holy scripture. Space does not permit identifying the donors. All have earned our devout gratitude.

In turn Temple Israel will be remembered for the gift of a Magen David Memorial Shield placed in the Chapel of the new Ym-YWCA building. Books of Jewish content were added to the libraries of Slippery Rock and Westminster colleges.

The effectiveness of the combined religious schools can only be evaluated in the future.

The decision on replacing prayer books with the new edition "Gates of Prayer" has yet to be determined.

Space permitting, a complete record of the Brotherhood would be included. Sponsoring Youth activities, paying tribute to motherhood, assuming financial obligations, presentation of a Humanitarian Award, JFred Rentz being the first recipient deserve praise.

Likewise the Sisterhood has functioned through the years. Presiding at the festive Oneg Shabbats is most pleasing. Visible efforts the distribution of the annual Calendar now in its tenth year and the incomparable Sisterhood Cook Book.. The Honorary president is Mrs. Blanche Ehrlich of California. Barbara Silverman has covered other adventures in a 35 year history which is due to be continued.

As a spiritual center, Temple Israel has contributed to the civic and cultural life of our city. With the approach of the 20th. century which will usher in 75 years of spiritual liberation, may God's blessings of peace descend upon the world.