

Factual history has been made available at previous anniversary celebrations, and in the Temple Dedication Journal, which we recommend to anyone not familiar with the Congregational history. Tonight, we thought we'd like to dig up a little of the color and flavor of the past. Our program was originally going to be a presentation of their earliest memories of our 80 year old gongregation by a group of our more mature native sons and daughters. The committee met to share reminiscence, and a tape recording of that session would be most interesting and revealing. Necessarily, we are forced to sacrifice spontaneity to propriety.

Professional historians concern themselves with debates as to whether personalities or events are paramount. But that was no problem for our committee; the accent was on personalities, and we're calling this report Unser Gang.

We don't stand behind our chronology; we won't even vouch for the data. And - the assortment of sketches isn't complete, partly because everyone has his own favorites and partly because we don't want to tell everything. If you want to hear everything - Lou Allen is widely reputed to be the raconteur of State St and to have total recall of all the pécadillos of the other members of his generation.

Let's start with Turk Rabinovitz and the first Mr. Cohen -- Simón's father, Lilly Rosenblum's grandfather. His name was either Henry or Aaron, but he was known as der Alter. He was a dignified man with a very erect carriage - in many ways a 19th century Jewish MacArthur. He wore a black caftan, was extremely frum, and ran a very strict boarding house for the group of immigrants from Kovne G'brna, refugees from the Czar's army. Turk was one of these refugees sheltered by the benevolent Cohens. On Shabbos, the peddlers and assorted boarders assembled and workhipped



together. Afterwards -- maybe a stroll thru the mud and occasional plank walks along State St -- to joke with the farmers who brought in their produce for sale every Saturday. The background's more interesting now to us than the story -- but our ancestors were greatly amused to recount der Alter's reactions to the farmer who insisted on delivering a suckling pig Turk had ordered.

There was Moshe Bazaler, the shuster. His personality doesn't come thru, but he was the first chazan at the little upstairs meeting room shule on Shenango St. Downstairs, Bazaler ~~made or at least purveyed~~ <sup>repaired</sup> a fancy fore-runner to today's storm boots -- thick felt boots that reached to the knee -- no higher for their rigidity would ~~inhibit~~ <sup>in</sup> movement -- and over them, rubber ankle boots. ~~Propriety dictated that~~ <sup>Both</sup> pairs of boots ~~be~~ <sup>were</sup> removed indoors, but foot comfort was provided by a red-hot pot-bellied stove in the little shule room. A fine lace curtain separated the ladies' section.

Joseph Routman was the first auctioneer; he was almost the only auctioneer, but ~~we~~ <sup>also</sup> remember Dave Mermelstein in this role in the 30's. The auctioneer auctioned aliyas - honors - on Sabbaths and holidays -- to the highest bidder, but apparently there was often a chosen designate. The auction was conducted in Yiddish, in a stylized sing-song -- in shillings, 8 to a dollar. It was the same Joseph Routman who got prisoners out of jail for Yomtif.

I must digress a moment, for the benefit of those who have not lived in Sharon for 40 years, and <sup>delivered the</sup> give you the benefit of my research into the Routman tribe. Joseph's sister married Henry, who took her name, fathered Gertrude, Jenny, Lou, and Sam, and lingers in my own memory cutting the lawn on Highland Road while wearing his derby. Joseph the Patriarch had four sons -- <sup>FRANK HARRY</sup> Harry, ~~Frank~~, Ben, and Alec -- all of whose progeny I could list, but the roster would sound like the begat chapter of Genesis. That's <sup>hint</sup> ~~enough of a hint~~; ~~and~~ all you have to do is assign all the other Routmans to one of these four family branches.

The Rev. Jacob M. Rabinovitz -- shochet, chazen, mohel -- also weddings, Bar Mitzvah, and Pidyon Ha'Ben. His fee for a chicken slaughter was 10¢ -- door-to-door. As a cantor, his beautiful tenor is still remembered especially for his fervent Kol Nidre and the N'sana Takof. Mr. Rabinovitz was the first m'lamed - teacher - in Sharon, and about the only one remembered with pleasure and affection. The others are remembered ~~for~~ the severity of their blows and the shortness of their tempers, as well as their occupational predilection for hot tea. These traditions die hard, and even we middle-aged youngsters knew the ruler and <sup>the</sup> pointer, were thrown out bodily, and bore witness to the sacred afternoon tea ceremony.

We are currently concerned that our youngsters display little dedication to their religious studies, but little George Lurie's grandfather George is remembered for his graceful and frequent exits out of the cheder window. And Bessie Routman Katlin worked out a ploy to bring the lesson to a swift close -- Put down your coat, Lash, and I'll faint on it!



These m'lamdim succeeded Mr. Rabinovitz during the long 12 year presidential tenure of Simon Cohen. Mr. Cohen ~~was~~ also helped Mrs. Max Daus start the first English-speaking religious school with classes in the YMHA rooms and Confirmation in the Thomas Theater. In 1924, the school was adopted by the Congregatn. Mrs. Daus was <sup>eventually</sup> succeeded by Mrs. Klafter and her daughter Rose -- and, of course, by Joe Goodstein. Joe had all the patience and good nature denied the m'lamdim. During one painful exposition and analysis of the 23d Psalm, Joe asked Marv Epstein if he could eat in the presence of his enemies, and Marv assured Joe he could eat any time. Think of it -- every year at the Congregational meeting, Joe gave us a cheerful, optimistic report of the conduct of our Religious Schools!

Bitter dissent and fervent personality clashes! Dues doubled from 50¢ to \$1 a month. The congregation splintered and later reunited. After half a century, the cause celebre is ludicrous, and only the personalities hold up. There was the classic, many-years-running battle of the stenders. A stender was a free-standing lecturn, locker, and foot-rest, all in one -- with a tilted surface for <sup>leaning and for</sup> the prayer book and a small cupboard for books, tallis, t'fillin, smelling salts, what-not -- a thoroughly practical convenience, but quite space-consuming. The first stenders were custom designed to fit their owners -- fat or thin, tall or short. Kivi Bearman had his so positioned that he stood with his back braced to the chimney, his foot on the stender rest and the whole immobilized against the first pew bench. He never sat during a service; indeed, it was an effort to extricate himself from his fortress.

Well, these stenders stood in the mizrach -- the open section in the front, the eastern part of the shule. Bidding for ~~these~~ seats in this exclusive section started at \$100, to be paid out in installments. But - it was crowded with the stenders and the multiplicity of design lent a rather disorganized appearance. There was much agitation for their removal, and equally ardent demand for their maintenance. Suddenly - they were gone - the work of an unknown activist! - later to be discovered piled high in the yard next door.

There were many hard-fought, emotion-packed meetings before a compromise was reached on a standard stender - a limited number of which were duly erected and installed. To supplement their decimated ranks, apertures were cut into the back of the mizrachi pews ~~which~~ <sup>so</sup> could be raised and positioned to hold a prayer book. But a ~~ledge~~ <sup>that a ledge</sup> had to be attached to the lower end to prevent the book from falling, and this ~~ledge~~ <sup>lip</sup> and the hinges made seating less comfortable. Besides, could one lean and daven with soul and feeling on this little device? Assuredly not!

Dissatisfaction needs expression. Meyer Yunkel "outman - M Zay to one and all - was an elder of the congregation - a philosopher - entitled to honor and respect. So it was Meyer Yunkel's reading ledge that served ~~as~~ the medium of dissent. One Yontif it was discovered that crosses had been carved into Meyer Yenkels place. Who could believe it? Who could think of such a desecration?

To this day, the crime is officially listed as unsolved, tho the shamas and keeper of the mikva - Mr. Ruben - offered to disclose the identity of the culprit at a public meeting Sunday at 2 o'clock.



A din terra - a court - was convened, but Mr. Ruben's testimony that he had seen only one man enter the shul so he must have been the one -- was ruled merely circumstantial and insufficient.

Newspapers were the rule for Rosh Hashanah; their rustling and the inevitable commentaries they provoked overwhelmed the davening. In the balcony the earnest ladies in the front revolving chairs were distracted by the gossip of the newly married young matrons in the rear. But they tried in vain to shush the endless chatter of maids and babies and fashion. On Yom Kippur -- smelling salts were in evidence and distributed widely. The older men wore kittels under their long heavy tallasim and slippers on their feet. Younger iconoclasts adjourned for World Series broadcasts or to inspect the new model automobiles. The women-folk, the devout ones, wore long white dresses that hung over the tops of their high laced shoes. Mrs. Adler~~ix~~ left the price tags pasted on the lens of her newly purchased eyeglasses.

On less holy days, at the whist table, Mrs. Freyman might urge Mrs. Bender "Bid, bid, Ich habe" or coyly ask "Could you maybe give an inkle?" Dora Allen was put to bed by solicitous daughters who feared she'd had a coronary. When the specialist came and asked how she felt, she replied "Fine." He couldn't find the thermometer - must have left it at his last call. "Sure you feel well?" "Yes, doctor, I'm OK." "Humm - where's the stethoscope? Must have mislaid that too." In Yiddish to spare his feelings, Dora volunteered to her daughters that she'd better get up and let the doctor go to bed.

There was Tante Fraydi - ~~my~~ grandfather's aunt, Bessie Lurie's mother-in-law, a woman who lived well into her 90's. She and Bessie normally communicated through an intermediary, tho she was a regular dinner guest erev Shabbos. She was ~~an ardent~~ <sup>a great</sup> admirer of her son George - ~~Gershon~~ and liked to ride in his car. There is a celebrated story of their ride out East State St and eventually to Mercer so George could turn around the square without backing up. And another story of Fraydi's urging George on to ~~wild~~ exhibitionism - Gershon, trube 'on - Ist cos kehn gelt nicht -- George, blow the horn; it doesn't cost anything.

Bessie was a character <sup>in her own right.</sup> ~~too~~. From an Orthodox background, she never missed a Friday night service tho she argued bitterly with our Reform rabbis. She taught in our religious school into the 1950's, and left even her household possessions to the Temple! She is remembered with a classroom dedicated to her memory, an annual campership at Camp Harlam, and with many a fond memory of her tremendous love and prodigious stubbornness!

One last personality -- Abraham Freyman. We remember his fine handwriting, the punctilious records posted in the picture box on the Shenango St. sanctuary. We remember his clever way of noting the purchase of aliyas with ~~xxx~~ bits of paper or straw or clips -and he never missed! He collected dues - delinquent or current - and kept Alice O'Brien on duty Erev Rosh Hashana to record last-minute payments. He never forgot early privation, so we could smile in the '50s when he snipped a cigarette in half, to put one part in the holder and save the other in his silver case for later. We remember the record paper carefully erased and ready

for re-use, the very short jigger used for dispensing schnapps after ~~snack~~<sup>services</sup>, and the schnapps itself - a total blend of all previous contributions! But he kept up - this man who brought his children from Russia 50 years earlier; he was "with it." It was Mr. Freyman's inquiry - Is Unser Gang going to the Eagles tonight? - that seemed the right title for this fond recollection.