REMEMBERING DONORA'S JEWISH COMMUNITY

By Arnold W. Hirsch

The Donora Jewish community established itself in a rush at the time the Borough of Donora was incorporated, early in the 1900s. The Borough had been envisioned as a community in which the people who would work in the intended steel works and zinc mill would live. These heavy, basic metal-producing facilities were at the time planned to be constructed on the Monongahela river front. As of 1899 the specific area was farm land; by 1903 it had been laid out in streets and lots, and public auctions had disposed of the land as building lots for residential and commercial structures.

It was anticipated that most of the residents of the new community would be immigrants from central and eastern Europe, brought over to work in an industrial complex that would include a towering row of blast furnaces, a mile-and-a half long steel-making and steel-fabricating plant, and a zinc works. The complex was intended to start upriver at the South end with newly-mined Minnesota iron ore, brought in by Monongahela river barge, and to end with fabricated steel wire, sheets of steel, nails, and other steel products down-river at the other end. In addition, zinc was manufactured from native ores in a similar procedure in a large extension of the industrial complex at the Northern end. In addition to the ores, coal , coke and other manufacturing necessities were also brought in by river-barge, pushed or pulled by coal-operated tugboats.

The sudden arrival of so many people planning to live in one small, formerly farming area, created commercial needs. Simultaneously with the establishment of Donora as a community to serve the steel and zinc workers as a place to live, a Jewish community came to life to satisfy commercial needs as part of the birth of the town, basically .

The Donora High School year books, (cleverly named "The Oradon") for 1927, 1928 and 1929 listed 9 Jewish graduating Seniors out of a total class of 85 in 1927, 6 out of 110 in 1928, and 9 out of 111 in 1929. Presently, if the Borough of Donora had continued as a separate school district, there would not be a single Jewish student in any class in that district from kindergarten through High School. A Jewish community which at one time consisted of some seventy-five families, each one with a number of children of public school age, has now shrunk to three matured families, plus one widow and one unaffiliated husband and wife. The Ringgold school district, which is made up of Donora and five other municipalities, containing about 5,000 students, probably has no more than a total of three or four Jewish children in all of its grades.

The yearbooks also contained a substantial number of advertisements by Donora business establishments, owned and operated by Jews. All of these enterprises are now gone and only one Jewish-owned business is now located in the Borough. This one store on a street just out of the downtown area is all that remains to remind of two solid business blocks in which at least half of the merchants were Jews, and to remind of the numerous small grocery stores and meat markets

scattered through the entire town in neighborhoods and in the downtown area.

The Donora Jewish community was at its largest in the 1920s. It was then that 75 Jewish families, each with a number of children, lived in every section of the town, from Spanishtown at the North to Cement City, which had been specially constructed to house the mill bosses. The head of the Jewish household and his spouse, generally, were both immigrants to the United States. Most of them had come from Hungary. Many had ties to the nearby larger Hungarian Jewish community of McKeesport. There they learned of Donora as a place of opportunity from McKeesport friends and landsmen.

Many of the Jewish people in Donora were related. Some had brought others over, or had at least encouraged them to come. In addition to relationships and friendships continuing in the new land there were also feuds and family fights which survived the move from Europe, particularly where an intended husband forgot to send back for his intended wife because of an easier marital connection made in the United States.

The Jewish community organized very early and was incorporated by the Washington County, Court on August 24, 1903. It's original name was DONORA HEBREW CONGREGATION OHAB SHOLAM. It was a strictly Orthodox congregation, although the original Articles of Incorporation only said that the "public worship [was] subject to the doctrine, discipline, rules and regulations of the Hebrew Religion." Thus a Scottish lawyer could cut through the variances of Orthodox, ultra-Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist doctrine and determine that the words "Hebrew Religion" were a sufficient doctrinal guide. The incorporators were: Samuel Markle, Max Platt, Samuel Klein, Adolf Moskovitz and Max Silverman (father of Myron Silverman, later a distinguished Reform Rabbi in Atlanta.) The lawyer was Oliver Scott, Esquire, and the notary was Justice of the Peace Bert W. Castner, a descendant of Peter Castner, a revolutionary War soldier, who had received a patent for the land that eventually became Donora.

In 1964, the name of the congregation was changed by a court proceeding to OHAV SHOLOM CONGREGATION OF DONORA, PENNSYLVANIA; the rules ond regulations were designated as those of the "Hebrew Orthodox Religion"; and maintenance of the existing cemetery was added to the corporate purposes, the prior proceeding having failed to mention the existing cemetery. When Judge Charles Greenleaf Sweet, of Anglican descent for many generations, signed the later decree he opined that the word "Orthodox" was likely to cause problems in the future. He didn't realize that the congregants could live with inborn notions of substantial liturgical and doctrinal difference and still be "Jews". He could not foresee that the enemy of the community would be the establishment of out-of town retail malls which would kill all of the local businesses and be a blow from which the community could not recover.

The Donora synagogue was built in 1911. On Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur the sanctuary squeezed in the 75 famiies. In the center of the sanctuary was a Bima, where the intitial prayers were read on an erev Shabbat or erev Holiday service, with the leader moving to the front Bima for the special Musaph

service for the Shabbat or Holiday. Because of the center Bima the sanctuary would have been impossible to evacuate had there been an emergency on a High Holiday with the sanctuary cramming in the entire community and folding chairs making the aisles impassable; fortunately, no such emergency ever occurred.

In the 1930s an addition to the synagogue was constructed on the level below the sanctuary, establishing a large social hall, installing a kitchen, relocating the stage and providing a clubroom for the B'nai B'rith.

In the 1960s the Sanctuary itself was remodelled, the center Bima being removed. That was the one of only two times when one of Judge Sweet's prophesied problems arose. Was the M'Chutza, separating male worshippers from female to be a part of the remodelled Sanctuary? The strictly Orthodox carried the day, and the M'Chutza continued in the Sanctuary. It consisted of a wrought-iron railing and a transparent piece of plastic that reached the height of the former M'Chutza, but permitted the women to see to the front Bima. It was promptly designated by the irreverent as "The Windshield". Anticipating the militancy of the women's lib movement, some women never attended services in the sanctuary after the reestablishment of the M'Chutza.

In 1993 the three remaining resident Donora dues-paying members of the Congregation donated the Synagogue building to the local Camp Fire Boys and Girls organization. A one year lease of the sanctuary was negotiated with Camp Fire so that Shabbat morning services could continue. The lease expired in September, 1994. Shabbat services were moved and are now held in the Sanctuary of Temple Beth Am, a Reformed Congregation in Monessen, Pennsylvania, located across the Monongahela River from Donora.

Even though the synagogue building is gone the Donora congregation continues. Our Memorial plaques and books have been installed in the Monessen Temple. We have services every Saturday morning, attended by the three Donora members, a father and son from another nearby community who belong to Ohav Sholom, the president of the Monessen Temple and such other residents of the area, who, while not belonging to the Congregation, make a point of ensuring a minyan. The corporate existence of the Congregation also continues; dues are paid; money is safeguarded and invested; and a legal framework is being considered that will perpetuate financial support for the maintenance of the cemetery.

The Congregation's cemetery is located in Carroll Township, just a few miles outside Donora. The earliest legible marker in the cemetery is dated 1912, although there are some obviously older markers which have been so weathered they cannot be read. Years ago ritual preparation of the body for burial was accomplished at the home of the deceased by members of the Congregation. Funerals were conducted from the home, and the entire community was involved in the after-funeral meal and in minyans at the home and then the synagogue for as long a period as the survivors wanted them to continue (usually 30 days, with recital of special mourner's prayers at synagogue services for eleven months).

The direction that the community seemed took initially was to establish a shtetl-like society in a town filled with gentile, mostly Catholic,

millworkers, most of whom were of Eastern Europe stock. Strict Orthodoxy was the apparent way to maintain Judaism in the town. The Jewish future depended on a strictly orthodox indoctrination of the youth. To that end the young people of Donora were the subject of a life-style that kept them continuously involved in Yiddishkeit of the Orthodox variety, at least until the time of Bar-Mitzvah. There were no Bat Mitzvahs at the time, although the girls attended Hebrew School and Sunday School and were confirmed with the graduation of their Sunday School class.

The typical Jewish child in Donora attended public school from about 8:30 A.M. to about 3:45 P.M. School being over, he (or she) rushed to be at Cheder (Hebrew School) at the synagogue by 4:00 P.M. There he remained in a graded class until about 6:00 P.M. The studies included Hebrew, both reading and translation, the Pentateuch, religious practices, praying as an all-inclusive group the afternoon Minchah prayer, and always being pushed by the teacher to learn at the height of the child's abilities. On Friday there was no Cheder, but attendance by the boys at Friday evening Sabbath services was mandatory, the student usually attending with his father.

Saturday morning attendance, again by the males, at the three- hour Shabbat service was also required. There, the Cheder boys kept a close watch on the Chumash text to see that the Torah reader did tnot make any mistakes, particularly in his recollection of the appropriate, unwritten vowel. (The Rabbi promised a quarter to the first student who sang out the correction.) Early Saturday afternoon a Gentile friend carried money for the student to the theater so that a Saturday afternoon movie could be watched. Cheder took up again at 3:30, with the Rabbi, following the episodic nature of the movies' short subjects, told a continuing story about post-biblical days that went on for months without denouement. Cheder ended at 6:00 P.M., and if darkness had arrived the ending consisted of the Havdalah service.

On Sunday there was Sunday School, which lasted from ten in the morning until a little after noon. Sunday afternoon was just about the only free time A Jewish boy had.

No matter how rigorous the Jewish schedule, the children participated in everything secular, schoolwise and communitywise. Bar Mitzvah at age 13 usually ended Cheder attendance (but not Sunday School or attendance at religious ceremonies).

The adult community was also deeply involved in Judaism. Shabbat services were held each Friday evening and Saturday morning. Even the businessmen came to Schule on Saturdays, leaving their stores for employees to run until they returned in the early afternoon. Everyone from every area of the town came and forty or fifty men and boys would walk North on Thompson Avenue to their homes (or to where in later years they had hidden their automobiles, since no one would openly drive to or from the Synagogue on the Sabbath).

During the High Holidays the synagogue was jammed with men, boys, and, behind the M'Chutza, women and adolescent girls; very young girls could join their

fathers in the Sanctuary in front of the M'Chutza. At midnight, on the Saturday night before Rosh Hashana, Selichos services were held at the Schule. Before the service began every ccngregation member paid his Synagogue dues for the past year and also paid what he had pledged during the preceding year to buy honors and aliyahs, and what he had"schnoodered" (promised as a donation to the Synagogue) when he was called to the Torah during the year.

During the High Holidays and the Festivals, the honors (opening the ark, reciting a portion of the prayers, et.cet.) and the aliyahs were auctioned off from the front Bimah. Since the winning bids and the schnooders could not be written in any book, there was a book available with the name of a congregation member on each odd-numbered page. The amount due from that member for bid, pledge or Schnooder, was inserted into the book in front of his page by pre-prepared scrip. All of the bidding was done in shillings, a shilling being worth twelve and a half cents.

The commercial area of Donora was effectively closed down by the Jewish holidays. The Jewish merchants closed their stores, and there were very few non-Jewish storekeepers in the town. Almost all of the many small neighborhood grocery stores and meat markets were owned by Jews, and they too were closed.

The Jewish community was involved in every kind of enterprise. A few Jews worked in the local mill as laborers; one, who had lost a hand in an accident at the mill, as a watchman; and one, the son of a local butcher, as a professional engineer. One Jewish girl was secretary to the Superintendent of Schools, and another was Secretary to the president of one of the three banks. A local boy became a physician and set up his practice in the town; later, the town had as many as four Jewish doctors. Two brothers were the only Jewish lawyers in Donora. There were a number of dentists and one optometrist. Some of the Jews were in politics: one served as local tax collector, and one of the lawyers served a term on the Donora Borough Council and two terms, including a term as president, on the Ringgold school board.

Commercially, Jews owned and operated enterprises involving men's, ladies' and children's clothing, furniture, sporting goods, pharmacies, automotive supplies, new and used cars, insurance, small loans, dry-cleaning, pool halls, bowling alleys, the manufacture and bottling of soda pop, wholesale live chickens, a large meatpacking business, and a large wholesale commercial bakery.

In addition to the spiritual and ritual ties, the Donora Jewish community had an organizational life of its own. The Congregation, made up solely of men, was an incorporated entity. It erected and maintained the synagogue, established the cemetery, and in some measure oversaw the morals of the community. By-laws in Yiddish and English were adopted and printed. Congregation meetings were held twice a month throughout the year. Officers were elected and ceremoniously installed. Infractions of the Rules of Order at the meetings resulted in members being fined (a half dollar was the usual fine) and on occasion suspended so that the member could not attend the next meeting

or two. Except for physicians and pharmacists, anyone who engaged in his usual business on the High Holydays would have been dropped from the congregation rolls.

Although the name of the organization was Ohav Sholom, meaning Lovers of Peace, or Loving Peace, meetings and even synagogue services were rarely peaceful. Problems arose on ethnic lines. Those of Hungarian origin, who were far and away in the majority, felt that all others, lumping German, Lithuanian, Polish, and something called Galitzianer, in a subspecies designated as Deutsch, pronounced "Dietsch" by the Hungarians, and tarred all of the non-Hungarians indiscriminately with the brush of being nonobservant. Litvaks considered the Hungarians to be superstitious, unlearned boors. The genuine Germans looked down on everyone, an attitude permitted by the absence of any Spanish or Portuguese Jews to look down on them.

No non-Hungarian could be elected to an important congregation office. The Depression of 1929, as it continued in the early 1930s brought the sobering realization that a slaveish adherence to ritual was not going to solve the financial problems of the organized community, and a leader of ability was needed. Out of apprehension for the community future, Rubin Hirsch, of Russian background, married to a daughter of a learned Lithuanian scholar, was elected President of the Congregation and was reelected until the Depression no longer constituted a threat.

Women were organized into the Hebrew Ladies' Aid Society. Sometime in the early 1950s the beginnings of womens' lib ended their desire to be limited to providing "aid", and the ladies became equals by changing their name to the "Sisterhood". The ladies organization, no matter how named, met regularly, in the early years all of the members wearing long white dresses to attend the meetings.

Most of the men, in addition to belonging to the Congregation, also belonged to B'nai B'rith, which, for a time had its own rented clubrooms, complete with a billiard table and areas for holding meetings and playing cards. The clubrooms were given up during the depression, but the organization continued, holding its meetings at the synagogue until the community could no longer support a Lodge, at which time the charter of the by-then-named Rubin Hirsch Lodge of the B'nai B'rith was surrendered to the national organization.

Social events were also a part of the Donora Jewish experience. Weddings were held in the Synagogue, with musicians performing in the Sanctuary. The music was generally provided by Humngarian gypsy orchestras featuring a Hungarian zither (of motion picture Third Man fame). Secular holidays were celebrated, including New Year's Eve, when parties were held at homes. Later, community-inclusive New Year's Eve parties were held in the social rooms of the Synagogue.

The biggest and best parties were the Bar Mitzvahs. The entire Jewish community and some non-Jewish friends of the Bar Mitzvah attended the Saturday morning service. Rarely, some pre-existing family feud would cause a member of

the community to be omitted from the invited list. Occasionally, someone would be left out inadvertently; no matter how abjectly the omission was apologized for and explained, a new family feud was born.

The Bar Mitzvah boy himself had spent a good part of the last six months in Hebrew School preparing for the occasion. He was expected to chant the Haftorah with the proper musical intonation, provided by printed symbols rather than notes, and to deliver a speech. The speech was one written by Rabbi Elefant and generally consisted of five or six typewritten pages, memorized by the Bar Mitzvah and delivered from memory. The boy stood at the Bima, facing the men and women of the congregation, wearing his new suit (still with knickers, long pants not to be worn until Sunday School confirmation at age sixteen), wondering about the presents that he knew were piling up downstairs in the Social Hall, hoping his changing voice would not break from soprano to baritone, or the reverse, during his speech on this once-in-a-lifetime occasion, and beganin a youthful soprano: "Dear Father, Beloved Mother, Worthy Rabbi and Highly Esteemed Congregation", going on from there into the explanation of how he was now a man, and his father would no longer have to answer for the burden of the son's sins.

Some of the better students also delivered from memory a five or six page Yiddish speech (the Rabbi's typewriter was a switch-hitter, miraculously able to go both ways, printing with an English font from left to right and a Hebrew font in the other direction.) A very few of the outstanding students, most notably the Rabbi's sons, each of whom later became a Rabbi, also delivered an all-Hebrew speech, which everyone marvelled at, but no one understood.

The religious requirements and the heavy speaking having been completed in the Sanctuary, everyone went downstairs to the Bar Mitzvah lunch in the Social Hall. This was catered by the Ladies' Aid Society. In addition to wine for everybody and a a couple of alcoholic shooters for the heavier hitting men, after a proper Kiddush had been made, there were soft drinks for all plus pickled herring, gefilte fish, corned beef with kosher pickles, potato salad, potato kugel, lokshen kugel (sorry, no umlaut available on this typewriter), cake and other delicacies. All of it was strictly kosher, served out of the strictly Kosher Synagogue kitchen.

Usually, Hebrew School saw no more of the Bar Mitzvah after the Bar Mitzvzh ceremony. He would attend Sunday School until confirmation, but no longer did he attend Cheder. A very few did attend Hebrew School until high school graduation, but they were the exceptions. The Rabbi's children, however, did continue to attend Cheder, helping to teach the beginning classes.

Even with all the Cheder attendance, the schule attendance, the studying, the praying, the full-time home, highway and byway observance of Kashruth and the minutiae of Orthodox observance, the Jewish kids never did develop a shtetl mentality. They all attended public school, and the public schools in Donora were an ethnic melange that had to effect changes in the most observant child. Donora had every kind of human being: White, Black, Hispanic, including Mexican, Catholic, Protestant of all denominations, Jews, Chinese, and some

input from every world culture, belief and previous condition of penury, wealth, slavery, feudal society and master-peasant relationship.

Even the Catholics, who were the most numerous, while professing the same general religious orientation, were divided into Orthodox (St. Nicholas, the Russian Church or St. Spyridon the Greek church right across the river in Monessen), the reformed (St. Michael's Ukrainian church), and the Roman (St. Dominic's for Eastern Europeans; St. Philip's for Italians; St. Mary's for the Poles; a Lithuanian Catholic church, whose name escapes the writer). For the Protestants there were available two Lutheran churches, a Presbyterian church, a United Presbyterian church, a Methodist, a United Methodist church, an Episcopal church, a Hungarian Reformed church, a Baptist church, three Afro-American Protestant churches, and various small Evangelical churches in the Borough or just outside the Borough boundaries. All of these serving a community of no more than ten thousand people including babies and those in the dotage of old age.

The Jewish kids dived into this mix of people, backgrounds and religions with the zest of Star Trek explorers and became an integral part of it of the human stew. They involved themselves in every aspect of the community that affected its youth. In addition to doing well in their secular schooling and their Hebrew studies, in both of which it was expected they would excell, they participated in everything else the community had to offer.

There were outstanding Jewish football and basketball athletes on the Donora high school teams. even thoughThis in spite of their parents wanting their sons to be doctors, lawyers, Rabbis and pharmacists, and their daughters the spouses of the same. Professional athletics, was at best a precarious, tobacco-chewing, ill-paid occupation, not fit for a boy of good family. Jewish kids were in the high school plays, performed in the high school band, were cheer-leaders, class officers, were members of the school clubs, and were included in all of the stratified social groups, being almost indistinguishable from the other students (except they didn't attend school on the Jewish holidays, and because of those absences no Jewish student ever qualified at the end of the year for a perfect attendance pin).

Dates for school dances were as likely to be gentile as Jewish. However, it was always understood that a spouse had to be Jewish, and there was almost no inter-marriage in the Twenties and Thirties. The one noteworthy time when love conquered all, the father of the Jewish groom sat Shivah for him as though he had died.

There were also, Jewish activities in which the school-age Jewish kids engaged. As part of the Cheder, there was a "Yiddish Redners" club, in which the business was transacted in Yiddish, a good deal of which was invented by the speaker as he spoke (an early appearance of what was later described by a writer as "Yinglish").

The Rabbi, in an effort to keep the young post-Bar Mitzvah boys in the fold, organized an athletic club, which played at tennis, baseball, softball and

football in the appropriate season. Named by the Rabbi as the B'Nai Mitzvah club, the uniform was a dark blue, long-sleeved, T-shirt, imprinted with the large white letters, "B.M." Alas, some of the less reverent gentiles called the club the "BabyMakers", an eventuality not foreseen by the Rabbi.

One year, when the B.M. club was a part of a softball league the team came up one player short, there not being a Jewish boy of the right age to be the tenth man in the field. (Softball, in those days, had a roving short-outfielder). In a move that would never meet the requirements of a tenth man for a minyan, a Spanish Episcopalian was made an honorary B.M. member for the ball games. The B.M. team was respectable, but it didn't win a game during the ten-game season; it could have used a couple more Spaniards.

The big outdoor event in the community was the annual Sunday School picnic. It was held at an amusement park near the town, which could be reached by chartered street car. The entire Jewish community attended, and there were footraces, family picnic baskets, the merry-go-round and the roller-coaster. Of course, all of the male attendees kept their hats or caps on during the entire day, in case the Rabbi was looking. A remarkable andr remembered annual highlight was when "Old Man Israel", a tall white -bearded Kohen, in his early nineties, showed off his strength by having one of the more portly men, face him and put his hands on Old Man Israel's belt. Mr. Israel would then grab the other by putting one of his hands on each of the other's shoulders and then raise him a foot off the ground.

The Rabbi who served this community in its great days, was named Gilbert Albert Elefant. He was unique. Although he had never been ordained, he knew more about the religion, its observances, the details of ritual and the way to organize and handle a community, than any spiritual leader of any religion or denomination in the area. Endowed with a great baritone voice, he led all of the services as Cantor. On the High Holidays, he had help with the early High Holiday Schacharis services from a hired cantor from (where else?) McKeesport. He delivered sermons in Yiddish and in English on appropriate occasions. Since he had never received S'micha to ordain him, the Hungarians, of whom he was one, always referred to him as "Mr. Elefant"; the other members of the congregation called him "Rabbi."

Rabbi Elefant stayed busy. His eight children, ranging in age at one time from seventeen to two, and all living at home, didn't seem to interfere with his concentration on other matters. In addition to being Rabbi and Cantor, he organized, trained, rehearsed and led from the pulpit a boys' choir on the High Holidays, assigning the prized solos to the better voices, with an eye to not stirring up any parent who might feel that his/her son, the perfect boy soprano, didn't get the solo that was sung by one of the Rabbi's children.

Music was not the only one of the Rabbi's additional duties. He ran the Cheder, teaching all the grades from learning to read to Mishna; he was principal of the Sunday School, overseeing a graded school and participating in a school assembly, including leading the singing every Sunday. He was the town ritual slaughterer (Schochet), and every Thursday the women of the town would

bring the live chickens they had just bought to the garage behind the Rabbi's house where they were properly killed. He was a Mohel and did the circumcisions in Donora and in the three neighboring towns. On Shabbat, when he would not ride in a car, he would walk the five miles to the next town where an ususpecting male infant was awaiting his painful initiation into the children of Abraham.

In addition to what he received monetarily for performing all of the above and being a participant in every Jewish activity in the town, the Rabbi had to make a living. He sold life insurance. With the proceeds from all of his activities he was able to raise his family, invite his congregants daily to his Succah on Succoth and there provide them with a Kiddush, make contributions to charity, and still live a good, full and remembered life.

The accepted way of life was family-oriented. The husband-father would eat his breakfast at home and then either go downstairs or take a short walk to his business, generally a grocery or a downtown store. He would return home for his next meal (quite often the main meal of the day and denominated "dinner"), go back to work, and then come back home for the evening meal ("supper"). Restaurants, in addition to not being kosher were the province of the unmarried, gentile millworkers. Everyone else, Jew and gentile, ate at home. "Lunch " in a restaurant as a normal experience didn't arrive until the early forties.

At home Kashruth was fastidiously observed in most homes, and pretended to be, in the others. Two sets of dishes, including pots and pans, one Milchik for dairy foods, the other Fleischek for those that were meat-based, was the norm. In addition, somewhere in a cupboard, two additional sets were awaiting the arrival of Pesach.

The home, not the synagogue, was the center for religious observance. In many homes the father prayed three times a day, donning Tephillin for the morning prayers. His sons probably did the same thing for a short while after their Bar Mitzvahs.

Preparing for Shabbat the house was cleaned and decorated to look different for the Holy Sabbath. Early Friday was devoted to cooking the Friday evening meal, which was enjoyed by the entire family after the men returned from services at the synagogue. At Friday's sundown the lady of the house lit the Sabbath candles in a quiet but impressive ceremony, covering her head and closing her eyes, wafting the candlelight towards her and saying the prayers she hoped would protect her family.

When a male child was born, if he was the mother's first child, there had to be a Pidyon HaBen (redemption party) at the home within thirty days. At that time money, in the form of silver dollars (generally five) was paid to a Kohen to redeem the child from being dedicated to the service of the Lord as a Priest, as required of first born sons in the early Jewish religion. This was followed by food and drink, which for some reason always included chickpeas. If the eighth day after birth did not fall on a Shabbos, the Brith was celebrated in

the home, Where the birth had probably occurred, again followed by a party, while the poor kid lay upstairs in his bed of pain.

Some weddings were also held at the homes, followed by the wedding reception at the same place. Funeral services were often conducted at the home, with the attendees coming back to the home from the cemetery for the required mourners' meal. lthough the home was, thus, the center of a lot of community eating and drinking, at which there was no stinting of wine and hard liquor for Kiddush and the appreciation of the taste and effect of the alcoholic beverages, there were no Jewish drunks or alcoholics. Some men drank oftener and more than others, but alcohol never interfered with understanding and appreciating the occasion, whether sad or happy. Jewish men were not made mean by what they drank; to the contrary, they generally became overly animated and wanted to sing, dance and make clever remarks.

In the mid- and late- 1930s the community started to change. Religion played a lesser part in the lives of the people. Although everyone still wanted the children to learn about the religion, to be bar-mitzvahed, to be confirmed and to marry within the faith, there began to be variations in observance. Although most of the homes still were zealous in observing Kashruth, many of the men ate their nonkosher lunches downtown at the restaurants. The prohibition against the ingestion of meat and milk products within the prohibited periods of separation was ignored, and shrimp and lobster were consumed by people who would not permit such nonkosher food in their homes.

The girls of the Jewish community had a problem. The pool of eligible young men was limited by the constraints against intermarriage and conduct that might result in it. In addition, the girls lacked the mobility of the young men, since most young ladies did not learn how to drive. While the young men were on the highways travelling to McKeesport and the nearby small towns looking for dates, the young women were at home hoping that someone was travelling in the direction of Donora.

A good-looking Jewish girl attracted men from all over the area. Sundays at the home of the Leiber girls, all three of whom were beauties, resembled an AZA convention. Young Jewish men from a radius of seventy-five miles came in their family automobiles to spend the day in the crowded Leiber living room, wishing that all the other young men would go home to Mount Pleasant, Monessen, Monongahela, Charleroi, Uniontown, Pittsburgh, or wherever ele they may have come from.

The Leiber girls all married well, but then, so did almost all of the others. The local girls had all been well brought up, were personable, friendly and fun to be with. Very few of the Jewish girls became spinsters, and those that did chose teaching school or becoming an essential cog in a business rather than becoming a housewife.

Anti-semitism was not a major problem. The town and school being so ethnically diverse, it was difficult for people to know who it was they were supposed to hate, to hurt, or to have nothing to do with. Most of the gangs of young boys

were divided on area and neighborhood lines, not on lines of religion or color. Kids played with kids in school without inquiry as to forbears, although occasionally some older person would try to inject some of the hatreds he had brought with him from the Old Country.

The anti-semitism of Henry Ford and, later, Father Coughlin and Charles Lindbergh did cause the community concern. However, no overt action was taken by the organizing anti-semites, and World War II seemed to sweep hates away in a concerted national effort to defend the country.

In the twenties, the Ku Klux Klan would occasionally burn a cross on the hills across the Monongahela River. They would also jam the roads with vehicles on the way to the farms where they had their Sunday meetings. However, there didn't seem to be any violence perpetrated by them, and when one of them had a gunshot wound after a particularly lively cross-burning, he came to his usual Jewish Doctor to have the bullet dug out.

Although the Jewish community had no rich people standing out from the crowd, it participated in many charitable endeavors. The Hungarians, who had a reputation for being non-charitable, did not stint when it came to support of the Schule. The United Jewish Appeal did not touch their hearts, but they would pledge and schnooder with generous abandon when called to the Torah, or during the Hoidays when the honors and Aliyahs were sold at auction as part of the service.

With the advent of Hitler, charity became a commodity easier to sell. The Kol Nidre prayer on the eve of Yom Kippur was not recited until a plea was made for the United Jewish Appeal, with the obvious beneficiaries being those Jews who were trying to escape from Germany. This appeal was a "public" drive. It was expected that every head of a household would pledge a substantial amount out loud in front of the assembled congregation, impatiently awaiting the Kol Nidre. There was no regard for feelings; occasionally a man would be told that his pledge was not sufficient to reflect his station in life. Those who tried to get away with the pledge of "Same as last year", might be told that "You didn't give anything last year, and we'll see that you do better this year." The pledges didn't end the matter; volunteers went through the community to collect the pledges in the days following the holidays, sometimes returning two or three times to the same pledgor, who erroneously thought the collectors would give up trying to collect from him if he asked for a delay in payment away enough times.

Among the most Orthodox there was a reluctance to give to charities that supported Zionism and the return to Palestine, since the movement was being led by Herzl and not by the Messiah. But, Hitler made Zionists of everyone. Pledges increased, collections were easier, and there was a feeling of brotherhood with those who had not left Europe in the past. In addition to caring for our own local poor (and there were a few in the Jewish community) the Donora congregation brought over from Germany two complete families, set them up in business, saw that their children were educated, attended their daughters' weddings, and watched them, fully integrated Americans, leave town

for greener pastures, just like almost everyone else did.

World War II changed Donora and everyone in it, Jew and Gentile. Fifty-two Jewish boys from Donora, every one who was not physically disqualified, served in the Armed Forces of the United States. Some left businesses that they owned and operated, many left wives, sweethearts and families. They served in every service and in every branch of the services. They were in every theater of operations, and they did everything, sailing ships, fighting as infantrymen, flying planes. No one of the was killed (although Jewish boys from the neighboring small towns were). Some were wounded, some were prisoners of war, and all of them had experiences which no one would believe unless they had been there at the time. All of them saw things that made Donora seem a small-town irrelevancy, and many came home with the idea of settling someplace else.

The community held its breath until the last of the boys came home, at which time a party was held in the social rooms of the Schule. That party is still remembered as the greatest party ever. War brides were introduced, alcohol flowed like alcohol would in a military club, and everyone had a time that would never be forgotten.

But, that marked the end. The community disintegrated. The young men, having seen the world, decided that Donora was not that part of the world in which they desired to live. The Donora Jewish community disappeared. The Ohav Sholom congregation now has two family members who live in Donora, the family in each case consisting of a husband and wife, with children living elsewwere.

Another nonfamily member lives in Donora, and there are five others who live in the surrounding area who pay nominal dues. Adding up, the congregation has eight members. Shabbat services are still held every Saturday morning, but there is some scurrying around by telephone on Friday to find the necessary ten men. Generally, enough are found, and only rarely have services had to be cancelled because of an the inability to make a Minyan.

It is hoped that there will always be a Jewish presence in Donora, beside the Cemetery. It is frightening to think that the time may come when the people of Donora would never have known a live Jew. That sort of person could believe anything he was told about the Jews, no matter how false and how incendiary.

The remaining members gave the Synagogue building to the Mon Valley Camp Fire Boys and Girls organization, now Mon Valley Youth aand Teen organization. Our plaques, Torahs and books have been moved to Temple Beth Am, a reformed congregation across the river, where we have our Orthodox Shabbat services on Saturday mornings. The Ohav Sholom Congregation continues as an incorporated organization, with the idea that our resources will eventually be devoted to maintenance of our cemetery.