

The History of Temple Israel

At the Standard Club, located at Pittsburgh and Peter Street, a meeting was held on June 10, 1904 to form a congregation which was called the Hebrew Congregation of Uniontown. At that meeting the following officers were elected: Max Baum, President, G. M. Silverman, Vice-President, and Lee Stern, Secretary and Treasurer. Joseph Rosenbaum was named Chairman of a four member Board of Trustees. Rabbi Isidor Reichert was elected the first Rabbi of the congregation.

On June 21, 1904, the minutes of the congregation signed by Lee Stern, Secretary, noted that the name of the congregation was changed to "Temple Israel Congregation of Uniontown." Temple Israel became a member of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) in 1924.

On Friday, August 30, 1907, the new temple building on East Fayette Street was dedicated at a special sabbath service, conducted by Rabbi Reichert. Dr. Joseph Krauskopf, Rabbi of Reform Congregation Kenneseth Israel, gave the dedication address. The program for the service noted that sabbath services were held Friday evenings at 8:00 PM. The religious school sessions were on Sundays at 10:00 AM and also Tuesdays and Thursdays at 4:15 PM. Plans were made for the establishment of a library for the use of children attending the Religious school.

However, long before Temple Israel was formally established in 1904, early Jewish settlers in Uniontown met in each other's homes regularly. In a letter to Rabbi Brody, Mrs. Dora Davis, daughter of Barney Cohen, one of the early settlers, described her early memories of the Uniontown congregation. According to Mrs. Davis, she remembers attending Sunday school classes on Church Street around 1889 with her brother and sister. She also recalls the dances and parties held at the Standard Club to raise funds for the Sunday school. She feels that a Reform Jewish Congregation was formed in Uniontown in 1882.

These early settlers, Barney Cohen, Sol and Joseph Rosenbaum, and Max Baum bought ground in Hopwood for a Hebrew Cemetery. A child named Raphael Cohen whose parents had lived in Uniontown for a short time was the first child buried there. Jacob and Irving Cohen, brothers of Mrs. Davis, who were killed in France in World War I, also were buried there.

According to the minutes of the congregation the Jastrow-Szold Prayer Book was used for worship services. In 1929, the bylaws were changed to read, "The Union Prayer Book shall be used exclusively." On Friday, November 5, 1976, the Gates of Prayer, (the new Union Prayer Book), was dedicated.

Temple Israel has benefited from outstanding rabbinic leadership that includes: Rabbi Reichert, Rabbi William Lowenberg, Rabbi Solomon Philo,

Rabbi R. Hershon, Rabbi Harry J. Stern, Rabbi Samuel Halevi Baron, Rabbi Harry Kagan, Rabbi Ludwig Roeder, Rabbi Arthur Brody, Rabbi Raymond Weiss, Rabbi Tibor Fabian, Rabbi Nathaniel Zimskind, Rabbi William Cohen, and Rabbi Sion David. Rabbi Roeder served the congregation for 10 years and was named Rabbi Emeritus on his retirement. Rabbi Stern served Temple Israel for 5 years before moving to Temple Emanuel in Montreal. Rabbi David served 27 years and was named Rabbi Emeritus upon his retirement in 2003.

Temple Israel has experienced periods of growth and decline over the years. Since its inception, great emphasis was placed upon the Religious School and Hebrew School. From the twenties, through the sixties, there were as many as 75 students in 10 classes. For the High Holy Days, children were seated in the balcony of the Temple as every seat was needed for the adult members of the congregation. Eventually, Temple Israel and the Tree of Life Religious schools merged, and classes were held at the Jewish Community Center. There was an active Temple youth group. With the merger of the religious schools, Temple Israel and Tree of Life youth joined B'nai Brith Youth Organization, (BBYO). Uniontown was the venue for many BBYO conclaves. BBYO played a vital role in the life of our young people.

Efforts to merge the two congregations were made on at least three occasions. After the last effort to merge failed, Temple Israel's board resolved to sell the Temple building on Fayette Street and move to the Uniontown Jewish Community Center. By the year 2000, membership declined to less than 30 members. Although few in number, members of Temple Israel face the challenge of keeping Reform Judaism a vital force in the community.

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