

HISTORY OF THE WARREN JEWISH COMMUNITY

The beginning of Jewish settlement in the Warren area began in the 1850's. The George Ball family may have been the first although there was evidence of itinerant peddlers before and following the oil field discoveries in the '60's. When George Ball's son Michael V. Ball finished his medical studies in Philadelphia and resettled in Warren, he wrote the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, (HIAS), that there were industries in woodworking, lumber, leather and metalworking in this area needing employees. HIAS than sent a dozen or more families into this area at the beginning of this century and in 1905 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania chartered the Warren Hebrew Congregation of Tiphereth Israel Synagogue.

In 1906, Rabbi Aaron Shulman came to Warren where he was hired as it's first rabbi and served as teacher and schochet, ritual slaughterer, as well. There were fourteen Jewish families in the congregation and almost this many more in the surrounding areas. A Mikvah, for ritual cleansing, was built in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Sontag on south Carver Street. Rabbi Shulman wrote to the Jewish Publication Society requesting a Torah and promising payment within a year, "with G-d's help". The Torah was sent at a cost of \$82.00 and was paid for in the promised time. Services were held in member's homes and on the Jewish holidays a local social hall was rented to accomodate the congregants.

The need for a synagogue of their own was painfully felt

at the time of the High Holydays in the year 1917. A group of people celebrating a wedding on the afternoon before Yom Kippur eve remained in the same hall which was to be used by the congregation long after the time the Yom Kippur services were to begin. This caused great frustration and a firm resolve that next year the congregation would have it's own synagogue.

In the following year it was learned that the UNITED BRETHERN CHURCH on Conewango Avenue was for sale. The members excitedly met raising part of the required down payment themselves and then traveled by train to other established Jewish communities who contributed the balance towards their holy undertaking. The members came with horse and wagons bringing materials for the conversion of the church to a synagogue and digging out a basement for the study, social, kitchen and bathroom facilities. As expressed by Louis Segel, one of the younger members, "The builders of Solomon's Temple didn't have more enthusiasm for their undertaking than did this small group of Jewish immigrants". Following a series of building improvements through the next two decades, the mortgage was finally paid off in the late 1930's. In 1955 the synagogue was modernized with a new Ark, Marble Ten Commandments, Bemah, Amud and lighting, as designed by Architect, Sol N. Gellman of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

At it's early inception in 1918, the congregational dues were 50 cents per month with \$3.00 charged each family for High Holiday seats. At that time each member was obligated

for a two week period to clean the shul building and assist in arranging for services. There was a great spirit of participation, occasionally resulting ⁱⁿ heated arguments on procedure, but throughout the years most families and members took turns in assuming responsibilities and offices.

A Ladies Auxiliary, later known as The Sisterhood, played a very important role. It helped provide the initial furnishings and continued throughout the years to raise funds to support shul operations, provide dinners and programs for the celebration of the various holidays and special occasions. It created and operated a Sunday School for the children of members, providing teachers and materials. In addition it held regular meetings at which a variety of programs were presented which created a close social bond between the women members.

Throughout the 1930's and later, the Sisterhood provided meals and arrangements for lodging for itinerant unemployed Jews passing through Warren. With the coming of the Nazi terror in Europe, the community undertook to sponsor several individual Jews and families who were fortunate enough to escape from Europe before the war. After World War II, the Jewish community undertook bringing five refugee families at one time. Apartments were acquired and furnished, our women scrubbed the floors and stocked the cupboards and temporary jobs were provided. Only one family remained more than a year, the others anxiously opting to move on to larger cities and Jewish communities.

During the 1950's, 60's and 70's the synagogue participation was enthusiastic with emphasis on the education of our children. Over a period of fifteen years five rabbis were hired full time to prepare perhaps thirty-five children for the ceremony of Bar and Bat Mitzvah and for additional Hebrew and Jewish history education. This was supplemented by the Sunday School classes and during the years that we did not have a rabbi, Aaron Shulman instructed the children very well in Hebrew.

Special anniversary celebrations for the 40th, 50th, and 55th Anniversaries were held in the synagogue and Rabbi Bernard Poupko of Pittsburgh, a leading rabbi in the area was our guest speaker for the 50th. anniversary event. He is noted nationally for his efforts toward the release of Jews from the former Soviet Union.

While there were only about twenty five total members at any one time throughout the years, new families coming to Warren for a period from five to fifteen years as part of our community made an impact. Many of them were touched and influenced by their Jewish association and Synagogue experience in the Warren congregation. At the end of the 1970's and 80's, the number of families decreased. Some families moved, some members died and most of the grown children did not choose to remain, choosing to seek their fortunes elsewhere, so the activities diminished also. By the end of the 1980's, the five or six remaining families and a few single members came to the decision that it would be necessary to give up

the synagogue. It was hoped that we might be able to "gift" our Torahs, Ark, Amud, Ten Commandment Tablets and Memorial Tablets as a unit to a growing congregation or institution to perpetuate in some measure our Warren Hebrew Congregation.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WARREN COMMUNITY

Through the several generations that Jews were living in the Warren area, many contributed meaningfully in ~~both~~ business, and professions and in its cultural activities. There was evidence of Jewish peddlers following through the area during the early Oil days. The earliest record of a Jewish ~~business~~ owner business establishment was that of George Ball, a merchant ~~and~~ tailor and dealer who settled here in 1855. He employed as many as twenty tailors selling throughout the area as far as Buffalo where he later established a store also. The Siegel Brothers habadashery was a leading store for men in the 1880's. The Levi Epstein family had early stores in Sheffield and Warren. Sam Schraybman established the first grocery super market in Warren. Stein's sold fine women's apparel and was the first store to have air conditioning in downtown Warren. Browns, Glassmans, Shulmans, Waxmans were other retailers that served the area. More recently the Levinson Brothers department store and Betty Lee women's store became the most prominent anchors of the downtown until closing ~~at the~~ at the end of the 1980's. Other families ~~who~~ established businesses, most starting from the peddling route and becoming scrap metal dealers included ^{Yakov} Rothchild, ^{Samuel} Kornreich, Charles Punsky, Robert Punsky, Eli Gordon and Louis Segel. The Segels introduced the first comprehensive steel warehouse supply.

While there were a number of professional members in the Jewish community that ^{performed} gave excellent services, the role of Dr. Michael V. Ball was particularly outstanding. Born in Warren in 1868 he received preliminary education in Buffalo and high school in Warren. He entered Jefferson Medical School at Philadelphia at age of 18 and graduated three years later as Doctor of medicine in 1889. Dr. Ball took post graduate ^{studies} in Germany working under the celebrated bacteriologist Dr. Robert Koch. On his return he served in a number of hospitals and as instructor of Histology at Niagara University Medical School as well as teaching at the New York Medical College for Women ~~where he also was clinical pathologist -~~ ^{(He had written} a text on Bacteriology which was considered a standard for teaching and went through eight editions.) His family prevailed on his returning to Warren in 1897 where he was a specialist in diseases of eye, ear, nose and throat and practiced until the time of his death in 1945. In practice here he

2. (CONTRIBUTIONS)

Assumed a number of special responsibilities as a leader in medicine. In 1898 as President of the Warren Board of Health, he reorganized a system of vital county medical records and set up a school inspection service. He then served as County Medical Inspector and later as Coroner bringing up standards in medical practice and records. Dr Ball also involved himself in many local activities being a Past Master of the Masonic Order, active in the Shakesperian Club, and Warren County Historical Society writing a ~~WARREN COUNTY~~ MEDICAL HISTORY OF WARREN COUNTY. He was the leader in organizing the Warren Academy of Science. Another special contribution was his initiative ~~xxxxxx~~ responsible for the settlement of a member of Jewish families in the Warren-Sheffield areas. On his return to Warren he wrote to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society to direct the settlement of Jewish immigrant newcomers to this area as there were job opportunities here preferable to the teeming sweatshops of the East Coast Cities. By 1906 in the account given by AARON SHULMAN who came as the first rabbi, he found fourteen families in Warren and about twelve in Sheffield, mostly newly arrived during the past half dozen years. Dr. Ball remained a member of the Warren Hebrew Congregation until his death in 1945, bequeathing ^{leaving a} mfor the childrens Chanukah Festivals. He was survived by his wife Grace Patterson Ball, two daughters, Mary Ball Conway and Jean Ball who remained in Warren both teaching in the public schools, a son Dr. William Ball who maintained a practice here and another son Dr. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ John Ball who practiced in Bethesda, Md.

On his death May 28, 1945, a large congregation of friends of all denominations and walks of life assembled to pay homage to one who had unselfishly given a half century of vision, and service in the advancement not only in the medical profession but also to science, social and political economy as well as to the community as a whole. (This last paragraph condensed from ~~axforwardxtx~~ tribute written by Drs. Brown, VerMilyea and Frantz, 1945.)

While most members of the Jewish congregation participated throughout the years in the various roles and offices of the Synagogue, Sisterhood, BNai Brith, ZOA, Sunday School, Hadasseh and Warren Federation of Jewish Charities and most also took part in organizations within the Warren area, some of the special contributions and roles are listed below. We regret any omissions which can be later added...

Commander American Legion - - - Charles Sontag
 Co-Founders of Warren Civic Orchestra - Hope and William Glassman
 Founder of Warren Academy of Sciences - Dr. M.V. Ball
 Pres. Warren Chamber of Commerce and Recipient Community Service Award- Raymond Stein
 Pres. Warren General Hospital - Jacob Levinson
 Warren Retailers Assn.
 Pres. League of Woman Voters *of Warren Area* ----- Leatrice Segel
 Member LWV Pa. State Board
 Member Home Rule Charter Committee
 Member and Vice President of Warren Boro Council
 Member of Youngsville Boro Council - Barbara Shapiro
 Asst. Director of Warren State Hospital -Dr Leonard Rozensweig
 and Pres. Kiwanis
 Pres. Lions Club - Jerome Waxman, Ray Stein, Bert Levinson
 Pres. Family Service Agency - Ray Stein, Harry Segel
 Pres. Interfaith Center WSH - Harry Segel
 Pres. Warren County Girl Scouts - Ida Berenfield
 Pres. Warren Art League - Ruth Levinson, Abe Schwartz
 Pres. Conewango Country Club--Ray Stein
 Pres. Bnai Brith Northwest Council - He rshel Kanovsky
 Ray Stein
 Co-Chairman Kinzua Dam Committee - Bernard Gofberg
 Director Family Service - Arthur Goldberg
 Director RSVP - Ray Stein
 Winner of National Photo Essay Contest - Michael Siegel
 Founder of Weight Watchers - Jean Neiditch

RABBIS

Rabbi Aaron Shulman (1st - 1906)
Ulenofsky (1920's)
Irwin Halperin (1960's)
Berger
Fred Ackerman
Kosman (1970's)
Michael Eiserberger "

Some of the Cantors

Rev. Philip Shulman
Wolfe Gordon
Harris (SO.Africa)
Polonsky
Rabbi Meir Kahana
Rev. Abe Singer
Rabbi Leib Heber
Dov Bloom
Michael Bloom
Zvi Shuldiner

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERS

Dr. M.V. Ball
Dr. Leonard Rosensweig
Asst. Dir. WSH
Dr. Arnold Kippen - WSH
Dr. Joseph Sugerman - WSH
Dr. Abraham Halperin - WSH
Dr. Harold Levine - WGH

Atty. William Glassman
Atty. Meyer Kornreich, D.A.
Atty. Joe Goldstein - D.A.

Maria Orlowski - Drama Professor
Barbara Shapiro - Teacher
Harvey Shapiro - teacher

Special appreciation is given to Zvi Shuldiner of Pittsburgh who served as our esteemed cantor for the last nine High Holydays held in our community. ~~When~~ Each year as we called Zvi he responded, "I will never refuse You"-or "I'll come as long as you need me"...even though it meant being away from his own family most of these holidays. He served ably conducting our services and reading the Torah. He gave spirited sermons interspersed with information and understanding as to the events in Israel. Zvi made himself a friend to each member of the community.

*Dr. Philip Schwartz - non-member WSH
Director of research at WSH,
Studies in aging from cradle to grave...Nominated for Nobel Prize..
Rescued doctors and scientists from Germany during 1930s setting up Medical School for ATATURK in Turkey.

MEMBERS SERVING ARMED SERV

Charles Sontag
Ray Stein
Jerome Waxman
Hershel Kanovsky
Harry Punsky
Jacob Levinson
Hyman Levinson
Abe Schwartz
Harry Stein
Harry Segel