

Little synagogue that could

By IAN HEISS, *Special to the Chronicle*

There are a lot of people in the Jewish community who remember the old East Liberty neighborhood. This time of year we remember the synagogues, and the throngs of people dressed in their holiday best walking to pray up and down Negley Avenue.

With the relocation of the B'nai Israel and the Margareta Street synagogues, things have quieted down, except for the Torath Chaim Synagogue.

This Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot, the services are being handled by Mordechai Zaetz, the reading of the Torah by Eli Estrin, and the Blessing of the Cohanim by Mende Kohn.

The leaders of this ser-

vice were members of the Yeshiva High School and ranged in age from 13 to 16. "You get good experience", said Zaetz, the 15-year-old Baal Tefila, "It is a privilege representing the congregation in the service."

"The synagogue has a rustic feeling to it," said Estrin, the Baal Torah; "There are seforim on the shelves of the synagogue from the 1700's, and a Mizrach decoration depicting Jerusalem from 1812."

The interior of Torath Chaim bespeaks an elegance and majesty that escapes many more modern efforts. The women's balcony runs along either side of a 40 or 50 foot ceiling for the entire length of the room.

Over the ark is a beautiful mural of two lions facing each other on a Judean mountaintop. This was painted decades ago by Sam Savage, a skilled painter who came to America after the Holocaust. He was the father of Rabbi Stanley Savage of Beth Hamedrash Hagodol.

Over the lions is a stained glass window donated by the Shapiros, who now live in Florida. The center of the prayer hall over the Bima for the Torah readings is dominated by an enormous brass electric candelabra, itself about 20 feet tall by 18 feet in diameter.

The Yeshiva boys and other young men from the school have been taking part in a rotation to keep the minyan going in the Torath Chaim. So far this has been a success. Torath Chaim is far from being a museum attraction. Today, as a half century ago, people worship and find spiritual fulfillment within its walls.



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