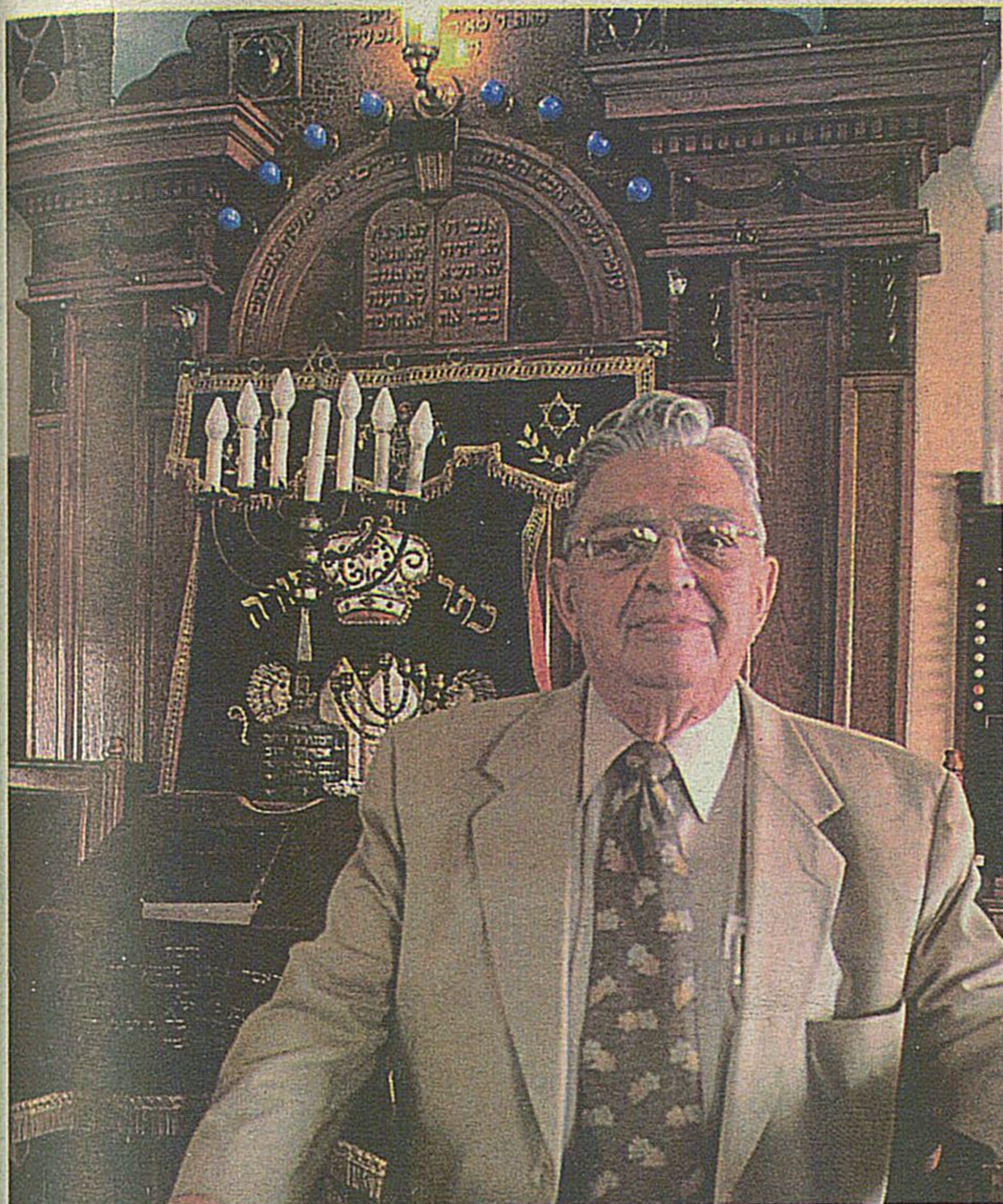


Torath Chaim closes

Congregation's demise spells end of East End Jewry



Chronicle photo by
Christopher Rolinson

Joseph Berger stands before the ark of the Torath Chaim synagogue. Berger, the president of Torath Chaim, says the East Liberty building — a fixture of East End Jewry for decades — is closing.

BY JO MARKS RIFKIN

Staff Writer

No one walked down North Negley Avenue, past littered sidewalks and sundry whiskey bottles, to High Holiday services at Torath Chaim this year.

The doors to the last remaining synagogue in the East End are closed. The paint and cement are crumbling and the Jewish community, almost in its entirety, is gone.

The dwindling congregation, which could only form a minyan when a handful of paid Yeshiva boys walked there from Squirrel Hill on Shabbat, officially closed on Aug. 28.

"Today, when I pass by the street, I want to cry. East End was the most beautiful part of Pittsburgh," said Rabbi Mordecai Glatstein, Torath Chaim's religious leader from 1950 to 1955. "We had many synagogues there and the people were so happy and joyous and now it's empty — completely."

The first Shabbat service at Torath Chaim, a converted house at 728 N. Negley Ave., was in 1927.

"It was for my brother's bar mitzvah," said Jason Shapiro, 83.

At the time, Shapiro said, there were five other synagogues in the area, and this was a break-away group of people who were followers of Rabbi J.J. Hurwitz, his great-uncle. The shul was added onto in 1948 and could seat 700 people.

"And now it's finished," said Shapiro. "It's all over now. All that's left is a well-cared for cemetery on Route 8 in Gibsonia."

A few weeks ago, after a financial meeting with the few remaining congregants and Torath Chaim's president, Joseph Berger, the synagogue closed its doors.

The building's future is not yet determined.

"The sad part is that the shul has been open these last 10 years with next to no attendance," Berger said.

The attendance dropped dramatically after Shamai Shapiro, the congregation's Torah reader, died 10 years ago.

"He kept Torath Chaim going," Berger said.

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