

## By Max Azen

Vice President and Chairman of the Building Committee, of the Congregation B'nai Israel

It was just three years ago that we took up our residence in East Liberty, and it didn't take me long to realize that there was something that is very essential to the life of a Jewish community lacking. I wondered time and again, how it was possible that in a section where so many well-to-do, and God-loving Jewish families resided, there should be no house of worship, no House of God. I wondered how these self-respecting Jews could be content with the make-shift arrangement of hiring some hall or auditorium, in which to congregate and hold most sacred services of our Holidays, and days of atonement. I often wondered what our Gentile neighbors thought of us, and what opinion the various other Jewish communities throughout the city of Pittsburgh entertained about us. After meeting most of my new neighbors, I came to the conclusion that we were all equally sincere in our desire to have a House of Worship of our own, that we all sensed our great need, and that we were all willing to do our utmost toward that end.

To follow the paths of our fathers and to uphold our Jewish religion, we must have a dignified House of Worship, a place where men, women and children of the Jewish faith may congregate, a place where they can remember that they are the children of a people with a glorious history, a people who have given the world something that has made civilization. Houses of Worship have kept the Jewish people united, and without them they would not have succeeded and overcome hardships and privation which our fathers went through for more than two thousand years.

Many meetings have been held in the past, with the result that we must start to lay the foundation for a House of Worship, no matter how difficult the task may be in the beginning.

What is still more important, is that new workers are rallying daily to our side. Men and women, impressed with the zeal and earnestness of our work, through inspiration for the cause, are giving us their moral and material assistance in this great undertaking. And now it won't be long, I am sure, until our fondest wishes will be realized. It won't be long, I am certain, that we will have our own sacred House of Worship, a

temple we shall be justly proud of, where we shall be inspired to true and happy Jewish life; a temple which shall be a monument for our children and children's children, and for others a sign of the strength and faith of idealistic Judaism.

### INTERVIEWING MR. MAX AZEN Chairman of B'nai Israel Building Committee

Among the many big things now before the Jewish Community, none is more deserving of interest and support than the new synagogue in course of erection by the B'nai Israel Congregation. The congregation has been fortunate in those who have been engaged in its varied labors, and particularly fortunate in having as Chairman of its Building Committee, Mr. Max Azen. Mr. Azen possesses an unrivalled knowledge of conditions in the East End as pertain to synagogal matters; and combines the qualities of a Sherlock Holmes with the patience of a Job in unravelling the Jewish problems that now and anon present themselves there for solution.

In the course of an interview, he described the difficulties which had beset the congregation in their endeavors to proceed with their plans

for building the synagogue, stating that even after the architects were told to go ahead on the sketches submitted, how last minute changes were asked for by a number of disgruntled members because this, that or the other did not please them.

"Will the erection of the new synagogue bring new changes in the mode of worship?" Mr. Azen was asked.

"By no means," he replied. "We propose to continue the teachings and practices which have come down to the House of Israel through the ages. The old form of worship is good enough for us, to the contrary notwithstanding of what has been said about the B'nai Israel, and it is my hope it will always remain that way."

"Tell me in a general way about the congregation, Mr. Azen," the interviewer remarked, "and just how you are going to keep your boys and girls with you, and if I may anticipate one of your replies, wherein would the social and recreational inducements tend to bind them to the old faith; for in these times attendance at synagogues on religion's own day is made possible for the young men and women, and even a majority of the older men by a violation of the Sabbatical law."

"At the outset, we must not forget," rejoined Mr. Azen, "the love for the old faith is still aflame in our youth, and we propose to keep it burning through such agency as the Friday Evening Services, which as you know, under the auspices of the LaTovah Society, were always gratifyingly large in attendance. These services always attracted the attention and appreciation of the young men and women of the community and even brought visitors who came there regularly from other sections of the city. The services were thoroughly Jewish, solemn, decorous, sensible, intelligent, a service which drew a large portion of, particularly, our younger element into a place of worship. Here there was no drifting away from the God of our Fathers. To the young men and women these Shabbas evening services were a spiritual haven. It was where they received their best inspiration.

"We further propose to vivify the Jewish spirit of the boys and girls through our Academy of Learning, so called. Plans have been prepared and contributions in funds and books have already been made for a library in which literature on Jewish subjects will be accessible to those who may want to visit the library rooms. Through lectures and study and reading courses, we propose to dispel the ignorance and half knowledge of our children and thus create a love for the treasures of our literature and the thrilling story of the Jewish people. You know the desire for learning and the zeal for reading and discussion were among the chief characteristics of Jewry. You can, therefore, quite understand that our reading room will not only draw our young folks, but the very atmosphere being Jewish, an environment of this sort will have its effect in a religious sense. What is particularly wanted here is the generosity of all the community.

"What the B'nai Israel is doing should receive the support of every Jew in the city," he continued. "The spirit of Judaism will certainly be strengthened in the erection of the new B'nai Israel Synagogue and Social Hall. Its fine house of worship will bring to the younger generation a strong, healthy Jewish spirit; its hall, not only a place for social recreation, but a central meeting spot for all Jews of the community. All Jews should show their sympathy with their labors and rightfully identify themselves with the congregation.

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"When ground for the synagogue was first broken, it was the main topic of conversation in Jewish East End circles, and now months later, on the verge of our corner-stone laying festivities, interest and talk has by no means slackened. From the least, as well as of the most orthodox elements in the section, we continually hear praises of the many excellent innovations we have introduced in our Shool services, and the good influences which surround the children who attend the Hebrew and Sunday classes, and who come for Sabbath worship. We have established special children's services on Shabbas morning which are conducted by the children themselves.

"We have in addition to the La-Tovah Society, already mentioned, a Junior club of boys and girls who are no less a factor in the educational, social and spiritual aims of the congregation than their Seniors. The sympathies and labors of our La-Tovahs for and in behalf of the B'nai Israel, does not stop here by any means, for within their ranks are Sunday School and Hebrew teachers and Sunday School superintendents, and where the cause of Jewry is to be served and when the demands of charity beckon for workers, there La-Tovahs can be found.

"Our Men's and Girls' Clubs were organized only a few months ago. The members of these societies are interested in all phases of Jewish communal life in our section, and you will mark my word, by the time our synagogue is erected, their influences of good—spelling service that way—will be incalculable to the community. These societies are very important auxiliaries of the B'nai Israel and are not only fulfilling the hopes of the congregation with respect to the fine work they are doing in the community, but they have contributed in quite good substance to the Building Fund.

"But it is to our good Sisterhood that we are indebted most of all for the wonderful synagogue we are now putting up. It is to the noble women of this organization that the congregation is profoundly thankful; for without their co-operation, without their help, without their sympathy, without their readiness, to make the material sacrifices from their funds, the possibility of building the Shool this year, I must confess, would have been remote. Such was their sympathetic understanding of the difficulties of our work, and such was their willingness to help when help was asked for that it was like David and Jonathan—two hearts beating like one.

"I firmly believe," said Mr. Azen in conclusion, "that long before our new synagogue is ready for us, the accomplishments of the B'nai Israel will have its influences so thrown out to the Jews residing in the East End, that traditional Judaism will proclaim itself anew from one Central Synagogue and one Central Center as a power and force in the community, and ergo to the lasting good of all Pittsburgh Jewry."

### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE B'NAI ISRAEL

By A. L. Wolk, Chairman of Arrangements

The new synagogue of the B'nai Israel Congregation will be a House of God devoted to his worship along the lines of traditional Judaism. In these days of "following the line of least resistance" in regard to things religious, the knowledge of the wonderful meaning and import of Judaism, and of Jewish poetry, literature and learning in general seems to repose serenely in the minds of our

Rabbis and professors. If the indifference to the study of Judaism should continue for another generation, Judaism would be like unto a rare work of art, to be enjoyed and appreciated only by the very few. It takes the painter who is a real artist many months, frequently years, and then only by a constant application to his work, to evolve a masterpiece, and this same work of art coming into the hands of the ignorant might be destroyed by one stroke of a knife for lack of appreciation of its value. Likewise with the Jews. It took them many hundreds of years to develop Judaism, with its wonderful conception of religion and ethics, and yet the indifference of one generation might bring to an end the usefulness of that which has been the greatest contribution to civilization.

But there is a silver lining in every cloud, and we in the East End are very optimistic. In the past few years, there has been a very keen interest displayed in traditional Judaism. This has been particularly true as far as the younger generations are concerned. There has been to a large extent a return to the synagogue. The synagogue is fast becoming the center, the sun from which all Jewish activities are receiving light and encouragement. Those in our community who have had the pleasure of attending the Friday evening services conducted under the auspices of the young people of our congregation, can well attest to the fact that Judaism is not yet dead. The old spirit is still with us. It is only a matter of obtaining the proper physical surroundings for the conduct of divine services and of providing the young with modern facilities for the study of Judaism. We must teach Judaism according to modern methods, in classrooms physically adapted for that purpose, and without the discomfort and unwholesomeness of the old chaders, but the Judaism taught shall be the same that our forefathers lived, suffered and died for.

In the 28th chapter of Isaiah, it is said:

"Therefore thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I lay in Zion for the foundation a stone, a tried stone, a costly corner-stone of sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste. And I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plummet."

We in the East End are laying a stone, a tried stone, a costly corner-stone of sure foundation, and that is traditional Judaism. It has been tried and not found wanting in the least particular. It has come down to us in spite of the rake, the stake and the grave. Our forefathers suffered and died for it. The least we can do is to carry it on with undiminished strength and vigor to the next generation.

In harmony with the spirit that has manifested itself in the East End Community, the members of the B'nai Israel Congregation are now building a synagogue that by reason of its increased facilities will more satisfactorily meet the requirements of a growing Jewish community that inclines toward traditional Judaism. Traditional Judaism will hold sway, instilling in the minds of the children of our members a sincere love for the ideals of our ancestors, teaching them the philosophy and ethics of a great people, and making them understand the significance and importance of the contribution of the Jews to the world.

#### A LETTER FROM MR. GEORGE WOLK

To Mr. Saul Schein, President, and Officials of the B'nai Israel Congregation

I can only hope that your plans for the corner-stone laying of the new synagogue and the evening Celebra-

tion Dinner will be a success. We know how great is the need of a modern synagogue in our section of the city for the traditionally inclined Jew. Its erection we had put off long enough. The three feet of circular concrete wall now showing itself on the spacious synagogue grounds proves something is being done. We have gone thus far not only through the generosity of our members, but to a number of large and good-hearted friends of the B'nai

Israel who in many instances sent in encouraging checks. Our members have given liberally and no doubt will make further sacrifices to create for Jewry in the East End a worthy home in which all of us will be proud to worship.

We know our synagogue will be beautiful not only in ornamentation, but also in the service it will yield, and whilst of necessity expensive, let us not bemoan the cost. We are building no less for our children than

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for ourselves. To spend for a fine place of worship, adequate class rooms, and a Social Hall, should never be classed as luxuries. They are necessities. These we must have.

There have been many accusations made against the Congregation, mostly to the effect that our mode of worship will be changed and by the gradual eliminations of the old ceremonials our leanings eventually will become of a semi-reformed character. There is nothing more inaccurate or wrong.

The Judaism of the B'nai Israel Congregation will remain the Judaism of our Fathers, and in the furtherance of its aims to erect a beautiful synagogue in which the old prayers will be recited, the old melodies still be sung, the old ceremonials still be observed, every East End Jew should rally to its support. The cause of the congregation is well worthy of support, and if the Jews of the community will not support it, they are not worthy of it.

Yes, traditional Judaism will remain our form of worship, but our services will be dignified, decorous, not away from Judaism but towards Judaism.

**A MESSAGE FROM MRS. BARNETT DAVIS**

*President of the Sisterhood*

And so we are about to take part in laying the corner-stone of the B'nai Israel Synagogue. The building to be erected on one of our prominent avenues, is to be one of the most beautifully outstanding buildings in our city. Architectural critics have pronounced the plans of our synagogue, one of the most beautifully arranged houses of prayer ever built. Not only is it unique in the plan and construction, but also it is planned according to old traditional lines, of which we have so very few in this country.

Now, what part have the women of the B'nai Israel Sisterhood taken in this gigantic undertaking? Why, only that part which all the mothers of the world have had, when they undertake to encourage men to great deeds. In a quiet, unassuming way they urged the men of the congregation to undertake that which with the help of God, we will finish to the glory of God and service of man. It was the women who first proposed that the Jews of the East End must have a beautiful house of worship, one that our children would be proud and willing to attend. It was the women who saw the need of not only a worthy place for divine worship, but also a place for all sorts of community purposes and recreation. It was the women that constantly urged to make a place in our synagogue for the young people. It was the women who saw the need of and started the Sunday and religious schools, which today house about 300 children every day, studying Hebrew, and about 350 studying ethics, history, religion and Jewish culture in general, on Sundays. It was the women who showed the need of, and encouraged the engagement of a Rabbi for the congregation B'nai Israel. It was the women, who were so bitterly disappointed when we came to the B'nai Israel Shule in the East End, a new place in fact, but old in spirit. We loved the name, for it was the same as that of our synagogue that we attended in our youth, nearly half a century ago, and we also loved it because we found there old friends and neighbors of former days. But the disappointment was keen for many reasons, for it seemed to us that the men were satisfied to attend divine worship in a small room in the old post office building on the Sabbath, and then move to the Collins Avenue auditorium on the High Holidays. The march of the

Holy Week between the two places, was much like the wanderings in the wilderness. So it was the women who organized themselves into a Ladies' Auxiliary, and who offered their services to help the men to establish a permanent place of worship. This was no easy matter to bring about, for in those early days it was not known that women could or should help in congregational labors. It was the women who saw that the services should and could be conducted in a more beautiful manner, by following the old traditional customs, and keep strictly orthodox. It was no easy matter to bring about these changes, but the women set a high standard for the congregation and we thank God for the wise men in our midst, who were so ready and willing to accept that standard and work for it. The first time congregational singing was started in our synagogue, under the direction of Rabbi Neches, our first Rabbi, some of the older men who knew so well how to make the responses, would not join in, but now it is really a pleasure to hear them sing. And what is more inspiring than congregational singing? The children in our schools sing so beautifully in pure Hebrew, and we love the old melodies so well that when we visit our schools, the children know that they must sing their beautiful Hebrew songs twice over for us. These things may not seem much for women of a congregation to do, but life is made up of small things, and if only more of us would lend assistance to those who do so much, much more would be accomplished.

The women of the B'nai Israel Sisterhood are very proud of our young people, and helped and encouraged to organize our first young people's society. The LaTovah society is as fine a group of young men and women as could be found. It is to their credit that under their auspices the Friday evening services are conducted. Since then we have organized a girls' club, and men's club, also a Chevrah Mishna, and other clubs and societies. The women of the Sisterhood are practical, as well as religious and idealistic, so that when a question of money came up, and we all know that nothing can be done without money, they put forth their best efforts and helped along in money matters, first by giving of their own money, and second by arranging affairs, and in that way raising money both for maintenance and the building fund. In the early days, it was the women who took care of the religious schools, financially and otherwise. It was the women who engaged the services of the teachers and superintendent. It is with a great deal of pleasure that we look back at our ingenuity in arranging our Sunday school rooms with large screens, and when we held our entertainment, we appealed to the imagination of our audience and asked them to imagine a stage and scenery. O, how I can recall all the hundreds of things that the women of the B'nai Israel Ladies' Auxiliary did in the fifteen years of our organization. We did what came to us to do, and we urged and encouraged the men to do that which was the men's work. And now the Sisterhood is about to have the pleasure of taking part in the exercises of the corner-stone laying, for which we have all worked for the past fifteen years.

The men and women of the B'nai Israel congregation are people of high ideals and fine ideas. They have made and are making great sacrifices and it behooves every one living in the East End district to come forward with their assistance, either by joining the membership or by giving their personal service, or by giving

to the building fund, for it is only by their assistance that the men and women of the B'nai Israel will be enabled to erect and maintain a synagogue—orthodox, traditional, modern and beautiful, one which will be in keeping and worthy of our religion.

This is our hope and our ambition, to be able to serve in our new synagogue with as much zeal as we have served in the old, and when we are ready to retire, may the work of our hands be taken up by our children and our children's children as a light to the world from age to age.

**A TALK ON THE B'NAI ISRAEL**  
By Mrs. I. L. Scheinman, Secretary of the Sisterhood

"When I first beheld the four stakes which marked the out-posts of the new synagogue on the day ground was broken for the building, there roused within me a light and joy which only patient waiting could appreciate," so spoke Mrs. I. L. Scheinman, Secretary of the Ladies' Auxiliary of the B'nai Israel Congregation, when asked as to whether the congregation was going beyond the mere breaking of ground. "We are going to build, and build with a purpose. Our women have worked with the holiest of enthusiasm with the members of the congregation to see that a building is put up of the sort which our section greatly needs and from which will radiate that form of Judaism, which I believe is the only form that is going to solve the Jewish question.

"Our aim is to preserve and promote traditional Judaism among our children by leading them to its source in History and Literature. It is for that reason we are erecting this large and beautiful synagogue and providing class and communal rooms adequate enough to care for the large and growing Orthodox community of the East End, whereby we can imbue them with the real Jewish spirit so that they will find interest in the glories of our Faith. It is proposed to center all our religious, educational and social activities around the building. We are virtually going to make it a Jewish home, wherein the real truths of our religion will be taught to our children. It is of the utmost importance that the child's intellect and attention to Judaism be directed in a Jewish atmosphere, for Jewish surroundings only will keep them with us, and therefore with proper meeting and study rooms, they will find a deeper motive for living the Jewish life.

"We do not want them to drop out of Judaism. They should know and understand the greatness of the Jewish race—a race, the aristocracy of all races. We must not overlook the religious education of our boys and girls, and nothing Jewish should be alien to them. They must be made to understand that the force of Judaism is not spent or its influence dead. We must point out to them that the more they will adhere to the cause of Judaism, the more they will discover the beauty and truths of their people, the more tenaciously will they stick to it.

"It is strange that so many Jewish fathers and mothers seem so indifferent about their boys' and girls' connection with things Jewish. Most of them nestle under their own righteousness and are the very ones who should be blamed for the shortcomings of their children.

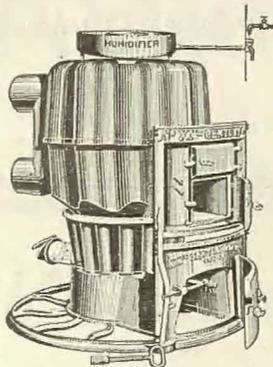
"Our boys and girls must be kept together. We must have a suitable place provided for them instead of driving them into the highways and byways of God knows where. We cry out in bitter disappointment with ourselves and wonder why the child is so reluctant to accept the customs and traditions handed down to us

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