

The Jews of Beaver Valley

(Specially Written for The Jewish Criterion)

As one enters the town of Beaver Falls, Pa., by either of its two railroad stations, one's attention is immediately attracted by a large Chamber of Commerce sign, which tells the world that Beaver Falls is the greatest manufacturing center of any town of its size in the United States; that it has schools, parks, churches, playgrounds, a college, and everything else that goes to make a town worth living in and working in. If this is so, what part have the Jews played in developing the city of Beaver Falls, the most important city in the Beaver Valley?

The towns of New Brighton, Rochester, Beaver, Freedom, Monaca and others are so close to Beaver Falls as to justify their being grouped together. In all of these there are Jewish families, prosperous, most of them, who form an appreciable factor in the life of the Beaver Valley. The most important Jewish community, however, is that of Beaver Falls.

Fifty years ago, we are informed, there was a German Jew by the name of Steinfield in Beaver falls; he had a number of sons-in-law, notably Hanauer, who were well known in the valley. The first Russian Jew to come was Judah Solomon; he came forty-two years ago from the town of Serei, Suvalk, and from the very first engaged in the buying of junk and scrap iron. He was shortly thereafter followed by his cousins, Joseph Solomon and Moses Solomon. Max Solomon, a brother of Judah, came later to work for his relatives who preceded him. Thus was created the firm known as J. Solomon & Co., whose success in the new land was widely heralded in the town of Serei, resulting in the coming of many other relatives and fellow-townsmen to Beaver Falls. Meyer Solomon came with this second group in 1888. He is a brother of Judah and Max and for many years has been the patriarch of the orthodox Jewish community, because he is a learned man and a leader in the matter of religion and Jewish affairs. Julius Wilkoffsky, a close relative, was later sent for; he was a Hebraist and well versed in the requirements of the dietary laws as prescribed in the "Shulchan Oruch" and it was his task to act as the first "schochet" and "chazzan." Thus

at first Jewish religious services were conducted at the home of Mr. Steinfield and the Solomons attended there. In 1882, however, the newcomers established a "minyan" of their own and prayers were read in accordance with orthodox customs.

Later as the Jewish population grew, a hall was rented, a "cheder" was started, and the Jewish community was indefinitely organized. At first a hall was rented of John Reeves, the well-known banker and real estate operator, at Seventh avenue, near Fourth street. In the nineties a larger hall was required and quarters were rented at 413 Seventh avenue.

In 1906 the community purchased a cemetery on Stephen's Hill, and the "Agudas Achim" congregation was definitely organized. The name Agudas Achim was used many years before to designate the corporate religious life of the Jews of Beaver Valley; during that year, however, plans were undertaken for the building of a synagogue. In the year 1911 a very active committee consisting of such men as S. Rabinovitz, Moses Gordon, Louis Wasbutzky, Max Solomon, Meyer Solomon, Louis Wilkoffsky, and others, purchased a lot on the corner of Sixth avenue and Fifth street. A beautiful structure was built and dedicated in 1914. Prominent men attended the ceremonies of dedication and thus the Jews of Beaver Valley took their places among the hundreds of other American communities that worship in accordance with their ancient customs in a house specifically set aside for such purpose. S. Rabinovitz, of New Brighton, was the first president. He was succeeded by Abraham Brody, of the same town. At present Mr. Louis Wilkoffsky, of Beaver Falls, holds that office.

The congregation has about thirty active members, but serves the religious needs of seventy Jewish families residing in Beaver Falls and the twenty-five others who reside in the towns of the valley.

Julius Trob is the "schochet" and "chazzan" of the community. Hyman Sedler conducts the Hebrew school at the synagogue, which post he has held for the last eighteten years.

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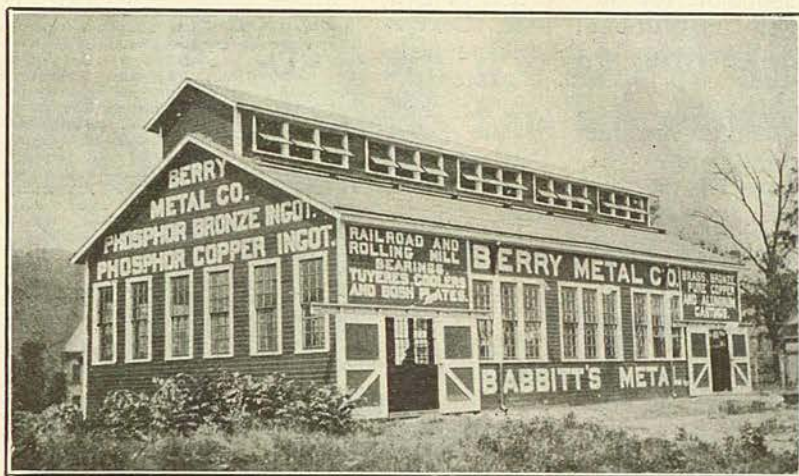
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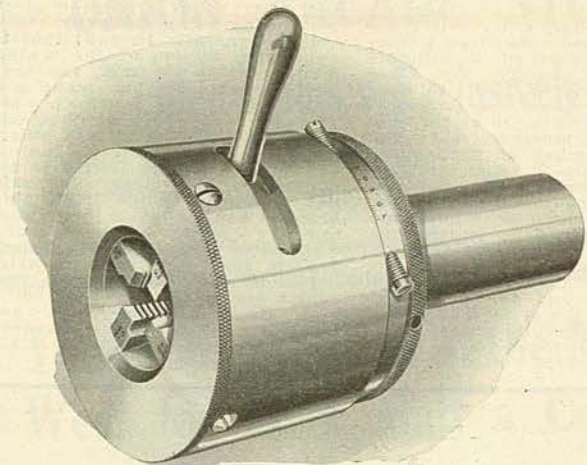
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The younger people are responsible for the creation of two new institutions; first, Beaver Valley Lodge of the Independent Order B'nai B'rith, organized in 1915; and a Y. M. H. A. The younger members of the Solomon family, the Pettlers, the Browns, the Berkman and others are active in these.

Two Jews have represented the community in City Council, namely, Isaac Solomon and Meyer Berkman.

Beaver Valley has done well in war relief collections, mainly through the efforts of Mr. Max Solomon, a man of wealth and philanthropic inclinations. These funds are sent to the Central Relief Committee of New York.

The leading merchants of the town are our people, they being represented practically in every line of the retail business. The Beaver Falls Jews apparently Americanize readily, most of them speaking English fluently and having become an important component of the citizenship of one of the most progressive counties in Pennsylvania.

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The history of any period of a Nation's political and state life may be read in the biographies of the leading statesmen of the times, and it is equally true that the economic and industrial development of any section of the country is typified in the history of the commercial institutions which have led the way in developing the resources and in directing the business energies of the people; and so we find in Pittsburgh, the great center of industrial and commercial life, a number of business houses whose history typifies and records the stages and incidents which have marked the magic development of Pittsburgh, from a barren country to its present position of wealth and prosperity.

If one were to pick out the commercial institution that pictures in its own history the best that has been made for progress and greatness in Metropolitan Pittsburgh, no better selection could be made than the wholesale dry goods house of Arbuthnot-Stephenson Co., a concern that dates its foundation back to 1843. In that year, Charles Arbuthnot, Sr., established a dry goods business at the corner of Wood and Diamond streets, and this business continued until the year 1854, when William T. Shannon was taken in as partner, and the firm became known as Arbuthnot & Shannon. In the year 1862, John G. Stephenson was admitted to the firm, which then became known as Arbuthnot, Shannon & Company, and remained as such until 1882, when on the withdrawal of William Shannon, and the admission of Jos. G. Lambie, the style of the firm was changed to Arbuthnot-Stephenson & Company. Upon the death of Chas. Arbuthnot, Sr., in 1892, a new partner-

ship was formed by John G. Stephenson, Sr., Jos. A. Lambie, W. S. Arbuthnot, Chas. Arbuthnot, Jr., and Adam P. Stephenson. In the year 1905 the present corporation, known as the Arbuthnot-Stephenson Company, was organized by the late John G. Stephenson, Sr., and a number of the other employees were taken in as partners, forming one of the most successful and influential business concerns of the city. John G. Stephenson, Sr., was president of the corporation until his death in June, 1902. He was succeeded by Chas. N. Hanna, who withdrew January 1, 1904, and was succeeded by W. W. Miller, who withdrew in 1909, and was succeeded by W. S. Arbuthnot, who is today the managing head of the business. The business of the company has grown steadily, until today it is the leading one in the Pittsburgh wholesale district.

The firm's place of business was on Wood street until 1872, when it was removed to 719-721 Liberty street. It remained there until 1891, when its present large and commodious building at Penn avenue and Eighth street was occupied. In July, 1894, the building at 811 Penn avenue was added, which, with the addition of outside warehouses, embraces approximately about 225,000 square feet of floor space.

The management of the Corporation is under these capable officers and directors: W. S. Arbuthnot, President; Chas. N. Hanna, vice President; Charles Arbuthnot, Jr., Vice President; James Rae, Secretary and Treasurer, and these officers and directors of the company have been in the business so long that their experience is really a part of the capital stock of the firm. The President, W. S. Arbuthnot, has been connected with the company since 1887, and no one of the management has had less than twenty-five years of active experience and association with the details of the business.

The company are wholesale dealers and importers of dry goods, notions, furnishing goods and noor coverings, and their large working capital enables them to carry very liberal stocks of merchandise in all departments, and this particularly equips them to promptly supply and respond to the varied needs of their customers. Their employes number 400, and the constant work throughout the year of over forty traveling salesmen has extended the business and reputation of the company, covering a radius of 250 miles of Pittsburgh.

The Sutton Press, Incorporated, while new in name, is really well established in the business life of Pittsburgh. The concern was recently chartered by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to conduct a printing and publishing business, and absorbed the Keystone Printing Company of Pittsburgh, a company which for years has borne an unusually good reputation for fine work and fair treatment.

The active members of The Sutton Press are Edward H. Sutton, ten years with The Keystone Printing Company as Vice President; Walter H. Jackson, five years with The Keystone Printing Company as Sales Manager; C. LeRoy Beet, formerly of the Stevenson-Foster Company, and for seven months General Manager of the Keystone Printing Company; and John A. Carey, for many years Treasurer of the Imperial Engraving Company.

It is generally thought that this organization is one of the strongest in man-power in the city, and their success is assured. Their plant is modern throughout, their workmen above the average, and their product compares favorably with that of any other printers in the country. While the old company for years specialized in the production of high-class color work, the new company, while continuing that branch, has added a department for ordinary commercial work, more especially the varied forms needed those days in the "essential" industries.

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