

THE STORY OF KETHER TORAH CONGREGATION



Mrs. Max Rice

In 1907, a group of 15 orthodox Jews, emigrants from Volinia (a province of old Russia) who had settled in Pittsburgh, decided to organize a "Chevra."

Solomon Linder, who owned a Sofar Torah, offered his home as a temporary place of prayer and the Chevra accepted, organizing into Congregation Anshe Volinia.

Came 1914, and the Chevra decided to accept as members, not only those who had emigrated from Volinia, but all parts of the world, without any restriction and

for this reason the name was changed to Congregation Keser Torah (changed to Kether after the war, Keser sounding like Kaiser).

The need for a spiritual leader became apparent and in July, 1922 at a general meeting of all members, Rabbi A. M. Ashinsky was unanimously elected as Rabbi, on a lifetime contract.

April 10, 1921, when the new Synagogue building (corner Webster and Erin Streets) was formally dedicated, the following women members organized the Ladies Auxiliary: Mrs. Faga Rice, Mrs. Cepee Gilbert, Mrs. Zivia Linder and Mrs. Rachael Supcoff.

The Ladies' benefit fund helped to purchase new benches for the synagogue and to build the Holy Ark. They also contributed to the maintenance of the building.

With the passing of the years, the Jewish population left the Hill District, until there were not even enough men left for a "minyan." Meanwhile, Mrs. Max Rice still kept a firm hand on the few remaining women in order to keep the auxiliary alive.

About eight years ago the synagogue was finally sold because the membership could not afford to continue its support. When this building was sold there was nostalgic sadness in closing a synagogue from which so many members had been bar mitzvah and married.

The Chofetz Chaim invited the remnant members to use their social hall for High Holidays, but still these people (most in their

80's) were not happy because there was no Keser Torah. Finally a few years ago they purchased a house at 5706 Bartlett Street and started re-organizing.

But then their children and grandchildren had already become members of other congregations. They knew the job ahead was not an easy one, but a home for their Torah had given them new strength. Last year there were only a handful attending High Holiday Services. This year the room was crowded to capacity and many were standing throughout the services.

Once again Mrs. Rice suggested they try to get the younger women back into the fold. On October 21, 1958 an election was held and the following were elected:

Mesdames Max Rice, honorary pres.; Sam Kruman, pres.; Seymour Faigan, 1st v.p.; Samuel Lenowitz, 2nd v.p.; Lawrence Cohen, rec. sec'y.; Norman Black, fin. sec'y.; and Abe Rabner, treas.

These women are all descendants of the original emigrants from Volinia.

Today the paid-up membership is 50.