

## April 22, 2012 Shabbat YPS 66<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

Good morning, Shabbat Shalom. I am very pleased to be speaking to you this special weekend, celebrating the 66<sup>th</sup> anniversary of YPS. It has been a delight to research my subject, namely, the history of the synagogue and of the events and personalities in the year of our founding, 1946.

I want to thank Susan Melnick of the Rauh Jewish Archives, housed at the Heinz History Center, for providing me with our archives, which were donated by David Fax. She also guided me to the CMU Library's PGH Jewish Newspaper Project, where I saw films of the American Jewish Outlook, edited by Asher Isaacs, one of our founding members and father of Ruth Ann Eisner. Special thanks are owed to Ruth Ann Eisner, Miriam Feinberg, Sarah Kohane, Hilda Diamond, Sidney Deutsch, and Jerry Rosenberg for speaking with me about the early years of the synagogue. Please forgive any mistakes I have made. There was no written documentation about many of the congregation's early activities. The newspapers can be found at [pjn.library.cmu.edu](http://pjn.library.cmu.edu).

What was happening in 1946, the year YPS began?

WWII had ended just five months previously.

Harry Truman was president, and both houses of Congress had Republican majorities.

The Nuremberg war crime trials returned death sentences for 12 Nazis, including Foreign Minister Ribbentrop and Hermann Goering, Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe.

The U.N. General Assembly convened for the first time, and UNICEF was established.

Winston Churchill delivered his Iron Curtain speech in Missouri, saying an iron curtain had descended on the continent of Europe.

The Philippines became independent of the United States after 48 years.

Syria became independent of France.

Juan Peron was elected president of Argentina.

The bikini was introduced in Paris.

There were 12 hours of network TV shows per week on 2 networks, NBC and Dumont.

American hero Joe Louis, heavyweight champion from 1937 to 1949, defended his title for the 26<sup>th</sup> time, winning against Pittsburgher Billy Conn.

The most popular books were Hiroshima, Benjamin Spock's Baby and Child Care, and All the King's Men, a novel about a Huey Long-like character.

The most popular movies were the Best Years of our Lives, Notorious, and Great Expectations.

The most popular songs were Tenderly, Come Rain or Come Shine, and Zippadee Doodah.

Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in the major leagues, joining the Dodgers.

Average wages were \$2,500, the average new house cost \$5,600, and a car, \$1,120. A gallon of gas sold for 15 cents, a loaf of bread for 10 cents, and men's ties for \$1.50.

In PGH, David Lawrence was first sworn in as mayor, serving from 1946 to 1959.

Fritz Reiner conducted the PGH Symphony from 1938 to 1948.

The population of the city was 675,000, ranking PGH 10<sup>th</sup> in the nation, and the Jewish population was 55,000.

Renaissance I began to clean the air and revitalize the city.

227,000 CIO steel workers in the PGH area out of 800,000 CIO workers nationwide walked out in the nation's largest single strike.

And one year later, 1947, the Allegheny Conference in its first transportation report said Pgh's transportation system was outmoded and recommended the construction of an Oakland to downtown subway.

All these events were taking place when a group of 30 or so Jewish Pittsburghers, largely members of Hapoel Hamizrachi Zionist youth movement and some from Poale Zedeck, began to meet in the basement of the Hebrew Institute, in a large mansion on the site of today's Maxon Towers. Asher Isaacs, Saul Feinberg, Max Engelberg, Abe and Donald Butler, Meyer Fogel, Carl Margolis, Lou Weiner and Jack Goldman, among others, formed the minyan. Ruth Ann Eisner and Joe Trattner were teenagers. The oldest Feinberg son, Libo, was 6, a regular attendee, and was the first junior speaker on Simchas Torah. The purpose of the synagogue was to give young men an opportunity to learn to conduct services and to give short speeches. They also wanted a frillfree service that was over early, according to Ruth Ann, as her father's custom, like that of many others, was not to eat before services. Articles in the American Jewish Outlook, the predecessor of the Jewish Chronicle, described other synagogues as "commercial," auctioning off honors in order to pay their mortgages and hence excluding many who could not pay. Asher Isaacs, the editor, was proud that that was not our focus. In fact, there were no dues. The group was careful not to take away membership from other congregations and encouraged membership in fulltime congregations. YPS helped young people to participate who otherwise would not and who would gain confidence in their synagogue skills. Ruth Ann feels this confidence carried over into other, secular areas of their lives. There were no weekday services, and there has never been a cemetery or rabbi, the only paid functionary in the earliest years being Cantor Harry Perlmutter, who is dearly remembered and served until 1976.

A few years later there was a second wave of members, many from Westinghouse, the University of PGH, and CMU, and a constitution was written in 1955. The purpose of the congregation was to promote traditional Judaism in all facets of living; to encourage young men and women to participate actively in all phases of the synagogue service; to stimulate participation in other forms of Jewish communal life; to strengthen bonds with Israel and with Jewish people everywhere, and to exemplify

Judaism by emphasizing the principles of righteousness and brotherhood in society at large. Membership in other synagogues was no longer promoted but certainly not prohibited. We moved to the new Hebrew Institute in 1956.

Marshall and I came to YPS as graduate students in 1968, thanks to seder invitations arranged through Pitt Hillel with Marion and Hershel Markovitz and Bob and Ruth Ann Eisner. Each had three children at home at the time, including Amy Eisner in a high chair. Marshall came from a congregant led Talmud Torah synagogue in New Orleans, and we had returned only 3 years earlier from our remarkable Junior Year Abroad at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The congregation was so large and so purpose-driven that prospective members had to show their intentions to participate by attending many Shabbatot before receiving a letter inviting them to join. We were particularly attracted by the people and by all the wonderful singing. Besides the Markovitzes and Eisners, the people whom we came to know were Charlotte and Frank Sadofsky, whose son Dovie had the first YPS bar mitzvah we attended, Roz and Harvey Rosenblatt, who invited us to their Alan's bar mitzvah soon after our arrival, Stan and Bernice Snyder, the Finebergs, Rosenbergs, Shapiros, Engelbergs, Klionskys, Solomons, Hilda and Saul Diamond, Ernie and Sally Light, the Heislars, Epsteins, Schreibers, Sterns, Suldans, Vogels, Rapoport, Blooms, Faxes, Mark Pomerantz and Sylvia Mendelsohn, Trattners, Ida Mintz, Reva Swartz, Pauline and Hymie Milch, Harriet and Phil Mallin, Sidney and Carol Deutsch, Flora Isaacs, Bennie and Annie Tisherman, Menasce Levi and Joe Dickman. Many became close friends. Not much later Ellen and Frank Toker, Lisa and Irv Oppenheim, and George and Sylvia Plutchok joined. Marion and Hershel Markovitz taught us the joy of having a sukkah....they hosted guests for three meals AND tea each day, and were immensely hospitable to the entire synagogue and many in the community at large ....and Charlotte and Frank Sadofsky taught us how to make the synagogue and our festive meals both beautiful and memorable and have been equally generous. David Fax was esteemed as the resident rabbinic interpreter, researching various halachic questions that surfaced over the years, and the membership took his findings as definitive. He shared his love of gematria with the congregation and organized our calendar, even well after he and his talented wife Eleanor Fax, who designed our gift bookplates, relocated to the Boston area .

Most had young children whom we enjoyed, many of them as members of the Ushers Committee, which put on a yearly skit at Simchat Torah. We had an active Nursery Shul , led by Evelyn Bloom, Nina Schor, Esther Clair, and Corinne Cahn among others. Each Shabbat afternoon there was a class in Chumash, Rashi, and commentaries between Mincha and Ma'ariv, led by a rotation of members. For a number of years there were regular teachers: Joseph Bayer, Rev. Simon Kantaroff, and Rabbi Charles Weiss. We have had fine cantors: Harry Perlmutter, Sidney Deutsch, Ira Clair, and Moshe Taube. There was a monthly study group, Shavuot luncheons, Purim parties, a sukkah, and a yearly picnic. Members have generously sponsored kiddushim and graciously served as officers and on the board. We have had a rich variety of speakers and fine educational programs.

Most of the early members' children left PGH for college and did not return but often tell us they looked for congregations like ours. New members continued to join and take leadership roles, including Presidents Jordan Dern, Zarky Rudavsky, Alex Orbach, Bob Schor, and Marian Solomon and Torah reader and gabbai Allen Spiegel and many-hatted Rebecca Spiegel. We are grateful to their spouses,

Cindy, Laurel, Linda, Nina and John for all the support they gave as first ladies and gentleman. There have been so many wonderful people who have enriched our lives and the life of the synagogue that I cannot name them all. The synagogue could not have survived without all of its dedicated volunteers, its officers, board, and congregants.

In 1996, the year of our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the synagogue needed to move when the Yeshiva Girls' School took over the Hebrew Institute building, and we were fortunate to have the opportunity at that time to share Bnai Zion's building with the possibility of a merger. We had a gala weekend celebration, including a musical parade across the street to deliver the Torahs, with chocolates waiting for us on the porch to sweeten the day. The merger has proved a win/win situation for the two congregations. For about a year following a fire in 2000, when Marshall was president, we had to move across Denniston to the ZOA House. The synagogue was redesigned by Lou Krupnick, supported by Marshall Hershberg, Frank Toker, Walter Vogel, Gid'on Lion, a very dedicated committee and a major capital campaign. A much needed first floor bathroom was added. Brian McElwain, as an Eagle Scout project, made two replacement stained glass windows, and he and his troop landscaped the front of the property. Eva Vogel did a lot of planting. Within a year or two, Jerry Rosenberg was instrumental in our securing a grant for our ramp.

The archives include minutes of our board meetings and interesting correspondence between Walter Vogel and Kurt Waldheim, Henry Kissinger, and the Lebanese ambassador to the U.N. regarding the terrorism at Kiryat Shemona in 1974. There are letters between Frank Toker and Rabbi Freehof, Aharon Kessler, and the Rabbinical Council of America on the subject of including women speakers at services in 1977. We all know that women were granted the privilege of speaking after Frank and Marshall did that research. Thank you to Ellen Toker, Rebecca Spiegel, Nira Lion, Patty Anouchi, Liz Stern,, Marian Salomon, Solange Lebovitz, Nina and Devera Schor, Ronna Harris, Eva Vogel, Miriam Vogel Fenster, Laurel Rudavsky, Charlotte Sadofsky, Marilyn Marcovitz, Sibyl Treblow, Shulamit Bastacky, Jean Hartz, Sherry Sable, Thelma Miller, Maya Tobias, and Reva Swartz and so many others for their fine talks. Again, my apologies for any and all omissions. There is publicity for the educational programs and the picnics and annual dinners, complete with menus and prices and speakers. I was pleased to see the announcement of my brother Bob Goldman's speaking at the Webster Hall in 1975 about the State of World Jewry. For several years Larry Epstein entertained us at our annual dinners with songs recast to describe members, set to familiar Yiddish and other tunes. Social activities included an annual Sukkot square dance in the 1960s and a Lag B'Omer dance. Regulations were included for Hebrew Institute students having their Bnai Mitzvah at YPS if they did not belong to another congregation. Art Solomon was one of those Bnai Mitzvah. For many years we have provided scholarships for experiences in Israel and Jewish study, as we did recently for Derek Kwait, who is studying at Pardes. We also contributed to relief funds for Soviet Jewry, among other causes. We have always been leaders in the amount of Israel Bonds purchased in the community, including one YPS bought for \$100,000 in 1973 at the time of the Yom Kippur War.

It is now 2012, 5772. We are delighted to see so many gathered to celebrate this anniversary.

I speak for Marshall as well as myself when I say how grateful we both are for the opportunities to celebrate Shabbat and the holidays at YPS and how enriched we have been to be in this community, with the friendships and educational and social activities we have had through the years. While we love everything about PGH and its amenities, YPS has been our anchor.

Eleanor Goldman Hershberg

April 21, 2012