



**IRON STREET SYNAGOGUE:** This was the home of Rodef Sholom Congregation for approximately forty-five years. Ground was broken for the building in 1904, the cornerstone laid in 1905 and the Dedication held in 1906. The last High Holy Day services in this building were conducted in 1950, for by the following year the Congregation was in its new Center-Synagogue in Westmont.

## Chapter Four *The Synagogue*

**W**ITH the legal requirements met, the next order of business was the election of officers. The written record of the Congregation does not begin until October, 1904, and events of the years between 1899 and 1904 are shrouded in the mists of memory.

Thus, it cannot be established definitely which of the founders had the honor of being the first president of Congregation Rodef Sholom. Newspaper accounts of 1906 refer to Isaac Cohen as the first president, but this report apparently called upon recollections of an election seven years earlier and may not be accurate. Another historian of the present Congregation states that Jacob Fisher was the first president; still another believes the chair to have been occupied first by Max Beerman.

It is most probable that all three, and perhaps several others, served as president in the 1899-1904 period. The names of the other original officers, unfortunately, cannot be determined either, but quite likely were chosen from among the same group which had led the movement for formal organization.

The Congregation had outgrown the room in Reverend Kaminsky's house and the quarters which had been taken previously in the then-new Ellis Building were too small for the High Holy Days. There was but one answer to the problem: build a Synagogue.

The section around Iron Street and River Avenue by this time had become increasingly populated by Orthodox Jewry, the new arrivals probably being drawn there by the proximity to Reverend Kaminsky's home at 36 River Avenue. Further impetus for moves to this location was provided by the opening in the latter part of 1903 of a Kosher meat market by David Fainberg. In partnership with Daniel Beerman, Mr. Fainberg started his shop in the Meyer Pittler building, next door to the present store conducted by Samuel Fainberg, a nephew.

Iron Street, therefore, was considered the best and most central location, easiest of ac-

cess by the majority of the Congregation, although some favored a site on Franklin Street.

Accordingly, Rodef Sholom Congregation paid \$2,500 to Rudolph and Herminie Luebbert for a tract fronting 21 feet on Iron Street and extending back 160 feet. The two-story, frame building, located where the Pennsylvania Railroad Company baggage and express building now is situated, had a storeroom on the first floor. It is recalled that Meyer Pittler occupied this storeroom at one time. The second floor, with a little rearrangement of partitions, was found suitable for services, Cheder and congregational meetings.

It is not known whether the Congregation planned to tear down this building eventually and erect a Synagogue on the site or whether the place was to serve merely as a temporary location. For it was at approximately the same time that the Congregation also acquired a property across the street. The latter site fronted 41 feet three inches on Iron Street and extended back 100 feet to Carden Alley. It was purchased for \$2,450 from R. D. and Mary J. Davis.

It may be possible that after acquiring the first property the Congregation learned the second was for sale and decided that it would be a more desirable location. Undoubtedly the passing of trains at the rear of the original building would have been a large factor in the decision.

Financing, of course, was a prime consideration. Therefore, at a meeting on October 9, 1904, a committee was appointed to engage the famous Jewish orator, Rabbi H. Maslansky of New York, to speak at a fund-raising banquet, the proceeds to go into a building fund. The same committee was empowered to sell the first of the two properties acquired. Members of that group were Solomon Holzman, Chairman; Adolph Gottdiener, Secretary; Max Beerman, Morris Berney, Morris Fruhlinger, Abraham Heller, Samuel Malasky, Isaac Rabowitz and Max Weisberg.

בית הכנסת רodef שולם  
**Congregation Rodef Sholem**  
 Johnstown, Pa.

**Programme**

of the



**Dedication**

of

**The New Synagogue**

BY

RABBI AARON M. ASHINSKY, of Pittsburg, Pa.  
 and CANTOR REV. SAUL GRAFMAN,  
 of the Cong. Beth Hamedrash Hagodol, Pittsburg, Pa.

Sunday, March 18th, 1906.

...Programme...

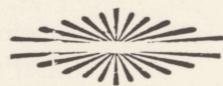
- 9-Psalm XXIV. (תהלים כ"ד) חודו על ארץ ושמים, לדוד מזמור  
 CANTOR S. GRAFMAN CHOIR AND ORCHESTRA
- 10-DEPOSITING OF THE SCROLLS IN THE SACKED ARK  
 הכנסת ספרי התורה, ובנהה יאמר וכ  
 MR. CHARLES YOUNG
- 11-ADDRESS BY HIS WORSHIP THE CITY MAYOR  
 MR. CHARLES YOUNG
- 12-DEDICATORY ADDRESS - - - - - דרשת הרב  
 RABBI AARON M. ASHINSKY
- 13-Psalm XXX - - - - - מזמור שיר חנכת הבית  
 CANTOR S. GRAFMAN CHOIR AND ORCHESTRA
- 14-Psalm CL. - - - - - הללויה הללו אל בקדשו  
 CANTOR S. GRAFMAN CHOIR AND ORCHESTRA
- 15-BENEDICTION - - - - - תפלה  
 RABBI AARON M. ASHINSKY
- 16-HYMN - - - - - אדון עולם  
 BY MR. EDELSTEIN THE TEACHER  
 AND THE PUPILS OF JOHNSTOWN HEBREW SCHOOL.

...Programme...

- 1-How beautiful are thy tents O Jacob! מה מבו אהליך יעקב  
 CANTOR S. GRAFMAN, CHOIR AND ORCHESTRA
- 2-LIGHTING THE PERPETUAL LAMP הדלקת נר תמיד
- 3-HANDING THE KEY TO THE PRESIDENT OF CONGREGATION
- 4-OPENING PRAYER - - - - - תפלה  
 RABBI AARON M. ASHINSKY
- 5-Psalm CXVIII., 26-29 - - - - - ברוך ה' בשם ד'  
 "Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord," etc.,  
 CANTOR SAUL GRAFMAN
- 6-TAKING OUT THE SCROLLS OF THE LAW הוצאת ספרי התורה  
 "Hear, O Israel!" etc. שמע ישראל וכו' לך ד' הנדונה וכו'  
 CANTOR S. GRAFMAN, CHOIR AND ORCHESTRA
- 7-CIRCUITS WITH THE SCROLLS הקפות עם ספרי התורה  
 אנה ד' הושיעה נא, וכו'
- 8-PRAYER FOR OFFICIALS OF FEDERAL AND LOCAL MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS  
 RABBI AARON M. ASHINSKY

Officers and Building Committee.

- |  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| I. Rabinowitz, Pres.                     | H. Silverstone, Vice Pres. |
| M. Weisberg,                             | Max Berman,                |
| S. Kaminsky,                             | M. Berney,                 |
| Hipsman,                                 | A. Heller,                 |
| A. Gottdiener,                           | T. J. Callet,              |
| S. Malasky,                              | M. Caplan,                 |
| Wm. Teitelbaum,                          | I. Neafach,                |
| S. Holzman, Chairman Building Committee. |                            |



Committee on Arrangements.

- Wm. Teitelbaum, Chairman.
- |                 |                |
|-----------------|----------------|
| A. Slutzker,    | Philip Meyer,  |
| A. Gottdiener,  | Max Finkelson, |
| H. Silverstone, | M. Berman,     |
| I. Neafach,     | M. Fruhlínger, |
| M. Weisberg,    | Feinberg,      |

The committee moved rapidly—for the Congregation's minutes of October 31 report the banquet in G. A. R. Hall, exactly one week earlier, had brought in \$1,946 for the building fund. (The same minutes reveal the unanimous election of Reverend Kaminsky for one year as Shochet at \$30 per month.)

A special meeting was called for December 11 of that year and those in attendance were brought up to date on proceedings. Purchase of the Davis property and down payment of \$1,000 were reported. The balance had been borrowed at six per cent from the bank, but Solomon Holzman subsequently took over that mortgage and, as the minutes report, saved Rodef Sholem \$187, "for which the Congregation thanked him."

It also was reported that the "old Shul" building, on which a \$1,400 mortgage was outstanding, had been sold to Mr. Bailey for \$3,100. A building committee was appointed by President Isaac Rabinowitz to take charge of all details in connection with construction of the Synagogue and to remain in power until after the Dedication. This group consisted of Max Beerman, Morris Berney, Isaac Cohen, Abraham Heller, Solomon Holzman, Max Weisberg, T. J. Callet, Samuel Malasky, I. Rabinowitz, Maurice Kaplan and William Teitelbaum.

Mr. Holzman was designated as chairman of the Building Committee and eventually others were added to the group, including Harry Silverstone, Samuel Kaminsky, Morris Hipsman, Adolph Gottdiener and Israel Neafach.

Striking a fairly modern-day note, the committee immediately decided to raffle a \$250 piano with profits to go into the building fund.

In selling the frame building to William R. and Albert R. Bailey, brothers engaged in the plumbing business, the Congregation stipulated that it would retain possession of the second floor until the new Synagogue had been completed. An additional stipulation was that use of these quarters be rent free for one year.

(An interesting sidelight to the transaction with the Baileys is found in the Cambria County deed books in Ebensburg. The original deed was recorded January 4, 1905. A second deed is entered June 17, 1910, stating that the first one was defective in that it did not contain a record of minutes showing that a majority of lay members of the Congregation had approved the sale.

(The 1910 deed then notes that a meeting was called by William Teitelbaum, president, and A. M. Slutzker, secretary, for 8 p. m. March 13, 1910, to empower the president to amend the deed for real estate situated at 48 Iron Street and to convey it to the Baileys. Property was conveyed following the congregational meeting.)

Clipping from Daily Tribune, July 3, 1905

**ORATORY FEATURES  
 PLACING OF STONE.**

**New Rodof Sholem Synagogue  
 Started with Elaborate  
 Ceremonies.**

**BUILDING FUND INCREASED.**

Eloquent addresses, an elaborate banquet, and the raising of a substantial addition to the building fund, yesterday marked the ceremonies attendant upon the laying of the cornerstone for the \$20,000 synagogue being erected by the Rodof Sholem Hebrew congregation on Iron street.

The exercises opened shortly after 2 o'clock with an address in Hebrew by Rabbi Aaron M. Ashinsky, of Pittsburg, who, besides giving a brilliant exposition of the general doctrines of Judaism, complimented the local people upon their zeal in erecting such a substantial house of worship. Following this S. Holzmann, of Cambria City, with a bid of \$80, gained the honor for his children of placing the cornerstone.

After adjourning to the site of the synagogue on Iron street and seeing the stone swung into place, members of the congregation and a large assemblage of friends listened to addresses by Mayor Charles Young, Rabbi H. Kaminsky, and the Rev. E. A. Hibler, pastor of the First Christian Church. In the copper box under the cornerstone was placed a parchment list of members. The stone itself is marked with the inscription "C. R. S. 5665-1905." The initials are those of the name of the congregation, while the numbers are those of the present Hebrew and Christian years.

I. Rabinowitz, the Clinton-street merchant, who is President of the congregation, introduced the various speakers and took a prominent part in the proceedings.

At the conclusion of the formal ceremonies another adjournment was made to G. A. R. Hall, where a jubilee banquet had been prepared. Some more speeches were made here and a good round sum of money subscribed in addition to that already raised for the building fund. The Banquet Committee was composed of Max Beerman, Oscar Kaminsky, D. Feinberg, Abe Heller, M. Kaplan, S. Myerowitz, A. Gottdiener, S. Malasky, and William Teitelbaum.

# DEDICATION CEREMONIES WERE VERY IMPRESSIVE

## Rodef Sholem Congregation's New Synagogue Consecrated to the Worship of God with the Full Ritualistic Service of Hebrew Faith

With appropriate exercises and impressive ceremonies the new synagogue of the local Orthodox Hebrew congregation of Rodef Sholem on Iron street, which has been completed but recently, was formally dedicated. The event was one of great interest and note to the members of the faith in this vicinity and attracted a congregation that completely filled the handsome new structure. A portion of the service was in accordance with the prescribed ritual of the Jewish church and was very impressive.

The dedication was in charge of Rabbi A. M. Ashinsky of the congregation of Beth Hamedrash Hagodol of Pittsburg and Rabbi H. Kaminsky of the local congregation, who were assisted by Saul Grafman, the cantor of the Pittsburg congregation, and a quintet of singers. The services were opened at 2 o'clock in the afternoon in the G. A. R. hall, where an address was delivered in Hebrew tongue by Rabbi Ashinsky. Following the services here the congregation marched to the new synagogue on Iron street, which had not yet been opened. The sale of the key, which carried the honor of opening the door was carried out, the key being sold to Mrs. Samuel Ginsberg for \$80. The cantor and his singers then sang a psalm, after which the congregation entered the building. The program as published in The Democrat Saturday morning was carried out. In addition to an address by Mayor Charles Young, this included prayer and the carrying out of a number of Hebrew ritualistic forms. A pleasing portion of the program was that rendered near the conclusion by the children of the school, which is conducted in common with the church.

The dedicatory exercises continued until about 6:30 o'clock in the evening, after which a banquet was served in the basement of the church. An elaborate supper had been prepared by the ladies of the congregation. At the conclusion of the supper Rabbi Kaminsky announced the presentation on the part of I. Neafach and his wife of a silver cup and altar cover. The cup is used each Sabbath eve in a ceremony consecrating the Sabbath, while the embroidered cloth is used at marriage ceremonies. S. Malasky presented a handsome bible cover. In addition to these gifts there were many substantial cash donations from the members of the congregation, sums of \$25 to \$15 being subscribed very liberally. Following the supper H. A. Silverstone acted as toastmaster and a number of addresses suitable to the occasion were made. Among those who spoke was A. Cohen, whose sub-

ject was: "The Growth, Progress and Power of the Jews in Johnstown." Mr. Cohen has been in Johnstown for 27 years and touched more particularly on things within his personal recollection. The banquet concluded the formal dedicatory exercises and continued until after 9 o'clock. The services were in charge of the Messrs. William Teitelbaum, Harry Silverstone, Max Beerman, Morris Fruhlinger, D. Feinberg, M. Welsberg, Max Finkelson, Philip Meyers, Adolph Gottdeiner, I. Neafach and A. M. Slutzker. Their wives, assisted by other ladies of the congregation, acted as caterers at the banquet.

### Building Committee.

The Messrs. Solomon Holzman, Isaac Rabinowitz, S. Malasky, Mr. Berney, Max Beerman, T. J. Callett, M. Welsberg, M. Kaplan, Abe Heller, William Teitelbaum and Adolph Gottdeiner constituted the building committee. The plans and specifications for the structure were drawn by Architect Jacob Layton of Sheridan Station and the contractors were Edmund Overdorff & Bro. of Morrellville. The synagogue is built of brick on a lot with a frontage of 38 feet and a depth of 35 feet. The interior is finished in polished oak with an immense chandelier fitted with frosted electric bulbs. It is suspended from the center of the ceiling, and around the balcony are a half dozen brackets containing electric bulbs. The seating capacity of the church, including the balcony, is about 450. According to the Jewish custom, the men will worship on the first floor of the building and their wives in the balcony. The structure cost in the neighborhood of \$20,000, most of which has already been subscribed. When the sale of seats takes place at a business meeting of the congregation some time in the near future, it is expected that a sum of money nearly sufficient to wipe out the debt will be raised.

In the center of the synagogue is a raised platform about 10 feet square from which the rabbi is to read the scrolls, some of which cost over \$100. The scrolls are kept in the sacred ark, located in front of the structure. On top of the altar is the perpetual lamp, which was lighted during the dedicatory services and directly under the lamp are the two tables of stone on which are inscribed in Hebrew the ten commandments. The golden candlestick is situated just in front of the altar. It will burn gas, as will also the perpetual lamp. The American flag was prominently displayed in the church yesterday, it and a large number of palms being the only decorations that were used.

Edmund Overdorff & Bro. of Morrellville was engaged as contractor, ground was broken, preliminary work started and then delay was encountered. Contractor Overdorff, after excavating to a depth of about six feet, struck water, either from a hidden well or, as is more likely, from seepage of the Little Conemaugh River, less than a block behind the site. This unforeseen circumstance provided many anxious hours for the Building Committee and the Congregation. Additional labor to meet this threat added more than \$900 to the costs.

Meetings were held in the Bailey Brothers building almost daily and nightly, some of the latter sessions lasting until the early hours of the morning. Some of the men spent so much time on Shul affairs that their families and businesses were neglected.

It is related that Adolph Gottdiener, for one, devoted practically all his waking hours to the Shul project to the exclusion of almost everything else. In order to have more time for the Synagogue activities, he hired a man to look after his store. After one of the meetings which lasted until about 3 a. m., Mr. Gottdiener returned to his Cambria City store, above which were the family's living quarters.

Unlocking the store door, he entered to find only bare walls; his entire stock of merchandise had been stolen. The employe and a few of his cohorts, knowing that if Mr. Gottdiener had gone away on Shul business he would not return until a late hour, took advantage of that fact to make away with the entire inventory.

The water seepage problem eventually was overcome and construction work moved ahead. By Sunday afternoon, July 2, 1905, the Congregation was ready for the cornerstone ceremony.

First came a mass meeting from two to three o'clock in G. A. R. Hall; then the entire Congregation marched in a body to the Synagogue site. Solomon Holzman, apparently the Congregation's "financial angel" of the day, bid \$80 to gain for his children the honor of placing the cornerstone. After the ceremonies were completed, the congregation returned to G. A. R. Hall for a jubilee banquet beginning at 6:30 o'clock.

Placed into the cornerstone were a complete history of the Congregation written in Hebrew by A. M. Slutzker, samples of tickets to the "Lecture by Rabbi A. M. Ashinsky at the Grand Army Hall—Admission for Gent

and Lady, \$1.00," several cards identifying I. Rabinowitz as president of the Congregation and other material identifying Mr. Rabinowitz as proprietor of The Great Eastern Clothing House of Clinton Street.

Also placed in the cornerstone were a bill-head of David Fainberg, "Dealer in Fresh and Salt Meats, Bologna and Kosser Products," a copy of The Daily Tribune of July 3 carrying an account of the event (which must have been inserted a day or two later) and a page listing the names of men identified as founders of the Congregation.

This list was written in Yiddish and the Flood of 1936 apparently soaked the document, rendering much of it illegible. As near as can be determined, this list includes the names of Adolph Gottdiener, Isaac Cohen, H. Letowsky, Max Beerman, Daniel Beerman, Solomon Holzman, David Galfond, Samuel Malasky, Morris Fruhlinger, Israel Beerman, Jacob Fisher, Oscar Kaminsky, Israel Aaron Kaminsky, William Teitelbaum, Morris Beerman, Meyer Pittler, H. Marcus and J. Suchman.

With the building still uncompleted in the fall of that year, it again was necessary to rent space in G. A. R. Hall for the High Holy Days. But construction moved rapidly during the fall and winter of 1905-06 and by March 18, 1906, Congregation Rodef Sholom held its "Programme of the Dedication of the New Synagogue." (A copy of that original program is reproduced on Page 20.)

(It might be noted here that Rabbi Ashinsky, main speaker at the event and closely affiliated with Rodef Sholom activities in the earlier years, died in Pittsburgh on April 2 of this year at the age of 87 after a long illness. Press reports identified him as Senior Rabbi of the Orthodox Rabbinate in the United States and as an internationally known Zionist leader.)

The affair was a gala one. The ribbon across the doorway was cut by Miss Anna Holzman, daughter of Solomon Holzman. Mrs. Samuel Ginsburg had the honor of unlocking the door and presenting the key to the Congregation. Contributions in honor of the occasion included a silver cup and altar cloth presented by Mr. and Mrs. Israel Neafach and a Bible cover presented by Samuel Malasky.

Congregation Rodef Sholom at last was in a "home" of its own, a Synagogue which was to serve its members for the next 45 years, through two World Wars and a second Johnstown Flood.