

Bangor's Early Role In Zionism

The Zionist movement has been a primary force throughout the years for many Jews. There is no doubt that political Zionism, as envisaged by Dr. Theodor Herzl, had a tremendous effect on Jewish life.

Although there was other Zionist activity in Bangor in the early 1900s, the membership of Beth Israel took the first step to officially organize a group when it formed the "Chovevei Zion" in 1903. Rabbi Seltzer, Joe Raichlin, Morris Rosen, Sam Leavitt, Jonah Wallace, Philip Hillson and Joe Byer were the nucleus of the forerunner of the present Bangor Zionist District.

By 1905 there was a B'nai Zion, and during that year a mass meeting was held at Congregation Beth Israel to support the proposed purchase of Palestine from the Turkish government. The optimistic leaders were reported as believing that "on account of the present financial conditions, the purchase will be easily effected."

In 1912, Myer Minsky, a name that was later to become synonymous with the Bangor Zionist movement, was instrumental in initiating a "Young Judea" club.

During World War I, leaders like the Rev. Zvi Hirsch Masliansky, Zionist orator, spoke in Bangor. Jewish National Fund activities were carried on continually.

In November 1919, Bangor's Jews gathered at the synagogue to hear two speakers from Boston. Dr. M.M. Eichlez and M. Alpert discussed the Zionist movement and the Balfour Declaration.

Under the leadership of Minsky, the Bangor Zionist District, then known as the Sons and Daughters of Zion, played an important role in the life of the young Bangor Jewish community.

Before there was a Jewish Community Center, the Sons and Daughters of Zion was the main social organization for Jews in Bangor. The group rented rooms for activities and also sponsored social functions including dances and sailing trips on the Penobscot River.

Perhaps the most memorable activity of the district was its surprise reception of a train carrying a contingent of the Jewish Legion through Bangor on its way to Halifax and Europe in 1918.

A week before the train's scheduled arrival, Minsky

announced the trip to the Bangor group. What was supposed to be a non-eventful pass through a sleepy Maine town in the pre-dawn hours — between 2 and 4 a.m. — turned into a festive celebration.

Legion members were met by almost 100 cheering people including practically the entire Bangor Jewish community. A band was playing and people were dancing and singing. The Legionnaires enjoyed the sandwiches, pastries, fruit and other refreshments the Jewish residents had prepared for them.

Among the revelers that day was David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973), who years later would become the first prime minister of an independent Israel. Revered in his country as the "Father of the Nation," Ben-Gurion never forgot the reception he and his fellow Legionnaires received in Bangor.

"I remember it as if it were yesterday," Ben-Gurion wrote in 1965, responding to a query by Myer Minsky's son, Norman. "Please transmit to your father my deep appreciation for what he had done 47 years ago."

The founders of Beth Israel started life in 1888 with the dream of Zion in their prayer books and 60 years later their heirs rejoiced at the announcement that Israel was reborn.

As Israel continued to flourish during the 40 years after it was declared a Jewish homeland with the aid of the Bangor Zionist District and the community's sponsorship of dunams, the Zionist District continued in full force until the late 1980s, when participation began to dwindle somewhat.

By 1988, the Zionist District, due to a misunderstanding in the Massachusetts leadership, had stopped collecting dues in Bangor. The community still contributed to the Jewish National Fund, and usually collected about \$4,000 during the High Holy Days.

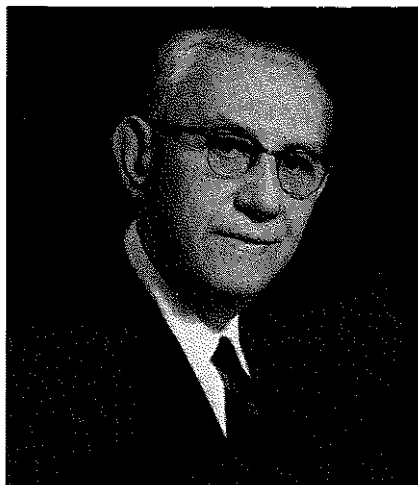
Bond Drives remained popular and continued regularly at the Red Lion restaurant in Bangor.

Zionist District President Sam Rolsky, who took over after Minsky passed away in 1971, said that the future of Zionism was up to the youth of the congregation, and that he expected participation to increase as more of the older members of the community retired and moved to Israel.

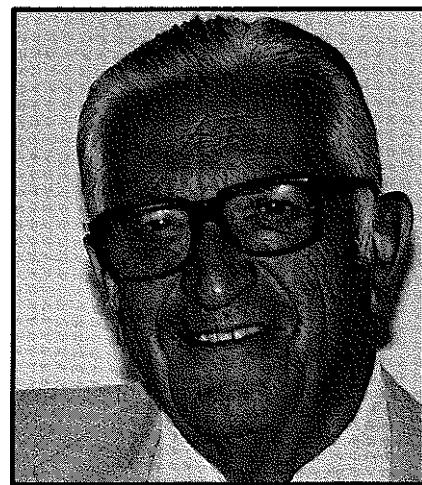
By Henry Segal, John Ripley and Rick Levasseur

Beth Israel Honors These Men

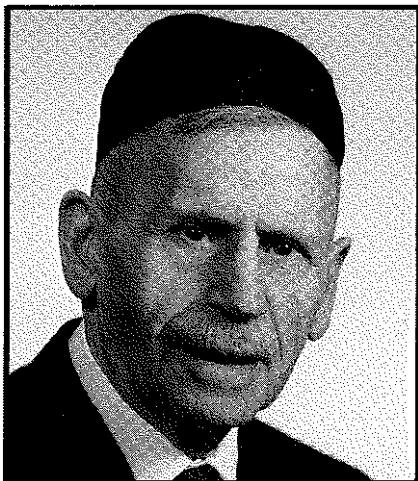
The board of trustees of Congregation Beth Israel has honored six men for their contributions to the synagogue. Although many people have faithfully contributed their time in the past and many continue to serve the needs of the synagogue today, these six men stood out in the minds of the directors of our synagogue. The citations, written by Henry Segal, hang in the vestry of the synagogue in honor of: Abraham O. Emple, Harry Epstein, Rabbi Avraham Freedman, Myer Minsky, Samuel Rolsky and Abraham Stern. To further honor these men, their citations have been reproduced on the following pages.



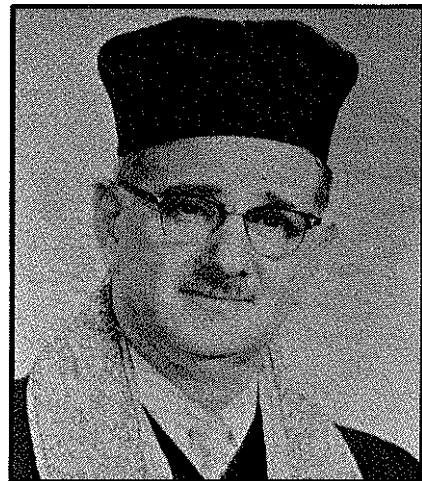
Myer Minsky



Harry Epstein



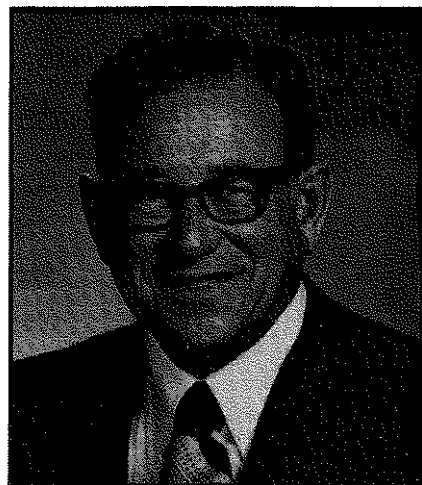
Abraham O. Emple



Rabbi Avraham Freedman



Abraham Stern



Samuel Rolsky

Citation

Harold R. Epstein, Immediate Past President Congregation Beth Israel

HAROLD R. EPSTEIN, immediate past president of Congregation Beth Israel, you have been the recipient of many honors from your congregation which express the plaudits and the gratitude of the entire community. In making the momentous decision not to seek re-election, you exhibited a degree of courage and self-denial no less than that which gained for you the many honors heretofore.

One of the most pressing problems facing American Jewry today, is the task of preserving for the Synagogue its historic position of centrality in the American Jewish Community. There is unprecedented challenge ahead. There is great promise, and deep menace for the future of Judaism in our community. Our reach into the future can be creative and productive if we strive to nurture and develop the leadership so vital for the continued success of our Congregation. You are a prime example of our progress to preserve Tradition amid change, and to preserve change amid Tradition.

The rich and ennobling structure of the Beth Israel cultural and religious life will ever continue as an enduring tribute to your unceasing efforts. We recently paid homage to the Founders and Builders of Beth Israel. You, too, will be recognized as a Builder by the future generations. You will remain in the high and affectionate regard of your many friends upon whom you have made an abiding influence and impact. There is no nobler human record than one that encompasses an unbroken chain of several generations faithful to the age-old principles and ideals of a great people.

By your record for a quarter of a century, you have set before our people a conception of Synagogue duty, personal integrity and devotion to public service which is as noble as it is indispensable for the main-

tenance of free institutions in a democratic society. You on many occasions abandoned the private pursuit of lucrative gain to devote your talents to the good and welfare of your Congregation.

Into synagogue administration, you came fortified with knowledge and strengthened by deep human sympathies; endowed with a temperament militant for the preservation of Judaism and conciliatory in judgment. Your instincts are deeply rooted in democratic faith. For democracy is part of your religious heritage. Your congregation elected and re-elected you as its president repeatedly but at no time was your candidacy inspired by selfish ambition. You proved yourself strong in friendship and undaunted in leadership during the difficult years that Beth Israel had experienced.

Your noble efforts will inspire us to approach our cause with a sense of dedication, dedication to the Synagogue, dedication to the eternal values of Torah and with this approach we shall meet the challenges of our day, create an enlightened laity and an effective congregation in the true tradition of Beth Israel. May you go from strength to greater strength and from glory to greater glory in the service of God and community.

We of this Congregation, dedicated to a deeper understanding, through loyalty to our heritage, of the spiritual growth of mankind through the gifts of Israel's religious genius, are happy to embrace you, Harold R. Epstein, as an honorary member of the Board of Directors of Congregation Beth Israel.

By a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors, we declare that you are entitled to all the Honors, Rights, and Privileges to that office appertaining. In token whereof, I hand you this citation.

Henry H. Segal
Bangor, Maine
January 23, 1966
2 Shevat 5726

An Appreciation

Myer Minsky, Immediate Past Vice-President
and Gabbai

Congregation Beth Israel

MYER MINSKY can look back on a career rich in service to the Jewish people, but among all his numerous and varied activities there is probably none in which he has found so great a degree of self-fulfilment as in his labors for Zion.

A consecrated leader of the Zionist movement, he was truly one of the pioneers in our community to acknowledge the supreme significance of a Jewish Homeland and the promise of fulfilment it held for the future of our people. It was through the genuine devotion and inspired leadership of men of the calibre of Myer Minsky that the State of Israel came to fruition in our lifetime. A Zionist from his early youth—and one who has made sacrifices for his Zionism—emotionally and intellectually a staunch Jew, a firm believer in the supremacy of spiritual values, an idealist by temperament, and a man of courage and wisdom, he seems, as one looks back, to have been almost predestined to be closely associated to that movement in which the spiritual ideals of Jewish survival were to be embodied.

In a generation not congenial to prophecy, Myer Minsky stood out as one of those who most nearly approached prophetic inspiration. It was Myer who reiterated other great leaders with a great new idea in our own little community, buttressing it by countless proofs from sacred texts: "Israel cannot survive except through the establishment of a political state." To us who by now are completely adjusted, his

ideas appear self-evident. But 50 years ago, when the horizon of the Jewish people was very limited, few men had the foresight manifested by Myer Minsky. Here is a man who would not be disheartened, because even in defeat he can remember how they were frustrated in their day but that ultimately their message penetrated men's hearts.

No man more eminently deserved to witness the consolation of Zion restored for no man in our time has spent himself more prodigally to bring "Hatikvah" into fulfilment. Of Myer it can be said he has kept his communion with the spirit that was the guiding destiny of the Jewish people to whom he is attached with an everlasting love. With inexhaustible energy and idealistic devotion, Myer Minsky has served the Talmud Torah, the Community Center, and, of course, Beth Israel. He is one of the very few precious individuals who have dedicated themselves to community endeavors. By the grace of his personal talent and ability he has risen to a position of prominence and leadership in our community. To those of us who have worked intimately with him whatever the endeavor he is a continuous source of "nachas."

We are happy to embrace you, Myer Minsky, as an honorary member of the Board of Directors of Congregation Beth Israel. By a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors, we declare that you are entitled to all the Honors, Rights, and Privileges to that office appertaining. In token whereof, I hand you this citation.

Henry H. Segal

Bangor, Maine

January 23, 1966

2 Shevat 5726

A Tribute

Abraham J. Stern, Immediate Past Secretary Congregation Beth Israel

ABE STERN IS ONE OF THOSE RARE AND SINGULAR individuals who combines so many facets, qualities and attainments with enviable ability and dignity. Eminent attorney, communal worker, and public official, he brings to each area of responsibility a degree of personal insight, scholarly background and high moral purpose, seldom found in one person.

His deep-rooted interest and devotion both to his profession and to the faith of his fathers have made of him an ardent supporter of democratic ideals. No one has fought harder than he for equal civic and political opportunity and respect for the rights of the individual, recognized both by religion and democracy as inalienable. Abe Stern lives democracy in his everyday coming and going, and he envisions a world in which men will live in freedom and dignity. By the very manner of his conduct in and out of his chosen profession, Abe has signified that our rights and our obligations as Jews are inextricably interwoven with our rights and obligations as human beings. According to Abe, religion is indeed a way of life, dictating all the actions of men, coloring all their thoughts.

Others will honor Abe for his dedicated practice of the Law. Our long and unforgettable impressions are rather of Abe Stern, the man, the human being, the wise, yea, even the saintly. . . the exquisite spirit, the charming comrade, the tireless loyal friend. Our community. . . our country. . . needs more men like Abe Stern. . . men who are not satisfied to give lip service to justice, mercy, and charity; men who translate abstract ideals into specific programs. . . men who cannot rest. He is a man devoted to Judaism for whom there can be no artificial separation between Synagogue and Community. His interest in synagogue affairs is not a casual or prefatory one. It has depth and substance because it stems from a conviction that the Synagogue is fundamental to Jewish survival. . . indeed, the only reliable guarantee for the survival of Jews as Jews.

There burns within him the quiet flame of love for his people. His consecration to Jewish life in all its aspects receive nourishment from

a deep source of religious faith. He believes profoundly in the possibility of a harmonious adjustment of Jewish and American life under the aegis of the democratic philosophy. Abe continues to be an ardent supporter of all worthy causes which aim to improve the lot of his fellow human beings. He has faithfully served on the boards of the Community Center, the Hebrew School, and many other social and philanthropic organizations receive his whole-hearted support. Abe has been a keen and incisive observer as well as an active participant in every important expression of Jewish life in this community. But no field of endeavor is as deeply indebted to him as is that of Congregation Beth Israel to which he has so generously devoted his rich gifts and dedicated effort.

We, his friends, are fully aware of his spiritual achievement which he is wresting out of the agony of the illness that has struck him. The more his body becomes bent, the more erect he stands in our eyes as a person of rare courage and genuine humanity. He has refused to become an invalid. The sadness we feel in these moments are compensated only by our realization that we are witnesses to an act of great heroism. We join in silent prayer that you be restored to health and vigor and that your continued presence with us constitute a blessing.

No words surpass in grandeur and truth the immortal phrases of the Prophet Micah in which the essentials of all religion are summed up without complications and without omissions. We know of no other man in this community who so literally interprets these words as our beloved friend Abe Stern. Of him we can surely say: He is just, he loves mercy, and he walks humbly with his God. What finer tribute can man pay to his fellow?

We are happy to embrace you, Abe, as an honorary member of the Board of Directors of Congregation Beth Israel. By a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors, we declare that you are entitled to all Honors, Rights, and Privileges to that office appertaining. In token whereof, I hand you this citation.

Henry H. Segal

Bangor, Maine
January 23, 1966
2 Shevat 5726

Congregation Beth Israel

Citation For Religious Leadership

to

Rabbi Avraham Freedman

1949 - 1969

For Exemplary Service to Congregation Beth Israel, Enduring Loyalty to the Ideals of Our Faith, Self-sacrificial Labors in the Enrichment of American Life Through Traditional Judaism

RABBI AVRAHAM FREEDMAN HAS BEEN THE RECIPIENT of many honors which express the plaudits and the gratitude of our community by men of goodwill of all creeds. Ours is the privilege through these simple ceremonies to voice the appreciation of Congregation Beth Israel.

Rabbi Freedman has achieved distinction and historic status in the annals of Beth Israel through his 20 years of devoted service to the Congregation and the community. He is one of the eminent spiritual leaders of the New England area. Rabbi Freedman is a rabbi by inner compulsion; it is his special talent. A traditional Jew who reveres the ancient modes and rituals, he has pleaded for the creative use of this tradition. Rabbi Freedman is at his best when he explains Jewish concepts and institutions. For him, religion is not reliance on GOD alone but a kind of synthesis between GOD and man, which urges us to accept the universe and to sing a song of affirmation to life. His influence is felt not only in the Jewish community, but extends in ever widening circles to many non-Jews who find his religious philosophy both illuminating and relevant to contemporary problems.

Rabbi Freedman came into our midst fortified with a knowledge of TORAH and strengthened by deep human sympathies; endowed with a temperament militant in the preservation of the tradition of our fathers and conciliatory in judgment. During these critical years in Jewish history, Beth Israel has projected him on the stage of community affairs, where his superb command of language, his controlled yet effective passion have made him the best known voice in our history. One has only to hear his addresses to know that he is both lover and master of words. With accuracy, understanding and eloquence he has related the Jewish position on theology, social justice and humanistic values.

To his rabbinical duties Rabbi Freedman has brought rich gifts of character as a human being. He is fair-minded and gracious. He possesses a keen insight into men and events. He is wise in his humility before the struggles, sorrows and accomplishments of his generation. He is sensitively aware of the meaning of the passing scene for the destiny of the Jewish people.

The record of Rabbi Avraham Freedman's achievements and significant contributions is far more eloquent than any panegyric. He has set before our people a concept of civic duty, personal integrity and devotion to the service of our Congregation which is as noble as it is indispensable to the maintenance of free institutions in a democratic society.

No rabbi in the 80 year history of Beth Israel has so perfectly identified himself with the interests of his congregation and his people at home and abroad. We have demanded that Rabbi Freedman be pastor, preacher, educator, as well as Jewish representative to our Christian neighbors. Public relations took the traditional form of the active ambassadorship. Endowed with the talents for the office, he has broken down the barriers of prejudice, opened the gates of goodwill and friendship, and has inspired trust and confidence in our fellow Americans. Rabbi Freedman has acquitted himself brilliantly in these manifold duties.

As great paintings can be appreciated only from a distance, so can the stature of men be understood only in the perspective of time. We may estimate the power of their personalities during their tenure of office, but only after their departure can we measure the effects of their work upon our generation. Indeed the labors of men are to the end that future generations may reap the fruits of their toil. The reward of the spiritual leader is indicated in an obscure passage of the Book of Daniel, 12.3. . . . And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn the many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

We wonder whether Rabbi Freedman's destiny is not calling him to the Land of Israel. Notwithstanding the position he has held with Congregation Beth Israel, perhaps the Rabbi is seeking to contribute to the spiritual resuscitation of the new nation. In making the decision to take leave of us during the present period of unrest Rabbi Freedman has exhibited a degree of loyalty, courage and perhaps even self-denial.

No expression of appreciation of the works of Rabbi Freedman can possibly be complete without reference to his beloved wife, Hannah. Her superlative qualities of personality, and her own distinguished service to our Congregation, her inspiring and spiritual standards of leadership in our Sisterhood, have possibly served as the Almighty's own poetic reward for her husband's worth and works.

Rabbi Avraham Freedman will be missed but his influence will continue to be felt and we shall remember him as a good friend and counselor. It is our fervent hope that he will not sever relations with us and that out of Jerusalem he will send forth the words of TORAH which will serve in as good stead and fortify our will to carry on.

We wish Rabbi and Mrs. Freedman Godspeed.

Henry H. Segal

Bangor, Maine

June 17, 1969

1 Tammuz 5729

Congregation Beth Israel

Distinguished Service Award

Honorary Gabbai And Baal Tefillah

Abraham O. Emple

'with the aged there is wisdom, and the long-lived possess understanding.'

Talmud, Shabbat 152 A

In recognition of a broad and humane spirit of concern which he has expressed through his devoted services as Gabbai and Baal Tefillah for the past forty years. Asher Emple, as he is fondly called, has been a frontier participant in Beth Israel's coming of age, and has won the admiration of all who have served with him in the generations past and present.

He is a man, for all his practicalities, not without the vision of the idealist. He knows how to compromise . . . not with ideals but with the tempo of their fulfillment. He is a man who sometimes appears aloof, but his aloofness is only the outward reflection of his calmness. He is a man truly devoted to the welfare of his congregation, a man who holds sacrosanct the elements of righteousness, a man who is an ardent believing Jew.

His Synagogue activities are a sincere expression of his innermost feelings, for although he is not given to visible manifestations of sentiment, he is deeply concerned about the future of Beth Israel.

His quiet manner, personal integrity and relentless pursuit of the tradition of our people have made him a living symbol of the ideal of the truly religious life expressed in the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God.

Gabbai Emple, endowed with a spirit of compassion and openness to the needs of men, has worked tirelessly throughout his life with deep personal commitment to preserve the traditional standards of Judaism.

Modest, unassuming, shrinking from any form of pretense and ostentation, he lives a quiet but productive life. His nobility of character, his labors and achievements are hailed and appreciated. We, his friends, are aware of his rugged honesty, his sympathetic attitude and his gentlemanly bearing.

May his continued presence with us constitute a blessing. We pray that these thoughts concerning Gabbai Emple will be an inspiration to those who today, and in the years to come, will carry on the work of Congregation Beth Israel.

Because of our happy association with Asher Emple, because of our conviction that Congregation Beth Israel has been most faithfully and devotedly served by him, and because of our privilege and good fortune to know him as a synagogue devotee and friend, it is the Congregation's desire to record permanently its sincere appreciation of his able and successful leadership. His many colleagues and friends extend their heartfelt wishes for his good health and happiness in the years ahead.

We are happy to embrace you, Gabbai Emple, as an honorary member of Congregation Beth Israel. By a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors, we declare that you are entitled to all Honors, Rights, and Privileges to that function appertaining. In token whereof, I hand you this citation.

Henry H. Segal

Bangor, Maine
November 12, 1972
6 Kislev 5733

Congregation Beth Israel

Founded 1888

Citation for Exemplary Service

to

Samuel Rolsky, the Levite

Past President, Past Treasurer, Baal Tefillah
Encumbent Gabbai Rishon

then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said:
'Whoso is on the Lord's side, let him come unto me.' And
all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto
him.

EXODUS XXXII, 26

Over the years, Samuel Rolsky has brought to each of these areas of his responsibility a high degree of enduring loyalty and self-sacrificial labors for the enrichment of our American way of life through Traditional Judaism.

To his duties as Gabbai Rishon he has brought rich gifts of character. As a human being he is fair-minded and gracious. He is wise in his humility before the struggles, sorrows and accomplishments of his generation. He is sensitively aware of the passing scene for the destiny of our congregation.

He is a man devoted to Judaism for whom there can be no artificial separation between Synagogue and Community. Sam's interest in synagogue affairs is not a casual or perfunctory one. It has depth and substance and stems from a conviction that the synagogue, as an institution, is fundamental to Jewish survival.

We, your fellow congregants are keenly aware of your broad and humane spirit of concern for Beth Israel and its affiliates and that you are more concerned with unifying our membership rather than perpetuating religious divisions. Your synagogue activities are a sincere expression of your innermost feeling though you are not given to visible manifestations of sentiment.

Sam Rolsky is in the vanguard of those seeking to preserve the basic rituals of the Jewish religion as a sacred trust not subject to the whims and caprices of those seeking change that virtually threatens the traditions of our forefathers. He is truly a defender of the faith.

As a descendent of the Tribe of Levi, we cannot help but to speculate that a touch of mysticism pervades the religiosity of Sam Rolsky that extends from the Home to the House of Worship and continues to influence yet another generation of his progeny in matters of basic Jewish ritual.

As we approach our centennial year we shall pay homage to our founders and builders of Congregation Beth Israel. You, too, will be accorded the recognition of a builder in the generic sense by future generations.

Your noble efforts will continue to inspire us to approach our duties with a sense of dedication to Beth Israel and the eternal values of Torah. With this demeanor we shall meet the challenge of our day, create an enlightened laity in the true tradition of Congregation Beth Israel.

By your record of achievements these past forty years you have set before our people an example of synagogue duty and devotion to public service which is as noble as it is indispensable for the maintenance of a religious institution in a free society.

The name of Samuel Rolsky is synonymous with philanthropic and educational endeavors and are unhampered by the bounds of creed or race. He is an ardent supporter of the State of Israel emotionally and financially.

No words pass in grandeur the immortal phrases of the prophet Micah in which the essentials of all religion are summed up without complications and without omissions.

Of our brother, Sam Rolsky, we can say:

He is just, he loves mercy, and he
walks humbly with his God.

What finer tribute man can pay to his fellow?

May you go from strength to greater strength in the service of God and community.

We of the Congregation, dedicated to a deeper understanding through loyalty to our heritage, of the spiritual growth of mankind through the gifts of Israel's religious genius, are happy to embrace you, Samuel Rolsky, as an Honorary Member of the Board of Directors of Congregation Beth Israel.

By a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors, we declare that you are entitled to all the Honors, Rights, and Privileges to that office appertaining.

In token whereof, I hand you this citation. May you go from strength to greater strength in the service of God and community.

Henry H. Segal

1986