

Centennial celebrations throughout the years have provided people with the opportunity to look back, evaluate and move ahead. Just as America did in 1876 on a 450-acre section of Fairmount Park in Philadelphia, Congregation Beth Israel took time in 1988 to celebrate its founding 100 years ago.

The members of Beth Israel celebrated the shul's centennial in grand style. Congregants put together a list of activities that would have pleased any group of people on any occasion. The fact that we celebrated this milestone in such an ambitious fashion is proof that synagogue life is alive and well at Beth Israel.

One hundred years of existence is certainly a triumph, but for the Jewish community in Bangor, Maine, it has special meaning. The shul members can look back with pride and look toward the future with the knowledge that the synagogue will continue to grow and be an important part of their lives. Rabbi Joseph Schonberger has often said that we must work hard now to ensure a positive future for our youth. Our centennial celebration gives us the chance to share our past with our children and teach them the importance of the many contributions made during those 100 years. This is not a time, however, to be satisfied with our accomplishments. We must continue to build on this foundation to ensure a sturdy future for Bangor's Jewish community.

This book is a testament to all the men and women who have made this synagogue what it is today. Without the vision of a group of young men 100 years ago, we might not be celebrating this milestone. It is important that we carry on their vision and provide future generations with a bright tomorrow.

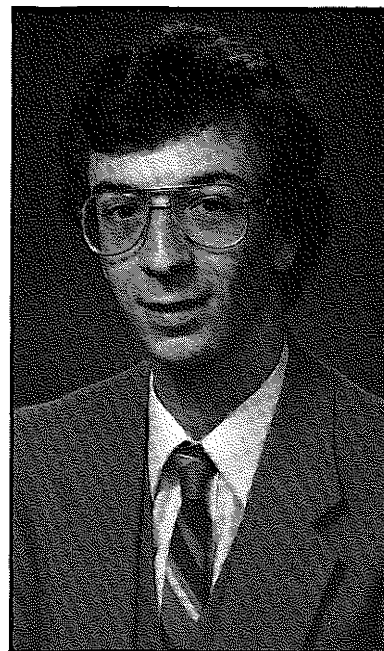
The year 1988 was not only important to the Jewish community of Bangor, but was a year for celebration worldwide. Not only was Beth Israel officially organized 100 years ago, the shul on York Street was built 75 years ago, the Jewish Community Center was established 50 years ago and the state of Israel was declared 40 years ago.

At this time I would like to extend congratulations to all those responsible for making this centennial year a success. I also would like to thank all those people involved with producing this centennial journal.

Special thanks go out to the people at Bacon Printing and Paper Co. of Bangor and especially Dwight King whose insights were helpful in producing this book.

I also would like to thank: Charles Campo, librarian at the Bangor Daily News, for his assistance in finding pictures and articles for use in this journal; free-lance writer John Ripley for his endless hours of writing and research; the staff at the Jewish Community Center; Henry H. Segal, editor and historian of the 75th anniversary publication, whose work was the basis for this year's journal; and President Norman Minsky for his advice and assistance throughout the entire process.

Happy 100th anniversary, Beth Israel.



James Adam Emple

—James Adam Emple
Editor, Centennial Book

A small hand in front of the eye can easily block even the most intense of sun rays from view. Similarly, if we picture God as that sunlight, we know that humans can create all sorts of simple and ingenious devices that interfere with the perception of God and diminish the warmth of His presence. Life is a complex mixture of joy and sadness, love and loneliness, courage and fear, light and darkness. In the midst of this complexity, the synagogue offers an environment that helps prevent the blocking of God from one's life. The synagogue helps Jews break through their artificial barriers to God, to enlighten and strengthen life.

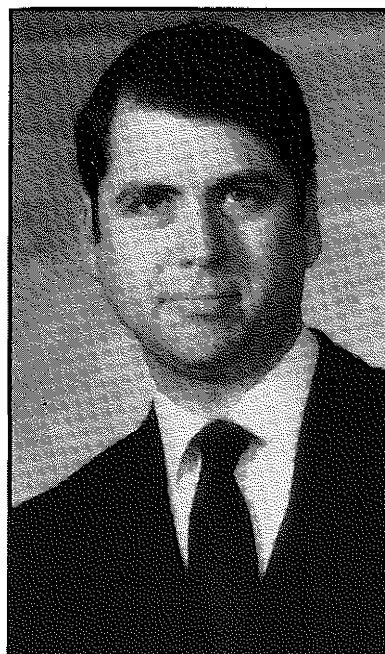
We marvel with gratitude at the leadership of Congregation Beth Israel for bringing the Jewish experience to Bangor in the first place, and then ensuring for the next 100 years that Jewish needs are met.

It is only when we step into the sanctuary at Beth Israel that we realize the great debt we owe and the depth of connection we have to our forebears. No other place captures the spirituality of this particular synthesis of human personalities, striving to grow as Americans and as Jews. In the sanctuary we find the blessing of a Jewish center of holiness that has withstood the test of the 19th and 20th centuries, the onslaught of Jewish indifference and division. Now, our responsibility to parents, ancestors, God and ourselves is to ensure that Beth Israel remains a clear, inspiring and empowering Jewish medium for the next century.

How can we accomplish this? From where will we derive our strength? Strength lies in our perspective as a Conservative congregation promoting balanced life. It is the dynamic Judaism of our greatest sages and saints. We model ourselves, with God's help, after their ethical sensitivity and nurturance of growth in themselves, their families and communities. Our Judaism is not narrowed and limited to the extremes of Jewish fundamentalism nor modern anti-traditionalism. Conservative Judaism best offers us the guidance for normal historical Jewish life, seeking to make life holy life.

How do we promote quality and ethical living? By participating in and maintaining the holiness of our sanctuary. Individuals and families in meditation and prayer in shul are the foundation for all of God's mitzvot. The synagogue is the place that best reminds us of and inspires us with God's animating presence. Empowered by God through the synagogue our families and children will be strong as Jews and hence grow as whole human beings. "Let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." (Ex. 25:8)

Mazal tov to the families of Congregation Beth Israel who have nourished and nurtured the Jewish soul for 100 years. May we continue to be guided by God and His commandments throughout our second century.



Rabbi Joseph P. Schonberger

—Rabbi Joseph P. Schonberger

Congregation Beth Israel has existed for 100 years because of the commitment of men and women to the principles of the Jewish religion, and their willingness to express that commitment in the form of active participation in the religious activities of the synagogue.

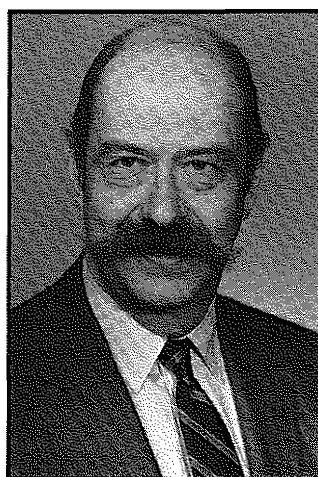
As we enter our second century, we should bear in mind that the synagogue will be here 100 years from now only if that commitment in the form of active participation in those religious activities is sustained.

The synagogue needs your help with its social and all other peripheral functions but these alone are not a force sufficient to guarantee our continued existence. We must remember that it is the religious principles and ideals of Judaism that form the cement which binds and sustains us — principles and ideals which we must demonstrate in our daily lives. We must inculcate these by education and example in future generations. We cannot pass along what we do not know or practice. As survivors of these past tumultuous 100 years of Jewish history, we have a special responsibility.

We have been privileged to have experienced an extraordinary year. We have just reason to be very proud to have accomplished so much so well. A great number of persons, whose names appear elsewhere in this publication, dedicated enormous time and ability, and to them many thanks are due.

On behalf of all the officers and directors, I send greetings.

—Norman Minsky
Beth Israel President



Norman Minsky

The many functions our congregation enjoyed throughout the centennial celebration were made possible because of the efforts of the Steering Committee with help from the Beth Israel Sisterhood.

The sisterhood members believed our centennial should be memorable and therefore gave all the financial support necessary to provide quality programs. We also thought our synagogue needed a little refurbishing and funded numerous projects and renovations during the past few years. In addition, the sisterhood had new carpet laid in the synagogue prior to the rededication.

Our financial support was made possible by several fund-raisers, including the annual rummage sales and biennial auctions.

The centennial celebration definitely brought out and revived a united Jewish feeling and community effort. It was rewarding to see so many people work to make the centennial celebration a great success.

If we wish to continue this synagogue spirit, it would be wonderful to see all the effort put forth for our centennial become a common occurrence.



Patti Tableman

— Patti Tableman
Sisterhood President
from 1986 to 1988

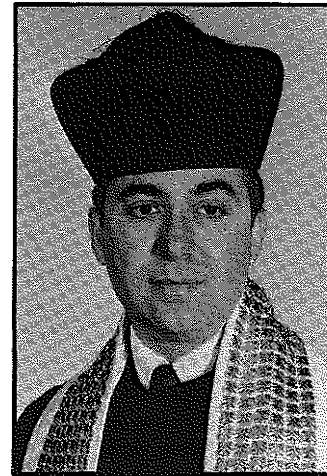
It is a feeling of great joy and exaltation that we celebrate the centennial of Congregation Beth Israel in the year 5748. It is indeed a moment of great thanksgiving as we offer prayers and songs of praise to the Almighty for having enabled us to reach this unique period. In the words of King David, "Ze Hayom Osah Hashem, Nogilah V'Nismicho Vo -this is the day which the Lord hath made; we will be glad and rejoice thereon." (Psalm 118:24)

Congregation Beth Israel for the past 100 years existed as a powerhouse which generated continuous spiritual energy to all who come to serve G-D from the heart and soul. It has served as a mighty lighthouse in the midst of darkness, beaming its light of love for G-D and for fellow man. During these past years, the congregation was blessed with dedicated spiritual leaders and members who served with enthusiasm and distinction.

In the coming 100 years, there continues to remain many tasks, duties and challenges that still confront us. Our Torah commands, "An everlasting fire shall be kept burning upon the altar it shall not go out." (Leviticus 6:5) Here then lies the charge upon us all, that the holy fires of Torah must be kept burning upon the altar. The fires of Torah faith must never be permitted to flicker or extinguish, but must be ever preserved for our children and future to come.

May the inspiration of this sacred event that we celebrate be with us for many years to come, and may Congregation Beth Israel be worthy of G-D's presence and blessings.

—Rabbi David Lapp



Rabbi David Lapp

On behalf of the Jewish Community Council, it is my pleasure to congratulate you and the entire membership of Congregation Beth Israel on the 100th anniversary year.

It is not often that a community such as Bangor, can celebrate the dedication and commitment demonstrated by the founders of Beth Israel. It takes special people in a special synagogue, filled with wonderful memories of people and events, to survive and prosper 100 years.

Pam, Ethan Louis and Leah Ethel, and I heartily express our warmest wishes on this wonderful simcha.

—William M. Cohen
JCC President

It is truly a pleasure to have the opportunity to extend to the Beth Israel Synagogue my warmest wishes on the occasion of its 100th anniversary.

An active and valuable member of the Greater Bangor community for a century, Beth Israel today has much to be proud of. It is my sincere hope that the synagogue and its members will continue to dedicate themselves to the spiritual needs and the welfare of their friends and neighbors for another hundred years and beyond.

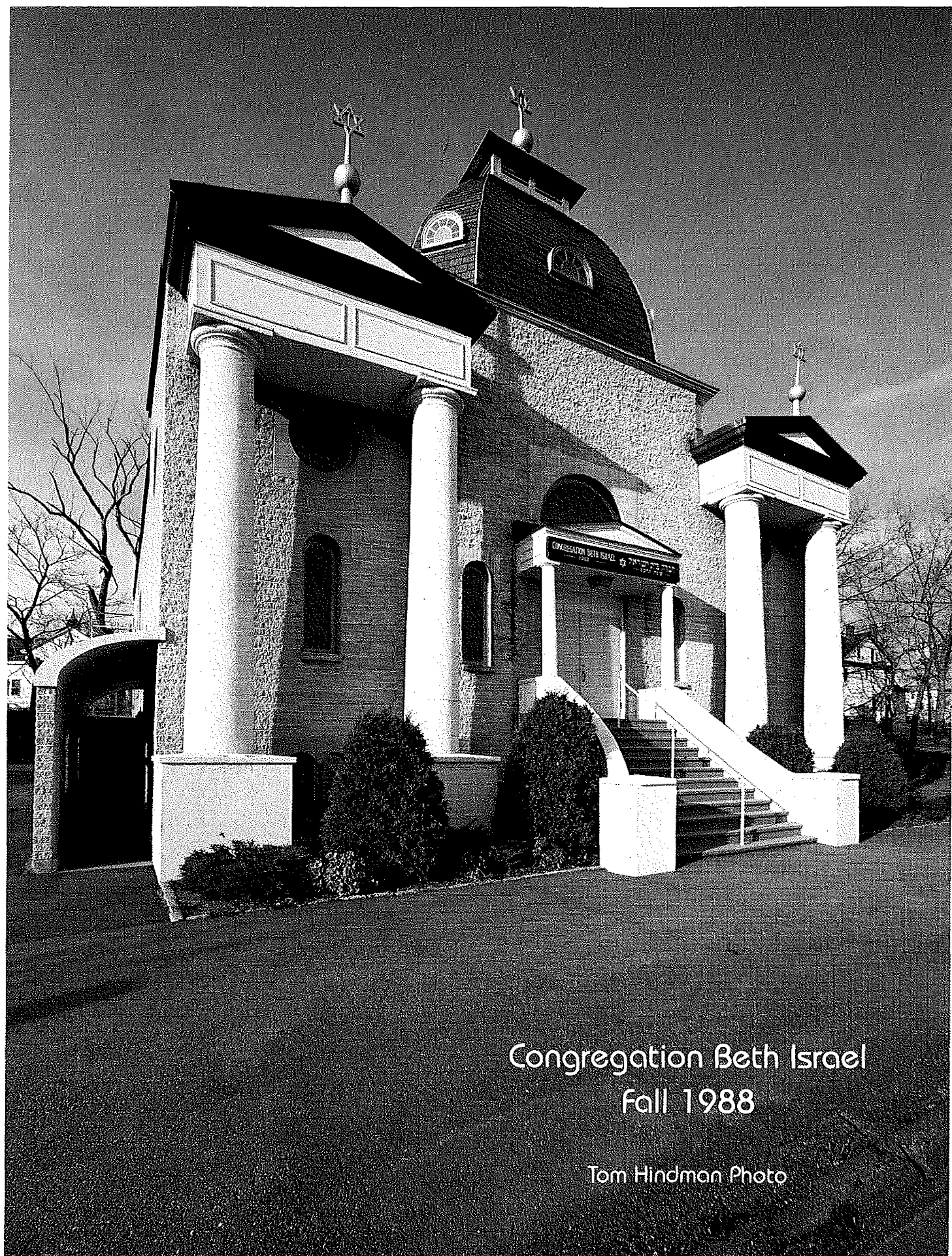
Again, best wishes and happy 100th anniversary.

—Gov. John R. McKernan

On behalf of the Bangor City Council, it is a pleasure to send you our sincerest congratulations on the 100th anniversary of Beth Israel Synagogue. We consider it our good fortune to have had the synagogue in our community for the past 100 years and look forward to it serving the needs of many residents of our city by continuing its commitment to caring.

Best wishes. You truly have something to celebrate.

—Marshall M. Frankel
City Council Chairman



Congregation Beth Israel
Fall 1988

Tom Hindman Photo

Introduction

The Beth Israel story records the existence of a handful of religious Jews who settled in Bangor more than 100 years ago in the days when this "Queen City" was a booming lumber port. It is a typical story of the growth of early Jewish settlements in America. The story begins when our forefathers banded together to establish a House of Worship — known as the Beth Israel Society. Here is recorded the story of the religious life of those of the Jewish faith, of their leadership in the social, commercial, and economic and political growth of Bangor. It is an inspirational recording of the courage, vision and firm religious convictions of the early settlers, and it is to memorialize their faith and spirit and the 100 years of progress that this story is told. The Beth Israel story has been written to provide future generations of Congregation Beth Israel with a tradition, with the incentive to build in this community from strength unto strength; to keep the fires of Judaism ever burning in this region.

We are incredibly fortunate to have many of the minutes of the congregation beginning with that historic meeting in 1888. These minutes with their unconscious humor and pathos, the meticulous attention to detail and the measured phraseology of that era, provide us with a vivid picture of our beginnings. No weighty historical tome could convey more strikingly (nor more delightfully) the struggles and aspirations of our founding fathers. Somerset Maugham, in a plea for reading the obscure authors of the past, very aptly has written: "It is a relief sometimes to look away from the bright sun of perfect achievement, and the writers who appealed to their age and not to posterity have by contrast a subtle charm."

The history of Congregation Beth Israel is in many respects the story of Bangor Jewry. Venerable and honored, the congregation has weathered and grown through all the vicissitudes of American life. Like the community itself, the synagogue has had its hard times. The flame of faith flickered more than once under the driving winds of circumstance, but the congregation and the city rallied to keep it burning with the fuel of dedication and hope.

The members of Beth Israel have never stood

apart from the community. They have provided leadership in many phases of both Jewish and general community life. The rabbis of Beth Israel have been no cloistered divines but have spoken forth frequently and brilliantly on the issues of the day, applying to these contemporary issues the truths of all times. Such men as Louis Plotkin, Moishe Zucker and Avraham Freedman have provided the kind of vigorous energy needed for the spiritual guidance of one of the state's finest Jewries.

From the beginning Beth Israel stood as the chief cornerstone of Bangor Jewry. From its family circle went forth offshoots to found other congregations and to promote those charitable and educational endeavors which with worship complete the cycle of Jewish communal life.

The older settlers, mostly Lithuanian Jews, and the newcomers from the more remote areas of the Russian Empire gradually learned to dissolve the superficial differences which tended to keep them apart. With the emergence of a unified Jewish community, new and creative Jewish energies were unleashed. The tide of Jewish regeneration swept new strength into Congregation Beth Israel. The congregation grew in numbers and activity.

It stands today after 100 years a vital center of Jewish faith and thought radiating its beneficent influence through its membership into the total community.

Many hands have worked under the roof of the synagogue. Many hearts were moved to respond generously to the appeals which were made from its pulpit for the relief of the handicapped in life, for aid to war sufferers and homeless refugees. Many happy voices echoed within its walls, and many anguished hearts found solace and comfort in its sanctuary. Many souls were kindled with renewed faith in God and man as they listened to the solemn ritual of its services and to the words spoken in the pulpit.

This, then is the story of Beth Israel — a story that has attained a singular depth when viewed through the perspective years. It is a story of that time, a simple, moving account of Jews putting down the roots of their faith in strange but friendly soil.