

# Congregation Beth Israel Sisterhood

Twenty-five years ago, Beth Israel Sisterhood President Hannah Freedman wrote that "success did not come easily. It was brought about by the willingness of many dedicated workers who carried out their tasks on a high plane of efficiency and devotion."

In 1988, as Beth Israel celebrates a century of perpetuating the Jewish faith and culture in the Bangor area, Mrs. Freedman's words are no less true.

Today, the sisterhood has been in existence for almost 40 years, and the organization continues to strive to meet the goals of its threefold program as Mrs. Freedman outlined them — "to beautify the synagogue, provide spiritual and cultural stimuli for its members and meet the social needs of the congregation."

The fund-raising efforts of the sisterhood are well-publicized. Many outside the congregation know of the sisterhood's goods and services auctions held approximately every other year.

A bat and ball from Red Sox star Dwight Evans, a silver tray from Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, Carol Burnett's mop cap and a script for Henry Winkler's character "The Fonz" have been among the many items which have made the auction a popular and visible activity of the sisterhood. Local merchants and business people also have given generously.

And more importantly, the auctions have helped the group in its efforts to "beautify the synagogue" over the years. In the last decade, that has included renovating the kitchen in 1980, remodeling and adding a bathroom in 1985, and general work and carpeting in 1988.

The kitchen is an integral part of both the life of the synagogue and the work of the sisterhood. Hanukkah parties, Purim parties, Passover seders and Shabbat dinners are all fruits of the members' labor.

The sisterhood is also well-known for its choral cantatas during Hanukkah.

A winter carnival for the New England region of United Synagogue Youth and Friday night children's services are examples of the sisterhood's contributions to youth of the congregation. The group also has sponsored attendance at charities — including chemical-free graduation parties.

During this centennial year, the sisterhood has sponsored a number of events, including the appearance of Rabbi Harold Kushner.

And on Nov. 9, 1988, the 50th anniversary of "Kristallnacht," Beth Israel Sisterhood had as its program a talk on "German Jewish Writers on the Eve

of Kristallnacht," by Professor William Small of the University of Maine.

Other program topics sponsored for its membership include crafts, music, wills, foreign exchange programs and women's health.

All are ways for the sisterhood to "provide spiritual and cultural stimuli for its members and meet the social needs of the congregation."

It is no wonder that sisterhoods are considered the backbone of their congregations. Rabbi A.H. Freedman said nearly 40 years ago, "In the sisterhood, a synagogue has a treasure that is priceless."

In 1949, the officers were: Bess Minsky, president; Dorothy Broder, secretary; and Esther Dresner, treasurer.

A list of the presidents of the sisterhood is indicative of the caliber of women who have enabled the organization to do so much during its almost 40 years. In most cases, the presidents have served in other offices and on committees as well.

Bess Minsky (1949-1951)  
Ruth Gelbert (1951-1952)  
Hannah Freedman (1952-1953)  
Helen Stone (1953-1954)  
Ruth Epstein (1954-1955)  
Bertha Robinson (1955-1958)  
Barbara Ollove (1958-1959)  
Helen Stone (1959-1960)  
Florence Wittner (1960-1962)  
Hannah Freedman (1962-1963)  
Ida Schiro (1963-1964)  
Marion Laeger (1964-1965)  
Helen Schiro (1965-1966)  
Roberta Mogul (1966-1967)  
Dorothy Ornstein (1967-1968)  
Helen Schiro (1968 acting president)  
Rosalie Shapero (1971-1972)  
Annette Chason (1972-1973)  
Eleanor Chason (1973-1974)  
Frieda Miller (1974-1975)  
Connie Kelsey (1975-1976)  
Connie Kelsey, Frieda Miller,  
Eleanor Chason (1976-1977)  
Paula Adelman (1977-1979)  
Arlene Rosen (1979-1981)  
Susan Garson (1981-1983)  
Fran D'Errico (1983-1985)  
Paula Adelman, Fran D'Errico (1985-1986)  
Patti Tableman (1986-1988)  
Sharon Theeman (1988)

In addition to President Sharon Theeman, the other officers in 1988 are: Susan W. Schonberger, vice president; Hilda Goodstein, treasurer; Marjorie Goodman, recording secretary; Karen White-Rogers, financial secretary; and Mollie Stern, corresponding secretary.

The sisterhood appreciates the support of the more than 140 women who have become life members over the years. Life members of the sisterhood, as of the end of October 1988, are:

Sarah Schiro, Ida Schiro, Edna Rapaport, Lillian Braidy, Helen Schiro, Mollie Emple, Irene Rudman, Ruth Epstein, Ruth Tabenken, Lena Friedman.

Frances Pilot, Hilda Goodman, Helen Stone, Sarah Striar, Pauline Rapaport, Rose Rudman, Eleanor Isracl, Sylvia Berson, Ida Shur.

Ethel Rapaport, Sadie Glazier, Julia Saltzman, Lillian Lacritz, Minnie Kominsky, Anna Epstein, Rosalie Shapero, Dorothy Emple, Hannah Freedman, Estelle Kupsenel.

Rae Gross, Edith Grossman, Judith Rudman, Inez Rudman, Bess Minsky, Rose Rapaport, Pauline Dresner, Hilda Rosen, Theresa Cohen, June Bayer.

Freda Bayer, Charlotte Broder, Marion Rosen, Isabelle Davidson, Ida Joy Rudom, Edith Wolman, Dolores Schiro, Paula Kagan, Joyce Ollove, Barbara Ollove.

Jennie Rubin, Violet Shur, Pearl Singer, Dorothy Ornstein, Ida Rolsky, Patricia Viner, Marcella Glazier, Arlene Offenberg, Sarah Mendelson, Doris Mendelson.

Nathalie Day, Rose Alpert, Frances Glazier, Alfreda Segal, Sylvia Friedman, Estelle Rich, Sally Striar, Sarah Fogelman, Pauline Rudman, Anne Brown.

Maxine Lieberman, Anna Abrahams, Esther Dresner, Mildred Striar, Naomi Lown, Sylvia Rolsky, Paula Adelman, Susan Garson, Anne Levine.

Marsha Carlin, Harriet Glass, Lois Higer, Elaine Braverman, Rachel Schiro, Marcia Lieberman, Elaine Rubin, Lorraine Miller, Rose Baron, Marjorie Goodman, Dorothy Higer.

Helen Epstein, Fannie Cohen, Miriam Viner, Elsa Cohen, Fay Goodman, Sarah Rich Lait, Eleanor Chason, Lillian Emple, Lena Dennis, Annette Chason.

Edith Stern, Frieda Miller, Ruth Shurman, Anna Leavitt, Mollie Leavitt, Lillian Goldstein, Janice Povich, Sadie Brenin, Anna Kaminsky, Katherine Carver.



Officers and board members of the 1988 Beth Israel Sisterhood include (front, left to right) Susan Schonberger, Karen White-Rogers, Hilda Goodstein, Sharon Theeman, (back, left to right) Sylvia Rolsky, Paula Adelman, Sue Garson, Donna Stern, Arlene Rosen, Mollie Stern, Constance Kelsey, Annette Chason and Fran D'Errico. (Brian Higgins Photo)



Some of the women who have served as president of the Beth Israel Sisterhood are (front, left to right) Arlene Rosen, Annette Chason, Ida Schiro, Constance Kelsey, Frieda Miller, (back, left to right) Fran D'Errico, Rosalie Shapero, Patti Tableman, Barbara Ollove, Paula Adelman, Ruth Epstein, Eleanor Chason and Roberta Mogul. (Brian Higgins Photo)

Susan Baron, Roberta Mogul, Clara Mogul, Lena Selair, Arlene Rosen, Helen Tabenken, Mary Levy, Susan Paul, Gertrude Gover, Carla Ames Cohen.

Jean Chamoff, Dorothy Serota, Eva Chason, Renee Minsky, Constance Kelsey, Ethel Schiro, Rosalie Adelson, Jennie Ginsberg, Fannie Jacobson, Tibey Elfman.

Ruth Vener Emple, Ann Pilot, Adele Miller, Gloria Miller, Clara Striar, Diane Emple, Roslyn Kaprow, Susan Singer, Phyllis Shapiro, Rosalie Trager, Esther Rosen, Fran D'Errico, Mildreth Rapaport, Mildred Saltzman.

By Roxanne Moore Saucier

## Violinist David Rubinoff Married at Beth Israel

World famous violinist David Rubinoff, a Russian immigrant whose concert music lifted the spirits of Americans during the Depression, took the music out of his heart one evening at Beth Israel Synagogue and replaced it with love.

Rubinoff married Mertice Ashby of Wichita Falls, Texas, in a simple ceremony Sept. 21, 1942, at Beth Israel Synagogue. Rubinoff had played in Bangor earlier in his career in a benefit for the Bangor Daily News' Santa Claus Fund. He revisited Bangor in 1942 to perform six concerts at various schools and at the Bangor Opera House. During his busy schedule he found time to get married.

Rubinoff, 45, married the 28-year-old Texas beauty queen in a traditional Jewish ceremony, conducted by Rev. Joseph P. Rakusin. Jack Rapaport of Bangor was his best man.

Rubinoff, according to the Bangor Daily News, said it was important that his marriage took place following the Yom Kippur observance. Despite the fact that Rubinoff's entire life involved music, there was no music at the ceremony.

The new Mrs. Rubinoff told the Bangor Daily News that it was wonderful being married to David. When asked what role she would play in his musical life, she said, "I'll play second fiddle."

Mr. and Mrs. Rubinoff received numerous telegrams of congratulations including one from Eddie and Ida Cantor.

While his concerts provided him success, his meetings with children meant much more to him. In Bangor he visited four schools and explained the importance of music and education.

Although Rubinoff was an international success, he wasn't too big to remember his friends or the small American towns that usually didn't get to see such a well-known celebrity. He once said there was no place too large or too small for good music.

In 1963 Rubinoff made numerous stops in Maine. In September of that year he returned to Bangor and spent the Jewish holidays with Mr. and Mrs. Jack



David Rubinoff married Mertice Ashby of Wichita Falls, Texas, at Beth Israel Synagogue on Sept. 21,

1942. Rev. Joseph P. Rakusin conducted the ceremony and Jack Rapaport of Bangor was the best man.

Rapaport. While in Bangor he addressed the Bangor Kiwanis Club. He told the members about the changes he had seen in Bangor, and how much he missed his old and close friend, Fred D. Jordan, former publisher of the Bangor Daily News.

Explaining why he took time out of his busy schedule to observe the Jewish holidays, Rubinoff said, "People should have religion in their hearts and the least I can do is to observe my holidays out of respect for my parents." He told the group, "The greatest thing God ever created was work. If people will work they will succeed."

Also during his visit he entertained students in Ellsworth and Skowhegan. On Oct. 4 more than 1,000 people turned out to hear Rubinoff play his Stradivarius violin in two concerts at the Orono High School auditorium. In November he played for students in Presque Isle and Calais.

Maine cities weren't his only small-town stages.

Rubinoff played and lectured to more than 1,000 assemblies each year to inspire youngsters to study music. He stressed the need for music by quoting President John F. Kennedy who said, "The richest child is poor without musical knowledge."

Rubinoff's next publicized visit to Maine was in September 1971. During that month he performed concerts in Bangor, Brewer, Presque Isle and Biddeford. As usual, he played for the students in each of those cities.

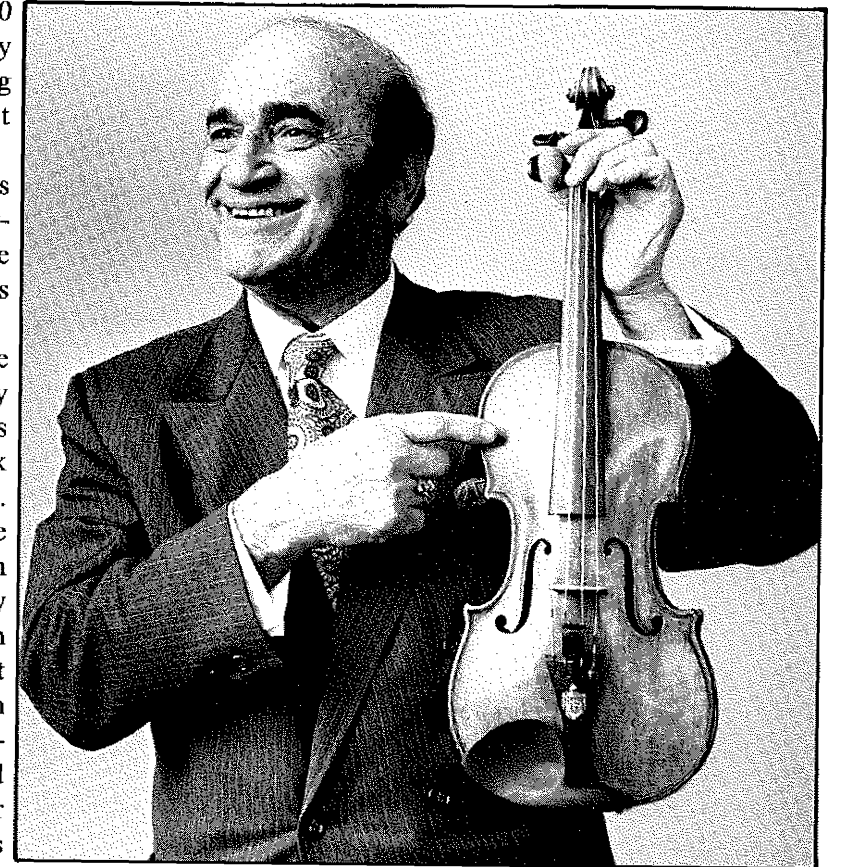
In a talk to the Brewer Kiwanis Club, he recalled his marriage in 1942. "I think every Hebrew in town came to the wedding. There was not a speck of food left." He remembered Jack Rapaport, who had since died, with great affection. "Jack always invited us to dinner whenever we came to Maine and that year (1942) we stayed with the Rapaports," he was quoted in the Bangor Daily News. He recalled Jordan with similar affection and explained the circumstances of their first meeting. He told the Kiwanians that he met Jordan at a newspaper conference at which he was performing. "A man stood up in the audience . . . and said, 'Mr. Rubinoff, Maine would love to hear you.'" From that point on, they were friends for life.

The master musician owned many violins, but preferred to play his Romanov Stradivarius which was made in 1731 by Antonio Stradivari in Cremona, Italy. The instrument was insured for \$100,000.

Rubinoff started taking violin lessons in Grodno, Russia, at the age of 5. "We were a poor family and my mother took care of the clothes of the instructor's family," he told the Bangor Daily News. He later earned a scholarship to the Royal Conservatory of Warsaw and it was there that he began his climb to the top. In 1911 he met composer Victor Herbert who brought him to Pittsburgh to attend the Forbes School. He became the leader of the school's orchestra and worked part time in a cafe, where he played the violin. Rubinoff eventually became a soloist with the Pittsburgh Symphony and went on to become a guest conductor of numerous orchestras, according to a story in the Boston Globe.

He was hired as a conductor and soloist at the Paramount in New York City. After being seen by Rudy Vallee, Rubinoff was offered a contract with the Eddie Cantor show. He was a regular on the "Chase & Sanborn Hour" on NBC radio from 1931 to 1935.

Rubinoff also performed at the White House for Presidents Herbert C. Hoover, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy. Rubinoff, who once gave 13 concerts in one day in the Hannibal,



David Rubinoff holds his Stradivarius during a 1971 visit to Maine. Bangor Daily News Photo

Mo., school system, performed for U.S. servicemen during the Korean and Vietnam wars.

He received a gold medal studded with diamonds and rubies from the Chicago Federation of Musicians for his 1937 performance at Grant Park in Chicago, which was attended by 225,000 people. More than 25,000 people had to be turned away from the concert.

Besides the gold medal and his Stradivarius, Rubinoff treasured a pocket watch he received from Will Rogers in 1932. The watch, which is 3 inches in diameter, has a poem engraved on it that says: "The clock of life is wound but once, and no man has the power to tell just when the hands will stop at late or early hour. Now is the only time we own. Love, live, toil, with a will, do not wait until tomorrow, for the clock may then be still."

The clock unfortunately stopped for the great violinist on Oct. 6, 1986. Rubinoff died of respiratory arrest at the age of 89.

For those Beth Israel members who remember his 1942 wedding and his vibrant personality, Rubinoff's music continues to play in their hearts.

By James Adam Emple

## A Story Of Two Synagogues

When the Old Town Jewish community, after years of meeting in homes, stores, and other buildings, decided to build a synagogue, they built it for future generations to extend the strength of their religion beyond the bounds of time and their own lives.

In 1986, a little more than a generation after the community labored for its own shul, the Old Town synagogue closed its doors after the Jewish population dwindled to almost nothing.

The history of Temple Israel dates back to 1913, when the heads of the Jewish families organized services in the Lait building on South Water Street. Between 1913 and 1915, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur were observed in the Cutler building on North Main Street, and by late 1915, a building on Stillwater Avenue was purchased by Edwin Cutler, Hyman Lait, Barney Ginsberg, Samuel Gordon and Israel Cutler.

Services in the Stillwater Avenue shul continued regularly, and in 1945, after much discussion and consideration, the congregation purchased a plot of land on Center Street for the site of the new shul.

After final plans for the new building were completed, the old synagogue was sold in 1954. Ground-breaking ceremonies for the new shul were held in July 1953, and by 1955, the Old Town congregation was busy dedicating its new shul.

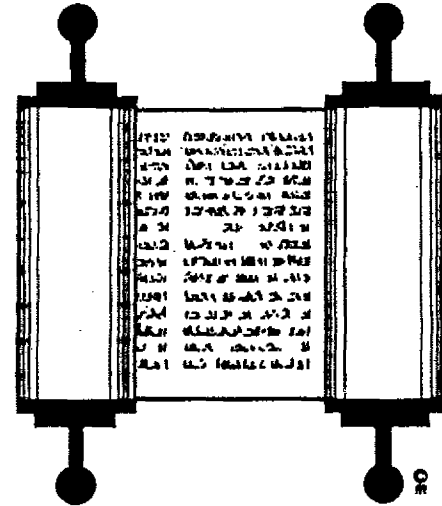
The dedication book that was published to mark the joyful occasion stated that the synagogue was built "in anticipation of the growth of the Jewish community in Old Town."

Over the years, however, the community declined. Elder members passed away, and their descendants left Old Town for larger communities. As late as 1985, the shul had a membership of 20 families, but many lived in retirement homes or spent winters out of state and could not attend services.

Eventually, the congregation had trouble raising a minyan for services, and shul President Walter Harris allowed women to be included in the minyan.

The decline in the congregation foreshadowed the end of the synagogue, although when the doors finally were closed in 1986, shul leaders waited two more years, hoping for an increase in membership before putting it up for sale.

The reason for the closing of Temple Israel never was one of money. The congregation toiled through rummage sales, bake sales and other fund-raising activities. Years before the last service was conducted at the shul, the building was paid for, and the synagogue even had a sizable bank account.



In order to attract members, Temple Israel held monthly, rather than weekly, services and activities, and maintained a more informal atmosphere and philosophy.

By 1988, Temple Israel was for sale, with the selling price dropping from \$80,000 to \$70,000 after few people expressed serious interest in purchasing it. The Torahs and memorial plaques followed some of the congregation to Beth Israel, and the building remained tucked away on its Center Street plot, the doors never opening, and serving as a monument to the strength and hopes of Judaism, and proof that times change.

Temple Israel was not the only synagogue that closed recently and left its memorial plaques in the care of Beth Israel.

In 1986, Congregation Chiam Yosef in Calais closed its doors for good after not being used for 20 years.

The problems that plagued the Orthodox shul were almost identical to those that closed Temple Israel — little money and a lack of members. As was the case of Old Town, the older members passed away and their children moved from the area.

The synagogue has since been demolished, and the scrolls were distributed to caretakers in Brookline, Mass., and in Montreal, Canada. The main scroll is housed in the Royal Bank of Canada in St. Stephen, New Brunswick. Also, the remaining religious items were sent to the Saint John Jewish Historical Society in Saint John, New Brunswick, and the memorial plaques to Beth Israel.

By John Ripley

## B'nai B'rith, Pine Tree Lodge No. 817

The spirit of B'nai B'rith is alive and well in the hearts and minds of Bangor residents. Both Jews and non-Jews alike agree that over the years, B'nai B'rith, Pine Tree Lodge No. 817 has left its mark in very special ways.

The Pine Tree Lodge was created Oct. 21, 1917, with 28 members witnessing its formation. Charter members included: Adolph B. Friedman, Myer Minsky, Max S. Kominsky, Maurice Rosen, Louis Goldberg, Louis M. Pastor, Harry H. Epstein, Abraham Segal, Robert R. Cohen, Hyman Davis, Samuel Cohen Jr., Max Striar, Samuel Kurson, Joseph A. Byer, Abraham Rudman, Eli Adelman, Simon Cohen, Samuel B. Ross, Samuel H. Goldberg, Cyrus Schiro, Jacob M. Ross, Daniel Wagman, Charles J. Bernstein, Samuel E. Cummings, Abraham Brown, James Striar, Myer W. Epstein and I. Cutler.

In the beginning B'nai B'rith was an organization primarily for community members to help one another: by visiting each other and each other's families in the hospital, by sending flowers when there was a death, by aiding local Jewish families in financial trouble. But as time went on, the purpose of B'nai B'rith included much more. The years from 1917 to 1950 were witness to Pine Tree Lodge's indomitable civic spirit, political spirit and religious spirit as its projects included overseeing the local chapter of AZA, the University of Maine Hillel and the anti-defamation league.

Time and time again B'nai B'rith was there when there was any sort of sickness or strife. Members sponsored an auction to raise funds for the Polio Drive; conducted an Overseas Clothing Drive; donated to the local Anti-Tuberculosis fund; aided the Bangor Sanitarium; dedicated a Day Room at the Dow Field Hospital; donated to the Maine Cancer Society; sold war bonds; gave blood to the Red Cross; engaged in Civil Defense services; equipped recreational facilities for armed forces; adopted an orphan; and brought a German refugee to Bangor in the 1930s.

It was the Pine Tree Lodge that was responsible for enhancing the quality of life for so many in Bangor; with annual picnics for local Jewish children; with services for Passover broadcast over WLBZ radio; by entertaining Jewish UMO students; by funding the Bangor Hebrew Institute; giving Christmas parties to the veterans at Dow Base Hospital; welcoming home Jewish veterans; supporting the Bangor High



Five of the founding members of the B'nai B'rith Pine Tree Lodge are (left to right) Israel Cutler, Max Kominsky, Abraham Rudman (standing), Sam Cummings and Myer Minsky.

School ROTC; donating a prize for the best essay by a Bangor High School student each year; and sending a Hillel student to camp each summer.

And every cent was raised through activities that became outstanding social events of the Jewish year: New Year's Eve balls; Valentine's dances; costume parties; minstrel shows; plays; Purim carnivals; smokers; suppers; dinners; banquets; lectures; and, of course, the annual installations where distinguished speakers included the chief German interpreter at the Nuremberg Trials; a noted Jewish humorist and a longtime leader in the Zionist-Palestine appeal.

The Pine Tree Lodge found itself taking stands on everything from decrying publicly the permitting of former World War II Nazi soldiers to act as guards at Displaced Persons Camps; to sending a telegram to a Maine senator in Washington requesting his approval on a bill before Congress to open immigration to Palestine; to leading the Zionist movement in Bangor; to educating the public on prejudice and ADL activities.

The future of B'nai B'rith lies in the hands and hearts of Bangor's Jewry. But whether the Pine Tree Lodge is visibly thriving with meetings, speakers and festivities, or quietly lending its protection and its aid whenever and wherever it is called for — one thing remains clear: as current President Bernard Miller ascertains — B'nai B'rith will always be here when it's needed.

By Ruth-Ellen Cohen