

BATH MERCHANTS

THE MERCHANTS OF BATH

Jewish commercial life in Bath followed a pattern typical in America in the late 19th century. First to arrive were itinerant peddlers with wares from distributors in port cities. In the 1870s, the well-known retailer William Filene, represented by his son Bert, opened the Boston Bargain Clothing Company (B.B.C.C.) on Front Street. The 1880s brought merchants Sussell A. Isaacson and Samuel J. Goldstein, whose clothing stores were downtown anchors.

APPAREL

Apparel was a mainstay for the Jaffe, Kutz, Levin, Levine, Povich, and Ziblat families. Bath had several Jewish shoe salesmen and cobblers (Jack Finkelstein, Morris Goldberg, Jacob Goldstein, Samuel Green, Samuel Perlman, Moses Weinblatt). Tailors included Harry Arenstam and Solomon Greenblatt.



Morris S. Povich, 1910s



Joseph Solovitch, 1920s



Solomon Greenblatt, 1930s



Among the earliest and longest established Jewish-run businesses were those of clothier Joseph Solovitch, shoe and apparel dealer Morris S. Povich, music and furniture dealers Isaac and daughter Sophia Mikelsky, shoe repairer Samuel Mack, and pawnbroker Harry Brown. Brown also owned a tenement apartment building, the Eagle Hotel, and a tailor's shop. All were leading members of the Jewish community that would found Beth Israel Congregation.

Shipyards activity in the years surrounding World War I provided a boom period for Bath. With the influx of new Jewish families and businesses, a Naomi Club and Happy Twenty group were established in 1916 and 1917. Members held parties, raised funds, and did good works.

ENTREPRENEURIAL ENERGY

Groceries with Jewish proprietors proliferated. Between 1900 and 1925 – and, in some cases, long after – five markets dotted Front, Center, Lincoln and Washington Streets. Louis Abromson, David Cogan, Max Cohen, Morris Cohen, Abraham Miller, Harry Persky and Morris Petlock were associated with Cut Price, Center Street, Commercial, Miller's, and People's Cash Markets. Later, Sam



Morris Petlock and his sister Marcia, 1920s

Prawer was a regional wholesale grocer, and congregational leader Abe Kramer ran Steeve's Market.

By the 1910s, Bath had a Jewish-run restaurant (Davis Weinblatt) and, by the 1940s, a Jewish-run movie theater (Nathan Press). In the 1930s, Anne Arik Cogan and Dora Petlock Cohen ran the Needle Craft Shop and Women's Exchange. Nathan Povich ran a furniture store. Sam Povich ran a popular sandwich shop. David, Moses and Nattan Goldstein, Louis Geller, Hyman Getzman, Louis Mikelsky, Nathan and Louis Petlock, Simon Shamban, and Harry Weinstein were junk dealers. There were two Jewish blacksmiths (Myer Small and

Jacob Lindenberg), a painter and paperhanger (Adde Bloom), and a jeweler (Frank Freeman).

Individuals worked in a variety of trades, with the Gediman family providing a striking example. Through the years, Benjamin was a picture framer and delivered milk. Henry was a messenger, clothing salesman, constable, musician and candy dealer. Arthur sold clothes and ran a successful appliance store into the late 20th century. He was among several Jewish residents to serve on the Bath City Council.

SEASONAL ADVERTISEMENTS

Solomon Greenblatt, a founder of the synagogue and one of its literal builders, is notable for his long tenure in Bath and his resolve to close his shop on the Sabbath – a practice that few peers followed. Christmas and Easter advertisements suggest the Jewish residents' integration into the community.

SECOND-GENERATION BATH JEWS

With the Depression and World War II, local work opportunities diminished. Many second-generation Jews chose to pursue education and careers elsewhere. Those who remained included clothiers Donald Povich and Doris Miller, shoe dealer Morris Goldstein, furniture dealer Jay Povich, dentist Jesse Levin, realtor Ada Y. Greenblatt, school principal Bessie Greenblatt, journalist Sophie Greenblatt, and Abe and Iscar Greenblatt, who ran a paint, wallpaper and appliance store. From Brunswick came insurance agent Isadore Singer and doctors Joseph and Jacob Smith. Newcomers to Bath were insurance agent Samuel Cronsberg, optometrists William Fradkin and Benjamin Zimmerman and lawyer Harold Rubin.



Ada Y. Greenblatt, 1940s

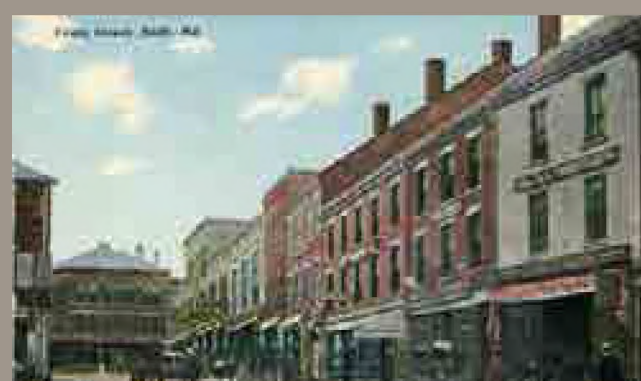
BATH SYNAGOGUE

Verily Bath has become metropolitan with a Jewish Synagogue in the Y. M. C. A. building.

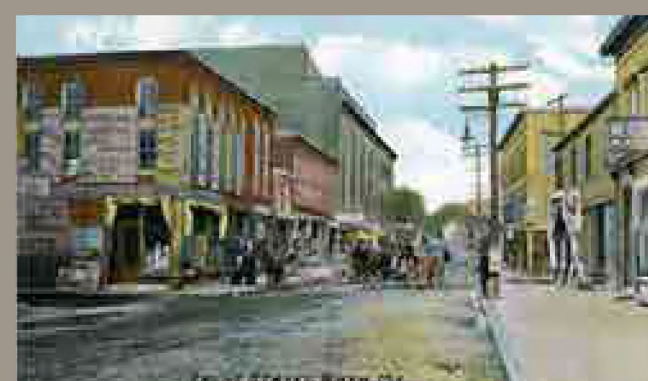
This headline from the Bath Independent suggests that, in 1898, Jews were welcome in the City of Ships – in fact, they were considered an asset. The “synagogue” referred to was not a discrete building, but the first of five temporary houses of worship that served the community before Beth Israel Congregation built a permanent home in the early 1920s.



YMCA building at Front and Summer Streets



Fraternal Brothers of Eagles Hall, 172 Front Street



Red Men's Hall of Sasanoa Tribe No. 6, 100 Front Street



Hall above A. Hallett & Co., Front and Centre Streets



Music Hall, Centre and Washington Streets (owned by Nathan Povich)

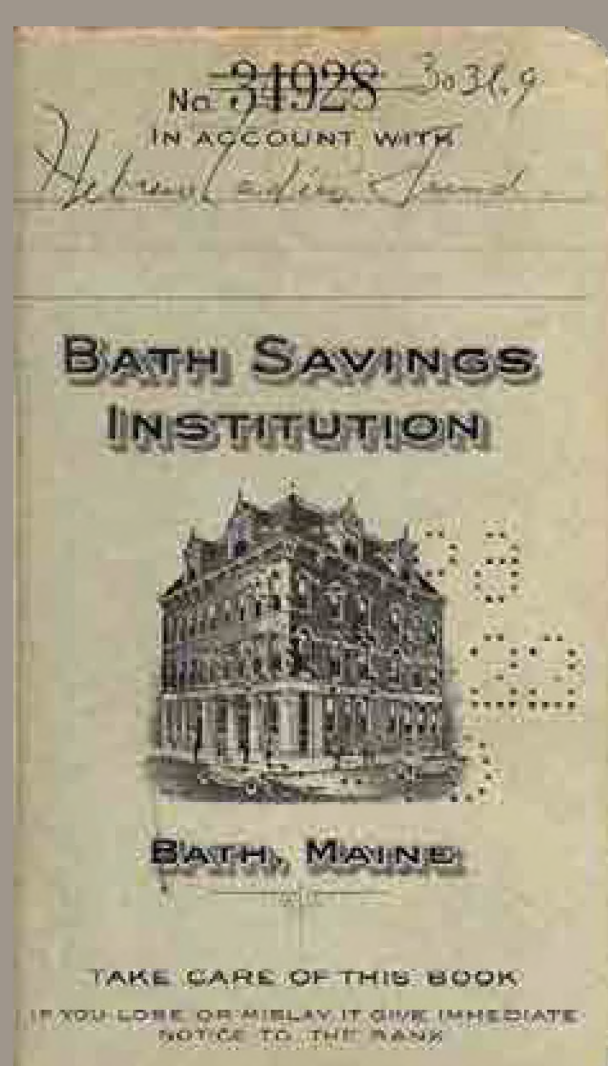
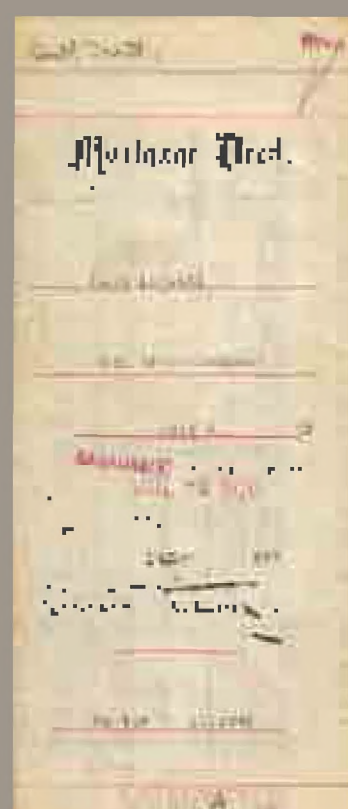
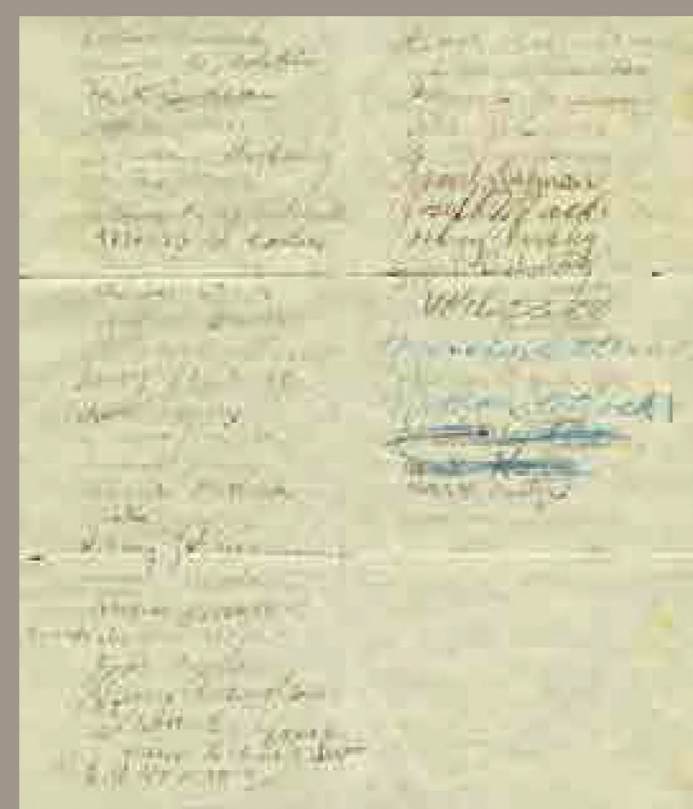
INCREASING NUMBERS

According to the Bath Independent, the city's Jewish population grew from “17 men with their women and children” in 1899 to 93 Jews by 1920. High Holiday services included families from Wiscasset and Brunswick, including the Abelons, Singers and Smiths. Seasonal articles educated neighbors about Jewish religious practices (Shofar blowing, fasting on Yom Kippur, layout of prayer book) and reported on visiting clergy before Charles Arik, the first resident rabbi, arrived in the late teens. Arik was among the Bath Jews who, early on, joined B'nai B'rith and the Arbeter Ring (Workmen's Circle).

RAISING MONEY FOR A NEW SYNAGOGUE

The first meeting to discuss a new building took place in Harry Arenstam's tailor shop in 1919. Fundraising soon commenced. The women of the congregation, whose early Naomi Club evolved into an active Bath Hebrew Ladies Society, held bake sales, raffles, concerts and parties – with phonograph records from the Mikelskys. Morris Povich, Sam Levin, Sam Mack and Morris Cohen traveled to Rockland, Thomaston, and Gardiner to solicit contributions from co-religionists. Nearly half of the funds needed came from Bath's gentile population.

As members neared their goal, they agreed on the name Base Isroall, or Beth Israel (House of the Jewish People). They borrowed money to purchase a house and empty lot on Washington Street, rented the house for income, and built on the lot. They prepared a charter, and members bid for the precise placement of signatures on the page. Here are the charter, a deed, and an invoice from the builder.



rites of passage

On a sunny January afternoon in 1922, congregants, friends, and public officials celebrated the new, partially completed synagogue. After auctioning off the privileges of transporting the Torah scroll, Aron Kodesh (ark), bible, and American flag, and the honor of unlocking the door for the first time, Samuel Povich, Henry Gediman and Solomon Greenblatt led 250 people up Washington Street from the Music Hall to Beth Israel. Three Rabbis officiated, there were psalms and Torah readings, and the national anthem was sung.

Long after this gratifying milestone, the congregation struggled with finances and building refinements. Still, members thrived as a closely-knit group of twenty or more core families for decades. They shared festive holidays, summer picnics, minstrel shows (still popular in the 1930s), and rites of passage like Bar Mitzvahs and weddings. Cantor Morris Cohen was a constant, leading services from the 1920s through the 1940s.



Solomon and Goldie Greenblatt, 1907



Morris and Dora Petlock Cohen, 1917



Petlock Family Rosh Hashanah, 1928



Nathan Cohen Bar Mitzvah, 1950

SUSTAINING THE COMMUNITY

Frances Smith, Bessie Singer and Donald Povich all served as synagogue educators. Smith represented Beth Israel on an interfaith council established during the Second World War. Women who successfully raised money for Jewish War Relief in the late teens again led the charge to support troops and war victims. This picture from Times Square shows two Bath couples, the Rubins and the Smiths, celebrating peacetime in New York.

Nathan Cogan paints a warm, vivid picture of the community in the 1950s, when congregants still spoke Yiddish and ate “herring and kichele along with schnapps” after services. From the 1940s into the



1980s, Abraham Kramer (left) officiated and, with his wife Gertie, kept the synagogue's doors open. Today, Fred and Marilyn Weinberg are among those helping to preserve history and sustain congregational life into the future.

