

LEWISTON-AUBURN

RITUAL AND TRADITION: REFLECTIONS OF OUR HISTORY

The genesis of the Jewish community in the Twin Cities lies in the arrival of German Jewish newcomers in the 1870s. Jews from Eastern Europe followed between 1880 and 1900. As the Jewish population grew, families founded Beth Abraham Synagogue in New Auburn at the turn of the 20th century, then Beth Jacob Synagogue in Lewiston in 1925. This rich immigration history provides a wonderful legacy for the present-day community that today includes Auburn's Temple Shalom Synagogue-Center and Beth Abraham Synagogue.

Religious and cultural practices provide a window of enlightenment into any Jewish community. So, here we present a series of stories—in words and images—connected to the Jewish traditions of Lewiston-Auburn. Our narrators showcase their values and celebrations, reflecting the region's distinctive past and present. These moments happened to us. They are part of our history, and they make us special.

WEDDING

AJewish wedding often features certain traditions, including a ketubah (marriage contract) that is signed by two witnesses, a chuppah (wedding canopy), a ring that is owned by the groom and given to the bride under the canopy, and the breaking of a glass that can represent the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the frailty of human relationships, or the idea that marriage changes lives.

It was one of the hottest days of the year. On June 17, 1955, 20-year-old Bates College student Adele Brody of Auburn married Lewiston businessman Morris Silverman, 22, at the Jewish Community Center, a civic hub on College Street in Lewiston. Rabbi Norman Zdanowitz of Beth Abraham Synagogue (the bride's place of worship) and Rabbi David Berent of Beth Jacob Synagogue (the groom's spiritual home) presided over the lengthy nuptials that included a meal catered by the bride's aunt, Sarah Smalley. "We were babies," Adele remembers.



Morris and Adele Silverman, 1955



Morris and Adele Silverman, 2006

SHOFAR

The horn of an animal, usually a ram, is blown during the Days of Awe, specifically on Rosh Hashanah (the New Year) and at the conclusion of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). This wind instrument recalls the ram that Abraham substituted for his son Isaac.

Sheri Olstein, of Auburn, blows a shofar that she and her husband, Joel, purchased in Jerusalem during a family trip to Israel. The shofar, says Sheri, symbolizes a wake-up call, one's reminder that the Jewish High Holidays are coming. "When you blow shofar you're not only getting to hear it yourself, you're enabling others to participate in the mitzvah (good deed) of lesh moah kol shofar (harkening to the sound of the shofar)."



HAGGADAH

The Haggadah is a booklet that tells the dramatic biblical story of Passover, the festival of the emancipation of the Jewish people from Egypt. It contains prayers and songs to be recited and sung in celebration of the event, and also serves as an instructional text, particularly for Jewish children.

The Lewiston-Auburn Hebrew School, held in the Beth Jacob Synagogue vestry, distributed this 1941 version of the Maxwell House Haggadah to its students, including 9-year-old Barbara "Babsie" Goodman of Auburn. She and her fellow students, whose names are listed on pages 8-9 of this wine-stained copy, participated in a model Seder in school to teach them the order of the service. "We attended Hebrew School three or four days a week after public school," she remembers. Her Hebrew School teachers included the "gentle and deeply religious" Jacob Lown, brother to Lewiston shoe manufacturer Philip Lown, the philanthropist who established Camp Lown. "Many wonderful memories are attached to those days," says Barbara, now known as Babs Goodman Shapiro.



The Haggadah

TIKKUN OLAM

Members of the Jewish community believe they share a partnership with God and should work to improve the state of the world by helping others, Jews and non-Jews alike.



Cardiologist Bernard Lown of Chestnut Hill, Mass., a Lithuanian immigrant who was the son of Jacob Lown and the son-in-law of Philip Lown, graduated from Lewiston High School in 1938 and from the University of Maine in 1942. Lown developed the first practical defibrillator and won the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize as co-founder of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. "To be an effective doctor, one must be able to connect with another human being. In fact, to connect is to build a bridge.... It is key to exposing and grasping the deeper human ache," said Lown during the 2008 dedication of the Bernard Lown Peace Bridge that links the communities of Lewiston and Auburn. "The bridge is especially meaningful to me as a physician."



Dr. Bernard Lown photographs a sign at the 2008 dedication of a bridge named in his honor.

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CHANUKAH

Chanukah, also known as the Festival of Lights, celebrates the rededication of Jerusalem's Holy Temple in the 200s B.C.E. when one night's worth of oil miraculously gave lamplight for eight whole days. While Chanukah is only a minor holiday on the Jewish calendar, its proximity to Christmas has—at least in this country—heightened its significance.



In December 2002, Paula Marcus-Platz, illuminated by the glow of Chanukah candles, enjoys a celebration at Temple Shalom Synagogue - Center. The Festival of Lights was a special holiday for Paula. She cherished a vivid memory of wandering outside their Auburn home with her sister Patti in their snowsuits to view a full moon. "The air was crisp and the sky was so clear. The snow was deep and cold and dry, the way that it can be in winter." Then they returned to a cozy indoors to light the menorah. "It was magical," she recalls, meaning her mother's "loving energy" as much as the warmth of the house. "Every year, my sisters — Carla, Gerry and Patti — and I would sing the traditional songs with our mother as we lit the candles."

BAR MITZVAH

Abar (son) or bat (daughter) mitzvah (commandment) is a Jewish coming-of-age ritual, usually celebrated at age 13, when girls and boys assume responsibility for Jewish law, tradition and ethics and become accountable for their behavior.

In 1952, bar mitzvah preparation was intimate, and Rabbi Norman Zdanowitz of Beth Abraham loved to prepare students for their rites of passage. The bar mitzvah boy here was Michael Abromson of Auburn. The proud parents, Natalie and Ben, held a luncheon at the Martha Washington Inn and served a jelled salad with edible flowers—pansies, and nasturtiums. Ruthie Gordon sat at the children's table with the host, and with Morton and Joel Abromson, Joseph Miller and Jeffrey Tarr. Their young and shiny faces glowed as they dreamed, perhaps, of their own special day to come.



Rabbi Norman Zdanowitz with Michael Abromson, 13, and family members at his 1952 bar mitzvah

TORAH COVERS

The Sefer Torah, a long scroll containing the entire text of the Five Books of Moses that is handwritten in the original Hebrew, is cloaked with a mantle or cover before it is returned to the Ark. Often made of velvet and embroidered with golden thread and decorated with beads, the cloak both protects and beautifies the Sefer Torah. Families often honor the memory of loved ones by donating an inscribed cover.



Torah covers from Beth Abraham Synagogue, including one donated by the Brody family

Adele Brody Silverman's family belonged to Beth Abraham Synagogue in Auburn, where her grandparents lived nearby on Laurel Avenue so that they, along with other Jewish families of the neighborhood, could walk to synagogue. Adele's older brother Morton Brody, later to become a U.S. District Court judge, celebrated his bar mitzvah there. Adele and Morton's maternal grandfather, Solomon Meltzer, was one of the synagogue's founders, and members often retreated to her grandparents' house after *Shabbat* (Sabbath) services for *Kiddush* (prayer and refreshments).

JEWISH EDUCATION

Jewish education can refer to the transmission of the religion's ethics and laws. While children and adolescents often participate in afternoon Hebrew school instruction, adding an emphasis on the study of the Torah (Jewish bible) often results in lifelong learning.

Gerry Marcus, a 15-year-old member of the Beth Jacob confirmation class of 1963, recalled that Rabbi David Berent "was the teacher who taught me stories that I still remember and live by. Some of these stories make me who I am," she says, such as simple explanations about why the rabbi wears all white on Yom Kippur. Or the folk tale about a troubled village that tried to scapegoat an ostracized shepherd for improper prayer — before hearing from God, "You have found the only person who prays to me from the heart."



Beth Jacob Hebrew School, 1917



Temple Shalom Family Hebrew School, 2013

Beth Jacob Confirmation Class Graduation 1963
From left, Andrew Ross, Gerry Marcus, Ronnie Wilner, Rabbi David Berent, Diane Leitman and David Hurwitz, lifelong friends and classmates.

BURIAL OF NAMES

Kevurat Shemot (*Burial of Names*), referring to the name of God, is the tradition of taking worn-out ritual objects such as prayer books or prayer shawls to the cemetery for burial. Many Jewish congregations have created their own ceremonies.

"We respectfully and lovingly bury them," says Rabbi Hillel Katzir of Temple Shalom, "just as we respectfully and lovingly bury a member of our community who has passed on."

"We have often been referred to as 'The People of the Book' because our traditions, our religion, our teachings focus so much on written tradition, on the Bible, and in our case, on the Talmud, and on prayer books and on commentaries that have been written down through the centuries. The fact that we care enough about those books when they can no longer serve us, to treat them respectfully, to thank them in a way for what they have done for us — that kind of ritual helps us maintain that idea of the importance of books, the importance of learning. More to the point, the importance of what's in the books, not the books themselves. That's a big part of making us who we are."

