

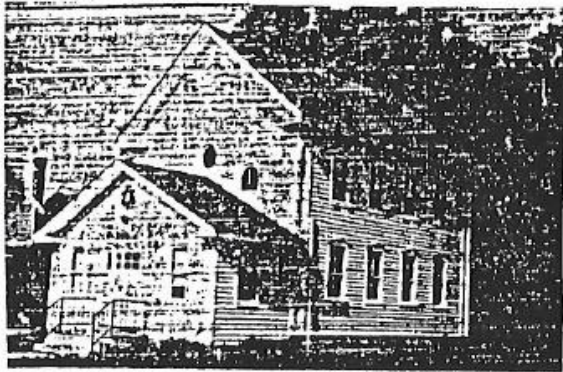
Southern New Jersey
SYNAGOGUES

A SOCIAL HISTORY

HIGHLIGHTED
BY
STORIES
OF JEWISH LIFE
FROM THE
1880'S - 1980'S

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BROTMANVILLE — The synagogue

Brotmanville B'nai Moses Anshe Estreich

Expansion of the Alliance Colony meant that newly arriving families needed more places to live. Ten years after the Alliance Colony was founded, the community was spreading out to make room for the new immigrant to dwell.

Mr. Abraham Brotman had arrived in America from Europe during this time. He lived for a short period of time in Philadelphia.

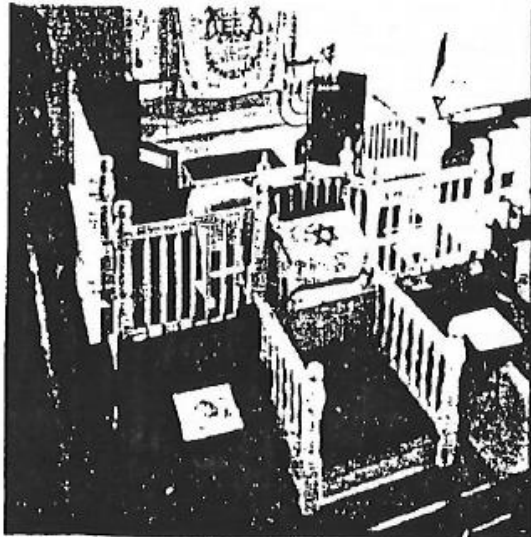
Some distance South of this Colony lay the newly founded Woodbine Colony. The development of this Colony in the early part of 1891 spurred more enthusiasm for continued Jewish settlements. This community was planned as an Agricultural settlement. Soon the community realized that a farm school would have to be initiated to teach the Russian Jews how to farm the land. In addition a vocational training school was developed along side of this endeavor.

Now a scientific approach would be applied by the Jewish Colonists. In spite of the great amount of toil that such an undertaking would require for one's livelihood meant that agriculture was only a means to an end. Sometimes, the risk was just that and everything was lost. This included the spirit of the pioneer when the crops failed.

Some Jewish immigrants such as Abraham Brotman thought that his helping hand in a business venture would benefit the Jewish Colonists. He bought the Gartman farm north of the Alliance community and started a garment factory. The work was sent home with the people as piece work initially. Fifteen people were employed in this fashion.

This income helped to supplement the Colonist and in some cases was the only monies for some families. Mr. Brotman would see great opportunity to expand his profits if he could have more employees work for him. Combined with the right time period in the wilderness was everything. This was the era right after the great Depression of 1893 had passed. This meant that it was the ideal time to invest in a full community. Abraham submitted plans for a community called Brotmanville to the clerk at the Salem County Court House in Salem itself. A full town was mapped out by a surveyor. The town of Brotmanville would include 200 lots and was submitted July 10th, 1893. Nine streets were mapped out in this grand developmental plan for the future.

In the early 1890's, industry was being introduced to the Jewish Colonies. Some Colonies were even standing because someone would invest in building a factory. Then the same person would try to build a town around the factory in hopes of luring newly arriving Jewish immigrant families. This idea was ideal for all players and guaranteed the investor a work force.



INSIDE of B'NAI MOSES

The purpose was twofold for the Jewish investors. First it was aimed at making a profit from manufacturing some item at a reduced labor cost as compared to the big cities. Secondly, it was a linkage of the investor to see that the factory would succeed and thus boost a fine feeling of encouraging his Jewish brethren in this pioneering effort. Everyone could boast if the plan succeeded!

Later Abraham Brotman would turn his energy to constructing a three story clothing factory. For the farmers in the Alliance Colony this was a great change! It was designed to target the newly arriving Jewish immigrants of the 1890's to come to America. The idea was simple. Allow the Jew to be free and independent, but still be part of the pioneering effort. These new immigrants were now arriving from Poland, Austria and Hungria.

A full community did grow around the factory. Farms that were once very large estates were subdivided into smaller lots. Streets were carved out of the sandy soils and mapped out.

As the 1890's got underway, more non-Russian Jewish immigrants started to arrive. It became apparent that customs and religious observances plus rituals were different of the newly arriving immigrants than those of the already settled Russian Jews.

This new activity led to the creation of Brotmanville as a community. A school, a general store and later a synagogue were all part of Brotmanville. The synagogue was established because it was too far for some congregants to walk to the synagogue in Alliance. Another reason for the establishment of another synagogue in the community was the fact that the Jews who settled in Brotmanville were Austrian-Hungarian in origin. The customs and ritual in use in the old country of these newly arriving Jews were different than the one in use in the Alliance Synagogue.

When enough Jews had arrived by the year 1900, Brotmanville was identified as a center of Jewish life. Up until this time, the majority of the Jewish population identified with the Eben Ha Ezer Synagogue in Alliance.

With the growth of Brotmanville meant that a different type of background in religious services and too great a distance to walk to the other synagogue meant that a new synagogue was imminent. The new Brotmanville congregation met in homes as it prepared for its future needs of the people in the area. The arrival of the 20th century was inspiring for these people. They now called themselves B'nai Moses Anshe Estreich or Children of Moses, Men of Austria.

Building construction went on for 18 years in Brotmanville. One man responsible for this work. He was William Cohn of Alliance. At the outset he would be joined by Jacob Greenblatt. Mr. Greenblatt had come to America in 1888. In Poland, the Greenblatt family had to be registered with the authorities. Jacob's family was not registered! The family paid a bribe to be private. Jacob hears that the person he bribed was going to inform the authorities. Jacob leaves his family behind and flees for his life. He would make his way to America and finally to Alliance. He was married in 1888 but would have to leave his family in order to escape.

Here in the Alliance Colony, Jacob would begin to immediately practice his trade in earnest. He was a carpenter and the work was plentiful.

Jacob later brought his wife, Golda and his five children to Alliance. By 1892, all of the mispocha was here safe in America and settled on the land. To Jacob and Golda were born six more children in the Alliance Colony. This meant that the family consisted of 11 children.

Together William Cohn and Jacob Greenblatt would build the community of Alliance and especially Brotmanville board by board. the identity of Brotmanville as a town began to grow as the factory got bigger. Jacob Greenblatt was a religious man in that he kept the Sabbath. He refrained from work on the Sabbath.

Jacob's first daughter born in America is now in her 90's and tells of her father's connection to Brotmanville. Amongst the Jews in the countryside lived some Gentiles. In the early part of the 20th century, Jacob was called to a witness in a dispute in the community. Amongst the Gentiles, his word was trusted by them when he said, "I will not give testimony on Saturday!" Jacob explained that he did not work on Saturday because he was a Jew. Jacob went on to explain about not riding on the Sabbath. But the Gentiles still could not understand why he refused to give testimony. Left with only his wit, he continued to explain his position and make it acceptable to the Gentiles. He asked the Gentiles if they knew of any of their Jewish neighbors who became married on a Saturday during the day light hours. No was the response! Jacob continued to give them a lesson on Jewish history by letting them know that 2 witnesses would have to be present and that writing a legal document was forbidden on the Jewish Sabbath. The Gentiles finally came to understand that Jacob was a committed Jew. This idea translated into a great deal of respect for Jacob.

Life in Brotmanville centered around the synagogue. Mollie recalls it was not so easy to carve out a settlement and especially a shul! The Greenblatts came to live near the Alliance Hebrew Cemetery toward Eskintown initially. It wasn't that the cemetery expanded, Heaven Forbid! Oh no cried Mollie! It was that the Greenblatts grew in numbers.

Jacob built a house for his family on Gershal Avenue above the Cemetery about two miles north. The family already included 11 children at this time and more room was needed. Jewish mid wives were common in the Alliance Colony since there was no hospital nearby. Assistance in caring for 11 children was also needed. Mr. Rabinowitz would help the Greenblatt family during this time.

A new community and a new set of neighbors awaited the Greenblatts. Religious life was difficult to maintain with the Alliance synagogue now being more than two miles way. Talk of another synagogue was always in the air in Brotmanville. Finally, the Brotmanville synagogue would be built! It was constructed by William Cohn and Jacob Greenblatt. The funds for the synagogue were donated by Mr. Brotman and the Jewish settlers nearby.

The synagogue building was started in 1900. By the summertime, it was half finished. A violent summer storm blew it down while the shul was under construction. Mollie was only 7 years old but she remembers how hard her father and others worked to build a Jewish house of worship. To see the shul lay in pieces on the ground was difficult for such a young girl to witness. Watching the shul being built was special to Mollie who could see it from her house. The frame of the shul started to go up again once more! The men were of strong conviction and the President George Pittel and the Secretary Abraham Nachovitch helped in the rebuilding efforts personally. It was a fine shul when completed with a three side balcony. The balcony was where the women sat according to the old world tradition of separation of men and women during prayer.

This seating arrangement was comfortable for the women. On the High Holidays, 50 women would take their seats upstairs. While an even greater number of men would conduct the services downstairs.

For Mollie, the services at the shul in those early 1900's and 1910's were wonderful and delightful times. Mollie's mother Golda actually conducted the services upstairs for the women to follow along. The ladies gathered around Golda to hear, follow, understand and weep on cue!

The men of the congregation respected Golda's knowledge. For she would " call " down and told the men that they had made a mistake in the reading! Only in AMERICA!

Rabbis for the congregation were not needed since the congregants could conduct the services by themselves. Jacob Greenblatt conducted services on a regular basis. This included Sabbath and High Holiday Services. By 1902, the congregation incorporated itself and took its rightful place in the community. Lectures during the week were held on cultural and Jewish issues of the day.

By 1907, 18 members were trustees of the shul. By 1908, Brotmanville had grown to over 200 people. The Charles Rosenberg Library was in operation for over five years . The Library was a special building. This was a the Talmud Torah, too.

Mr. Peterson took over the Cranberry bogs from Mr. Leach. Edna Peterson was the Shabbas Goi for the Greenblatts. This was in addition to Edna's duties which included the rounding up of the Greenblatt children on Friday afternoons from the Talmud Torah. Rabbi Kuden would teach eight to ten children in this cheder in the early 1900's. Later a Melamed would teach the boys in their homes.

The end of the first decade of the 20th century marked a prosperous time for Brotmanville. The 1910's would usher in a decade of change for the entire community. This began with the creation of the Brotmanville Social Club in 1910.

Professor Louis Mounier taught culture and enlightened the Jews in the community. The Baron De Hirsch Fund hired the professor in the late 1890's to bring culture to all the Jewish Colonies in Southern New Jersey. The Brotmanville Colonist would go to hear these lectures at the Alliance Hall. Professor Mounier was a pianist and she would add entertainment to the lives of the Jewish Colonists.

The Jewish Chatuaqua Society would teach the Jewish children about their Jewish heritage. Children in Brotmanville would attend this program on Gershal Avenue in Eskintown. Forty five children in all would be taught here at various times.

In addition, the younger children of the Colony attended activities of the center in Alliance. The Bailey's and the Steinberg's were regulars. But for the Greenblatts, the youngsters only had to travel out their back door. For Jacob had built a summer pavilion attached to the house. People would congregate here to listen to the children practice and play their musical instruments and listen to the adults talk about Zionism.

Professor Mounier was not completely liked or popular with all the colonists as recalled by Mollie. Culture was one aspect of life in the wilderness as a Jew. Jewish values could never be pushed aside in order to adjust to a new country!

School and public education was another aspect of life in Brotmanville. The grammar school in Alliance was 2 stories tall and was next to the synagogue. The lower room was used for grades 1 to 4. Upstairs was a room and that was used for grades 5 to 8. Here in the public school, English was taught and used as the language of instruction and not Yiddish. The public school brought Jews and non-Jews in contact with each other. Two teachers were employed by the Salem County board of education for this area. This introduction to American life was good for the Jewish families. On the same level it was good for the local population to share another culture different than theirs even though the non-Jew was in the minority in this school.

Anti-Semitism was not a problem in this school but initially the insensitivity of the teachers in their programs created a problem. Mollie recalls her dad repeating "since when was America created for Gentiles only?" A play in school occurred during the winter time. A popular prop was the use of "Christmas Fairies" which were portrayed by new Jewish students. The settlers were infuriated when they learned of this drama taking place with their children as participants. The protest was loud and clear in this matter. The prop was changed to "Winter Fairies".

The Colony did not produce a Rabbi from within the community over the years. But it did contribute Jewish teachers in the public school. This was a chance to instill a sense of pride in the Jewish community. The first Jewish women teacher was Miss Rudnick. Mollie graduated grammar school and left to help with the family chores.

Next Miss Levin taught school. She would convince Mollie Greenblatt to return to school. Mollie would enter high school in Vineland. By the time Mollie graduates in 1912, she is well prepared for the future. But 1912 is too early for the progressive movement to come to the wilderness. Certainly for a woman with an education this time period is ahead of its time. Instead Miss Levin convinces Mollie to become a teacher in the Jewish Colonies.

This was the time period that the great benefactor of Norma would reach out and extend his hand to all the Colonies. He proposed a scholarship for five summers for students who were planning to become teachers in the public schools. This educational opportunity would be held in the Cape May County community of Ocean City. Eventually, the Rosenberg, Rothman, Bakerman, Ravinsky, Leveson, Yosef, Segal, Block and Zager families would take advantage of this program.

Mollie went through this program. A new school would open up in the new settlement for Jewish people in Six Points. This was located three miles outside of Brotmanville. Mollie would teach the Crystal's and Klinefeld's amongst other students.

High School for the Jewish Colonist farmer in the 1910's became a burden for most in this environment. By 1913, overcrowding at the Vineland High School meant that Jewish children in Norma, Alliance and Brotmanville would have to go to Bridgeton High School.

To get to the Bridgeton High School meant that the children would have to get on the train. This cost money that most families did not have to spend. Besides the children continued to assist on the farm and acted as hire help. Or they would go to the city and look for work so they could assist their family. No High School diploma was needed. Only 65 hours of toil and sweat would do!

The new phase of labor fairness in the 1910's meant a relaxed work week of 58 hours! The Jewish workers seized the opportunity! Meanwhile, Mollie still had chores in her family life to tend. Chores for Miss Greenblatt and responsibilities did not stop her from going off to teach in a new nearby Jewish settlement.

Mollie's father, Jacob had spent a good twenty years in the Jewish Colonies helping to build a better life board by board. Now the time had arrived when no more building would take place. The era of expansion was over in Brotmanville by the early 1910's. A new occupation was in order.

Jacob would acquire the skills of a ritual slaughter or shochet. He would learn this trade by a man in Norma. This was an important service to the Jewish community. Being a Kosher butcher was very essential for the Jewish community. A Kosher Butcher in a Jewish community meant training and piety not found in the Gentile community. This is not to say that the Gentiles are unfit to be purveyors of fresh meat supplies but Jews must follow Biblical procedures to insure Kosher standards. For Jews in the old country and in the last century were to these standards.

The Steinsynder family operated the Jewish slaughter house on Garden Road going towards Six Points. This was across the road from the Kleinfeld's homestead.

Now Jacob's living was created by cutting portions from full sides of beef. These were the horse and wagon days in the countryside. That meant that a butcher's block was used on the end of the wagon on a daily basis. The front quarters of the animals were used only here in America. More detail and exact training in Europe separated one group of Jewish Butchers in the old world. In Europe, the self contained communities meant that whatever was not used was wasted. In Europe, meat was a scarce commodity in the early part of the 20th century. Jews learned to use the rear quarter with a greater degree of understanding and knowledge in Europe under these circumstances.

Here in America, the hind quarters of the animal could always be sold to the Gentiles in the area. Mollie recalls that in this time period in Southern New Jersey, cattle auctions excluded the Jews. Meat provisions in years past were imported to the Brotmanville area from the Port Richmond or "Jewtown" area in Philadelphia. Rabbi Block held that community to the strict laws of the Bible on this critical issue of Hebrew provisions in America. When the Jewish cattle slaughter houses opened, Jews were denied access to the cattle in Gentile run auctions. The response was for the Woodbine Farm School to assist the Jewish farmers in the raising of its own cattle for market. This would occur throughout the area in Southern New Jersey. This included Monroeville and Williamstown.

Jacob Greenblatt peddled his services and meat from his wagon pulled by a horse. The surrounding countryside was his route. Most of Jacob's customers lived in Norma. Hired help was in short supply and each farmer knew how dear it was to pay for their services. Large families helped to solve this problem in the long run. Here we find the same is true in the case of the Greenblatt family. Mollie's brothers, Joseph and Morris were enlisted in the family's aim to help support itself. The boys and Mollie would help to pack the wagons before attending their daily chores. For Mollie, who was already a school teacher by this time meant an extra long day. But the thrill of getting up at the crack of dawn was especially nice in the country. Morris delivered to his Vineland customers on certain days. Joseph delivered to the Alliance Jewish families on other days. Mollie would run her route and this included the outlying area going towards Six Points. Her mare was named Mollie and would give out a big horse snort before starting out in the morning.

Now Mollie really knew what it meant to be a public school teacher in the 1910's and the daughter of a Jewish farmer. This was real "prep" time especially before the start of the Jewish holidays. And oh what a schlep in the wagon.

Mollie Greenblatt married Edward Kravitz in 1919 and moved to Philadelphia. The era of the pioneering farm family came to an abrupt halt with the inclusion of America in World War One. This did not spell the end of the Jewish farmer, only the end of the pioneer era.

The synagogue in Brotmanville survived the man power drain of the community. After the War, Jacob Greenblatt moved to Vineland and joined the Grape Street Shul in the early 1920's.

Mollie Kravitz continued to serve the Brotmanville Synagogue as did her father in a number of ways. Soon the 1920's gave way to the 1930's and another wave of immigration to the area would begin to develop slowly. The German Jews were leaving their homeland in search of a better life and settled in the Cumberland and Salem Counties area in numbers before 1940.

By this development occurring meant that the Brotmanville Synagogue would continue into the future. By comparison, the Alliance Synagogue failed due to it being abandoned by the community as a whole only a decade earlier.

No caretakers of the synagogue in Brotmanville like the Greenblatts insured that their shul would perpetuate itself in order to accommodate the next wave and influx of Jewish immigrants. This meant a whole new generation of Jews would settle in Brotmanville and they needed a shul.

The Colens still lived in Brotmanville and became the new caretakers of the shul until more immigrants would arrive thus releasing the Greenblatts of this sacred tradition.

Elizabeth and Matilda Colen lived in Brotmanville at this time. Brotmanville was the mainstay of the Jewish Colony. Norma would also benefit from this change. Both synagogues were not a Beth Ha Keneseth or a place of assembly such as the large Alliance Synagogue but their was a need for a synagogue in each community at this time. If the new comers did not arrive in Brotmanville at this timely moment when they did, Brotmanville would follow the Alliance Synagogue into a pile of rubble, too.

By the Second World War's end in 1945, came a recurrence in the Brotmanville Jewish community. By 1946, most of the old time families had moved or passed away with time. But there remained a core of die hards that would not let the shul disappear with time. Yes, there was a struggle to create a minyan on Shabbas but it managed to survive the Second World War years.

When William's Kohn wife died she was honored by the Brotmanville community for unselfish deeds and hard work towards the synagogue. Her body was taken into the Brotmanville Synagogue out of respect! The Kohn girls were shocked and saddened at the condition of the interior of the shul at this time. The synagogue must be built up from within the four walls if it were to move forward into the future.

Elizabeth's sister, Matilda vowed to build up the shul. She went out and raised money for the synagogue. This amounted to \$ 800. A large sum for a small community that barely supported a minyan in the preceding years before this time. The money was raised to renovate the shul. This included painting the synagogue, covering the roof, wall papering the inside of the building and making it beautiful once again! This effort unified the full community of both the old timers and the new comers.

The new comers now numbered 15 families and they were all in the poultry business. This included Mr. Joseph, Mr. Katzstein, Mr. Berg, Mr. Dietrichman and others. Mr. Israel Apelbaum conducted the affairs of the synagogue for the most part in the 1930's and into the 1940's. Now George Berg would help to conduct the services and lent his voice as a Chazzon to the congregation. These Jews were not as observant as the Jews in years past but they all pulled together and made the whole thing work! Sometimes a Cantor was hired for the High Holidays. Matilda took on the job of becoming the Shamus during this time. She was the watcher for the shul and took pride in the shul as if it were her own! This was her mate and she loved the shul in many ways. She never married but this did not stop her active energies from being spent on the shul that she grew up in when her father and mother were both alive. She cared for the Brotmanville shul with such zeal that not even a man could rival her for this honor. She swept and cleaned the shul and then called people to make a minyan. The synagogue would last for another generation well into the 1970's due to her efforts.

Matilda's sister Elizabeth helped in the same spirit. During the 1940's, the young people pooled their efforts and donations to outfit the shul with new curtains upstairs in the ladies balcony. Even the children of the founders who moved away and led lives outside of Brotmanville donated monies to refurbish the Brotmanville Synagogue.

Honorable I. Harry Levin who was born and raised nearby on the same road leading to Brotmanville helped as a leader in the community. Mr. Levin represented the newly arriving German immigrants in the 1930's and did the same for the Holocaust survivors of the late 1940's and into the 1950's. This shul was open to them and all that attended. For a number of years into the 1970's and 1980's, I. Harry Levin would conduct the services for the congregation separate from the Sharis Israel Congregation.

Time has marched on. For four generations has passed since the first pioneer set foot on this land in the wilderness called Brotmanville.

By the early 1980's it was evident that Brotmanville had faded from life. In 1981, no more Shabbas services were held. No more minyan even existed to conduct these services. The community had combined with Sharis Israel for the preceding four or five years in an alternating fashion. Only a handful of men were left living in Brotmanville. Just as the forces of nature prevailed upon the first structure to knock it down and yet the congregation rebuilt it! The shul was built and served a proud community of Jews from all over th world as they struggled to make new life for themselves and their families.

It is with gratitude that we say thank you, Yosha Korach! A job well done! Each one of the Jewish communities that survived and prospered had a synagogue as its center . They were funded in part by a great benefactor and not necessarily a wealthy person. But one that cared for the special needs of the community in religious terms. The benefactor would see that service to the community was built on a firm foundation.

The community that existed more than 80 years ago made continuous use of its shul and helped to promote the pride of living in Brotmanville as a Jew no matter what their degree of observance remained.

In addition, each community of this nature that succeeded had its own " Shomre " or guardian in each generation that helped it along. But this one synagogue was special in the hearts of the Colens and Greenblatts. All of them did not let their responsibility to the synagogue end with actual building of the synagogue by the initial builders.

Meanwhile, the Bima was removed and restored along with the Aron Kodesh or Ark inside the Alliance Cemetery Chapel on the grounds of the Cemetery only a short distance down the road from Brotmanville.

Now the chapel had been turned into a museum and memorabilia is stored here to bring attention to the plight of the early Jewish Colonist.

A reunion was held and carried out to celebrate the 100th anniversary of this Jewish pioneering community in the swamps and wilderness. The Colony managed to survive and serve the needs and dreams of its inhabitants in a useful way.

The National American Jewish Museum in Philadelphia organized itself in the period following the American Bicentennial of 1976. One of its first exhibits was called "Living the Land" in the early 1980's. This inspired more activity to recapture the spirit of the early Jewish immigrants. The museum itself mounted an effort to save the Bima and Ark of an old synagogue in South Philadelphia in the mid 1980's. This venture has led to making a new tradition in these matters in America! Preserving the memory of a synagogue that once faithfully served a congregation is indeed a mitzvah!

Reference Source Credits

American Jewish Year Books of 1901, 1907, 1919

Immigrants to Freedom By Joseph Brandes

Alliance Colony Foundation Records

Salem County Court House Records Deeds Dept.

Taped Interview with Jay Greenblatt # 255 7/2/86

Taped Interview with Elizabeth Colen # 323 2/9/88

Telephone Conversation Mollie (Greenblatt) Kravitz
January 13, 1988

Jay Greenblatt, a third generation of the original founders returned to Vineland in 1980. His father, Joseph was born here in Brotmanville and was Bar Mitzvah boy here, too. Jay got a key and went into the shul to inspect it one day in late 1980. His father was now up in age and unable to attend in recent years. M. Joseph Greenblatt retired to the Martin's Run Jewish Nursing Home in Broomall, Pennsylvania. The synagogue was not locked as was the custom in years past. Remember this was a community of neighbors for many years. The synagogue was last used in 1979 for High Holiday services.

Jay entered the synagogue and found the tables covered with the same white table cloths that were used for the High Holidays. He was convinced to see to it that one day this treasure would not be lost. Some vandalism did take place to the building in 1981.

Jay tried to locate the people with "Seat Deeds" or seat holders but had no luck.

Jay's plan was to move the physical building down the road onto the grounds of the Alliance Cemetery. But overhead wires prevented this from happening. The best thing was to sell the building and remove the artifacts and find a safe place for them.

Jay Greenblatt not being of the generation that would have not thought twice about demolishing the Shul as Tradition in these matters as dictated in the Old World was about to do something that could only happen in the new world! He would apply his modern knowledge to this situation. Three Torahs were left here in the shul. The congregation had expired! The Torahs were wrapped in Talism. Temporarily, Jay took them to another shul where they would be safe. In the meantime, Jay was able to make contact with 6 ex-members of the congregation for their blessing in this matter.

Jay made the preparations to sell the property and convert the assets into a trust to reflect the memory of the shul in physical beauty as well as spiritual beauty. By this time he realized that the Alliance community would reach its 100th birthday soon. A foundation by the name of the Alliance Colony Foundation was incorporated during 1981. This served as a catalyst for a large celebration of this milestone in Jewish history in the Southern New Jersey area. The benefit and events that took place were a large success due to the efforts of many concerned people who were related to the original pioneers.