Southern New Jersey SYNAGOGUES

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

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Mayer Ehrlich on the Bima in Front of the Aron Kodesh
Inside the Jewish Farmer's Cong.
The ability of the Jewish people to pick up their lives in one land after being persecuted in another is part of the history of our people. A strong will to survive and then to resume a normal life is never an easy chore but the Jew has the resiliency to proceed with life in all generations. The Jew who settled in Atlantic County as displaced people would carry on this tradition.

To pick up with one's life in a strange country and to follow a strange occupation was a challenge that awaited some one hundred and fifty families in the area near Egg Harbor and the other side of May's Landing. Many Jews came as individuals initially of Polish descent to this area. They would be matched up with their spouses through friends and relatives living mostly in New York City.

The opportunity to begin life anew coupled with a roof over one's head was appealing to these hardy people. A cluster of Jews flocked to this area to set up a life style to insure the continuation of their spirit. This is the story of the Jews who came to live in May's Landing after the Holocaust took their families and cherished memories of Jewish life in just less than 15 years earlier. These Jews settled between Routes 50, 40, and 322 near McCleery City.

A grateful and committed Jew to lead this community would be found in Mayer Ehrlich. The re-dedication of one's life to God and all his glory would be found in this one man's energy. A spokesman of the group who declared that a shell was a necessary part of rebuilding one's Jewish life was essential if his family and co-religionists were to succeed. Mayer arrived in this area as displaced persons Lottery numbers for entry into the country became due in the late 1940's. Initially these Jews settled near Dorothy and acquired land for poultry farming. That area filled up and the Jewish Jews were funneled into vacant lands in Egg Harbor Township in the early 1950's.

The spark to gather and mold a Jewish community on the sandy scrub soil of this region was found in Mayer Ehrlich. He arrived in America in 1952. His background was filled with adventure and realism as he left the Nazi death camp of Auschwitz. Diamonds and money were recovered after the War to begin life anew in a place other than Europe.

By word of mouth was the way in which Mayer came to May's Landing. Upon arrival in this area he met an old friend in Mr. Jacoby. Both men had a family and children at this point in time. Both men would join together in the near future to establish a Jewish community for their children to share in and enjoy as they grew older.

But first, a course of business would have to be transacted. Jack Rudnick would help in finding a farm suitable for Mayer. The best area was near the Atlantic City Race track on Route 322. This area was composed of $10, $20 and $50 per acre parcelts. But the area near the main highway was $50 per acre.
Meyer's ambition was to bring back Yiddishkeit to those Holocaust Survivors who retreated far back in the wilderness on their chicken farms. He would drive four hours three times per week to Atlantic City. Meyer believed in this endeavor to ensure the continuation of the Jewish bond between the one generation and the next, i.e. the children.

Now he rekindled the inspiration and invited many Jewish families one on one to live not only a Jewish life but to live as Jews once again. This was a reawakening process as he recalls. The trips deep into the woods with a load of little Jewish children was just as much an adventure for him as it was for the children. Both would forget these days for a long time. Meyer went door to door to invite some Jews back into the fold if only for their children's sake! The miracle would work in America. The children sang Yiddish and Nationalistic Hebrew songs. Meyer chose America just as easily as he could have Palestine. No matter the country, he was going to match hidden Jewish feelings up with activity!

Jack Jacoby had children, too. Both men would join to create a synagogue now that they had a ready-made congregation.

Land was surveyed by Meyer Ehrlich. Mc Kee City was the central point of this gathering of Jews. He contacted Mr. Rabenstein on English Creek Road for help in this part of the plan. The parcel of land was about a mile south of Route 372 on an acre and half of ground. More people lived in the direction southwest of the land going toward Somers Point.

Meyer Ehrlich developed a format for pledges that helped to build the shul. During Chanukah 1955, it was decided to organize this group of Jewish Holocaust Survivors into a congregation. This was done with the help of Julius Waldman, Esquire of Atlantic City. The congregation initially chose to call itself Sh'arit Ha'Platah or translated means the left overs.

The next few years would be crucial for the development and growth of this community. The initial members included Max Gurvics, H. Rubinstein, M. Ehrlich, Mr. Zaltak, Mr. Horsterberg, Mr. Kolbauer, Mr. Telerian, Mr. Weinthal, Mr. Szmier, Mr. Zuckerfman, Wolf Ehrlich, Mr. Nunberg, Mr. Sotolm, Mr. Baumann, Mr. Greenbaum, Mr. Waldener, Mr. Roseblum, Mr. Zindorf, Mr. Baran, Mr. Copelman, Mr. Jacoby, Mr. Greenman, Mr. Taub, Mr. Schickman, Mr. Jacob Chorny, A. Linschitz, I. Schofer, Mr. Pshorwalj, J. Livchin, Mr. Gellman, and Mr. Grammer. Twenty-one more families were considered prospective members. This new Community Center would have a tremendous foundation of members.

It was during the 1957 year that the religious organization would boast a net surplus in funds. This would indicate that a building was now possible.
But the arrangement with the home congregation of B’nai Israel is only for its facility. True is the fact that this group is more Conservative minded than the Orthodox home in which it finds itself in at the current time.

These young families are found in an area geographically and spiritually oriented many miles from the mainstream of Jewish life in Atlantic County. They are even outside the realm of the Cumberland County Jewish Federation. But they do want to provide a Jewish education for their children and a social environment of Jewish brotherhood even if they are twenty-five miles from either federation.

Their hopes and desires are typical of all previous pioneers who came to southern New Jersey. But one thing is definitely different. They are the by-products of this history and they are now forced to feel like they are not only isolated by distance but isolated from the mainstream of Jewish life because of where they choose to exist.

These newly wed couples with children were just starting out and couldn’t afford to support a traditional synagogue as some of their parents did in the last generation.

So Judaism is the real big loser! Forget convenience. Forget the fact that it takes money for social activities and a synagogue in the 1980’s to exist. Thus in 1983 this new Jewish entity known as a new evolving Jewish congregation is defined in Mc Kee City. You can’t have a place for Jewish activities which include religious interaction without funds. Thus this new Jewish entity is stopped dead in its tracks.

The beneficiaries of years ago are not to be found in today’s generation. The Jewish congregations of today are made up of hard working people and professionals that have different levels of interest and varying amounts of disposable funds. Jewish Federations are now looked upon to help bolster the religious and educational aspect of growing up as a Jew in the 1980’s. And rightfully so! They are the central focus of the community to raise money to be used internally within the communities they represent as well as to funnel funds to larger projects outside their communities in the name of world Jewry.

The spark of this expression of a new era of Jewish life in Atlantic County is snuffed out and extinguished in a brief period of time. No funding for the second year of operation for an entity which involves Jewish education spells a warning. Wrong time, wrong place you might say! No, but these people were sincere about their Jewish connection and all that was needed, i.e. money was not allocated to them.

Some families in search of a continuation of religious education traveled the distance to Margate’s Beth El or Beth Judah in Ventnor. Another new synagogue on the mainland in over thirty years would still be on the drawing boards. A viable synagogue would not exist until Reform Congregation Beth Israel would build a brand new synagogue in Northfield. From Herb and Carol Brown’s perspective and knowledge most of these families would go back to being a non-existent Jewish statistic stamped Non-affiliated!