

Southern New Jersey
SYNAGOGUES

A SOCIAL HISTORY

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

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The land that is situated between Bridgeton and Millville covers eleven miles in distance. Back in the wilderness off the main road between these two cities lay the future of Jewish hope back into the 1880's. The wilderness would be home to Russian Jews as they fled their mother Russia after the 1881 May Day laws took effect.

Jewish life did not begin to take place in this area only in the 1880's. It was in the 1870's and possibly right after the Civil War that Cumberland County witnessed the arrival of its first Jewish settlers. A census of Jews was conducted by William Hackenburg, a prominent German Jew of Philadelphia. A survey of Jews living in the Greater Delaware Valley was conducted by postal card in conjunction with the Committee on Statistics in Philadelphia in the late 1870's. The society was located at 20 N. Third Street in Philadelphia. As early as 1878, Morris Myers of Millville reported 9 Jews living in that town. Bridgeton, the county seat of Cumberland County boasted 31 Jews living there as reported by Mayer Myers.

Five years later in early 1882, Michael Heilprin, a philanthropic Jew of New York City would convince his friends in Jacob Schiff, Jessie Seligman and Jules Hallgarten to settle newly arriving Russian Jewish immigrants in the wilderness between Bridgeton and Millville.

This area was known as Beaver Dam and was settled by William Miller, a German man in the 1850's. Beaver Dam was a stage coach stop on the road between the two towns.

One generation later, William Miller would try to attract German immigrants and their families to settle in Beaver Dam. After this failure and the return of those families to the Manayunk section outside of Philadelphia, William Miller agreed to sell this settlement to Michael Heilprin and his associates. A Jewish settlement would give way to a Colony or group of individual Jews living in an organized communal setting. The name of this area would soon change to reflect this change.

A great benefactor in Mr. Heilprin was found and led to the development of the wilderness into a community of Jews from Russia. The Jews themselves chose to rename the area for two reasons. The first one was in honor of their brethren that decided to leave Russia for the ancient Jewish homeland that once flourished in Judea and Sumeria many centuries ago. Carmel was chosen as the new name of the settlement. This name translated from the original Hebrew also meant garden or garden land. Since Carmel was near the sea and flourished as a green pasture, so too would Carmel in New Jersey would prosper in the wilderness.

Seventeen families were settled in Carmel in 1882 to 1883. These included Moses Sobelman, Max Levenson and Abraham Kunis. Of these families, seven left due to hardships.

New Russian Jews of Western Russia with agricultural experience arrived to support the original settlers. This included the April family. Isaac April was an orchardteer in the old country. This would lead to his success in America.

With him came Isaac Rosen at this time.

By 1889, Carmel had grown to 286 Jews in less than five years. These Carmelite pioneers were fortunate in that death was not a frequent visitor to this Colony.

But the hardships they endured in building a lasting Jewish settlement was a daily chore. The building association of Bridgeton held mortgages to many new homes built by and for the new Jewish settlers. The Jews survived by farming and tailoring until the Colony was self-sufficient.

The hardships endured for six years were made more trying by the sudden death and loss of its benefactor in Mr. Heilprin in 1889. That year, the settlers also lost a great man and a friend all at once. Mr. Heilprin's health gave way to his continual giving of his energy from 1881 until 1888 in establishing agricultural settlements for Russian Jews who fled their homeland and came to America to settle.

Helping the Russian Jews was the answer to their survival in the swamps and wilderness of Southern New Jersey as projected by Baron De Hirsch. But what kind of help was most needed? The individuals in Carmel approached this problem in many ways. Financial help in their time of need was crucial to the survival of their families in the long winters.

Religious life grew during this initial period of time in the Colony. The community did not see fit to erect a synagogue for the first generation in Carmel. Whereas other Colonies nearby did! A building served as a synagogue in the initial years. There were building already up in the area.

Even though this idea of a community institution did not come to fruition until almost a generation had passed by in Carmel did not mean that Jewish institutions didn't grow and develop. On the contrary, Jewish institutions numbered more than any other Jewish Colony in the region in Carmel.

A Chevra Kaddisha or religious burial society was organized in the early development of the Colony. But this institution was not used until the early 1890's.

With the passing of such an influential benefactor found in Mr. Heilprin, Carmel came to a halt in its move towards the future. Leadership was lacking and their was no vision to modernize the Colony in the late 1880's and early 1890's. This meant a halt in the religious activities, too.

The Colony in Alliance was more progressive and ready to sacrifice for a Jewish house of worship in 1888 than was Carmel. Carmel's level of prosperity was behind Alliance and the death of Carmel's benefactor prematurely stopped everything. Uncertainty settled in after the death of Mr. Heilprin. Carmel had lost its leader but not the wisdom found in Mr. Heilprin's thoughts. For Mr. Heilprin did his homework.

This void would be filled in time. Oscar Strauss brought word of the work which Mr. Heilprin had done in Carmel to the attention of Baron De Hirsch.

Rev. Sabato Morais of was a trustee for the Baron De Hirsch Fund in Philadelphia. This venture was directed in partnership with the Hebrew Emmigrant Society of Philadelphia.

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After Mr. Heilprin's death, Rev. Morais asked Moses Klein of Philadelphia to investigate the conditions of the colonies. This was to include the Carmel Colony. This survey was most timely for the Jewish Colonies but mostly for Carmel itself. A working knowledge of how best to help the Colonists based on their needs was shortly published. The publication took the format of a booklet entitled " Migdal Zophim " or the Watch Tower and was published in 1889.

Five thousand and ninety dollars were gained by the Carmelites to lighten their financial burdens. This money would then bring the Carmelites over the bitter winter months of 1888-1889. Seed money and money for horses were high priority items. Community support and communal use of horses for the heavy plowing was the order of the day.

Carmel was now thrust into the 1890's. New life was granted to the Carmel Colony. The first cemetery in Carmel was chartered on May 15, 1889. Fifteen hundred more acres of land was added to the Colony at this time. Now some 2300 acres made up the Colony and 36 houses stood in Carmel by the early 1890's. Mr. Miller erected a three story factory during this time of renewal. Mixing of industry with farming made for a viable and stable colony as witnessed by other colonies nearby.

The Baron De Hirsch monies could not be depended on again in the 1890's due to a new direction being casted by the trustees of the Fund.

A whole new Colony would be undertaken and the Baron De Hirsch Fund was behind this development from the start. The Baron De Hirsch Fund would underwrite the new Woodbine Colony in full. This new agricultural settlement was some 25 miles southeast of Carmel. That new development would capture the spotlight of the region in the early 1890's. This undertaking would be completely agricultural at the outset.

Meanwhile, Carmel would become completely self-sufficient by 1892. Competition of the Jewish Colonies for survival meant many hardships. But the Jews of many of the Colonies would see their dream come true.

In the 10th annual Report of Industries and Factories of New Jersey in 1892 it was reported that the Co-operative employed 92 people making shirts. Fifty percent of the work force was composed of women and children.

New challenges lay ahead for Carmel. The next step was to insure the continued growth of the spirituality of the Colony. The Colony was growing and expanding all at the same time. Now came the time for the communal leaders to lend themselves to consider a system by which Yiddishkeit could be formally taught to its children. The children were their next crop and this meant many more sacrifices.

Carmel couldn't receive monies from the Baron De Hirsch Fund anymore. But the working relations and the trustees could be looked to for ideas and concepts. In this way Carmel started in its success to give their children a Jewish education.

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Philadelphia's impact on the religious life of the Carmelites was great. The distance between the two communities was meant to keep the Russian Jews close to the land. This part of the experiment worked and a second function was the channels by which new and progressive ideas could be brought to the wilderness. Rev. Morais was busy at this time working on his large work, " The Jews of Philadelphia " which would be published two years later in 1894.

But this Colony was composed of Russian Jews not German or Sephardic Jews. The Americanization process was bored out in this fashion by collaboration of the two communities Jewish style! The Hebrew Education Society of Philadelphia was founded by the German Jews in 1848. The Central Talmud Torah of Philadelphia was founded during the recent Russian influx of Jews in the 1880's. This in conjunction with the full Philadelphia Jewish community provided for an educational institution being created in Carmel in 1892. The combined name reflected a cooperation between the two communities and the formal function of such an institution. Thus, the Carmel institution was incorporated in September 1892 as the Talmud Torah and Hebrew Education Society of Carmel.

The officers included H. Waxman as its president, M. Leopold as vice-president, L. Stillpass as secretary, S. Blime as treasurer with M. Erden, H. Rueben and Aron Finklestein as Trustees.

The congregation of Carmel met in L. Stillpass home and agreed to create a Hebrew School here. Now the regular religious services were supplemented by a religious school. This instruction would lead to a strong foundation of continued Jewish life as the Colony entered into the last few years of the 19th Century. Mr. Miller had provided space for the people of Carmel to conduct public worship in one his buildings. The congregation met for High Holidays in a building on Irving Avenue on the road to the public school house. For weekly services, the men would meet in Mr Stillpass home.

The financial collapse of the Reading Railroad and Pennsylvania Railroad had little effect on this community at the time of the great Recession of 1893. But this lack of capital made it impossible to connect the cities to the wilderness via the railroad lines. The ground in Carmel was too swampy to lend itself to a railroad bed anyway. The cost of such a venture would be too costly to even to consider. Immigration to the shores of America seemed to slow its rapid pace set in earlier years due to the adverse economic conditions in 1893.

Abe Dichter was an independent Jew who left Russia in search of a Jewish future. By 1890, Abe left for Palestine. But due to the outbreak of Malaria and poor farming conditions he returns to Russia in the early 1890's. The Dichters were merchants. Except Abe wanted to farm the land. The hope to resettle in America and farm was granted to Abe soon after his return to Russia.

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Abe took his family and located to the area outside of Carmel as an independent. The ground was more fertile out there than in Carmel. The land yielded more crops and fruits.

Nearby neighbors were found in the Gitomer family. These two families increased in numbers as the 19th Century neared an end.

As independent Jews they were still confined to the Carmel area. This land might have been part of the new land acquired by the Colony in the early part of the 1890's as recalled by Ada Rosen, the grand daughter of Abe Dichter. The two families would walk to Carmel for religious services. This was a good four mile walk one way.

The Dichters had three sons. They were Louis, Herman and Rueben. Herman lived on the land and had five sons and a daughter. Ada would grow up and live in Millville in the 1930's.

New immigration from Roumania gave the colonies a real boost in population after the Recession of 1893. Due to limited capital expenditures, the Carmel Colony grew internally. New organizations were formed and adjusted to this changing colonial situation.

The Carmel Colony would succeed and prosper as the 20th Century arrived in the wilderness. The Carmel Ladies Aid Society and Carmel Relief Society were formulated to help the newly arriving immigrants and insure their adjustment to the land.

During this time, the Baron De Hirsch Fund devised a plan to form the Jewish Agricultural Aid Society at the end of the 19th Century. This new Society would assist newly arriving immigrants in Carmel in gaining mortgages but grants were considered to be an item of the past. Work and the ability to pay for one's dwelling seemed to fit the new agenda of the Jewish Agricultural Aid Society. Settlements were seen as more likely to succeed if the inhabitants contributed to their well being themselves.

Professor Louis Mounier would make his appointed rounds to the nearby colonies as part of his job duties. His job as Chief of Americanization and Culture was sealed by the Baron De Hirsch Fund in the late 1890's.

But Jewish Life would not step aside for Professor Mounier. Sabbath Services and Religious home life continued more strongly as the new century got underway. Just as a night school was instituted to teach the new immigrants English, there was a resistance on the majority of the settler to take part in this free program. Less than 18 persons would attend this activity. Everyone in the community spoke Yiddish without ever learning English for a good number of years.

The foundation of any Jewish settlement rested upon its ability to create and sustain a congregation that held public worship. This was true especially in the wilderness! From 286 Jews living in Carmel in 1890 to over 471 by 1900 meant that Jewish activity was growing, too! By 1907, the settlement had peaked at over 600 Jewish inhabitants.

Two groups emerged at the end of the 19th Century in Carmel. Their division spilled over in to separate cemeteries being created for their members based on loyalty to one group or the other. The original Carmel cemetery or Chesed Shel Emeth was incorporated in 1889.

The newer group of immigrants formed an association and later affiliated with the National Order of Beth Abraham. New arriving immigrants to Carmel in the mid 1890's dictated that a new organization would be formed. This new organization in Carmel began serving the needs of its members by creating a separate cemetery adjacent to Chesed Shel Emeth and incorporated themselves in 1901.

This new group had vision and invited the newly forming Jewish community to the southeast of Carmel to join their group. The new activity in Millville represented renewed interest in the region in terms of East European Jews for the first time.

The move to the city was seen with keen interest to the Carmelites who were not the original Jewish settlers in the community by this time. Millville was just a satellite of the Carmel Colony in terms of its Jewish residents. German Jews had settled in Millville but still owed their allegiance to the big synagogues in Philadelphia for the High Holidays. The East European element was aided by this close tie to the Carmel community as it began its history. Some people left the countryside for the city of Millville some five miles south of Carmel. Other Jewish immigrants could not find land in the community towards the latter part of the 1890's. They went to Millville, too.

Religious services were conducted in this group by Moses Aaron. He was elected president of the congregation at this time. Religious activities and benevolent benefits were mixed to attract new membership. These activities served the internal needs of the members themselves.

Samuel Gelb created the momentum to erect a synagogue in the community of Carmel. The split in the community as to how the synagogue was to be conducted stopped work on the synagogue building itself. The two groups and two congregations were not about to support one congregation. So the source and drive for the funds ran out in the community due to this split. Even though the name of the Congregation was selected as Agudath Achim of Carmel or translated meant the Carmel Brotherhood made no difference how some felt in the community. The selection of the name did not reflect the popular sentiment in the community on this issue of religion. Agudath Achim being the first group in the community to organize invited the newly forming Jewish community in Bridgeton to join their congregation. Now two groups existed side by side in the wilderness with satellites in big towns only a few miles away from Carmel. This was religious politics at its best! Different points of view were necessary to create a sense of religious community and this was a carry over from the old country. Traditions played a large part in this division within the community.

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One of the events that represent this division can be found in the folklore of the community. Professor Mounier would describe the dancing and merrymaking of a wedding between Ike Merochnick and Dora Weiss Lithivianian style. The couple were engaged in 1898. That was the year that Professor Mounier accepted his job with the Baron De Hirsch Fund as Cultural and Agricultural Director. The couple would wait until Columbia Hall was completed in 1903. Then their wedding would take place. The bride lived near the little synagogue that Mr. Miller had provided the Jews. Two Jewish musicians were hired from Philadelphia to lead the band of marchers. The bride and the groom were escorted from the bride's home. They were accompanied by the marchers and the band. After the religious ceremony at the shul was complete, the band burst into happy music. Marchers were given candles which were then lighted. The procession marched from the shul to Columbia Hall that Saturday evening. The happy activities lasted until the middle of the night with the roving band going to each guest's table to play them a favorite tune. This Chassidic music festivity was a regular tradition in the old country and made its way to the new world. Some Jews in the community were not of this background and certainly not Professor Mounier. But everyone joined in and celebrated this joyous occasion.

By 1904, resumption of the building of the shul was at hand. But funds ran out again due to the lack of united community support by 1905.

By 1906, the Independent Order of Beth Abraham Lodge # 246 formally agreed to work with the Agudath Achim or Carmel Brotherhood. This was a Colony which would benefit in new inhabitants due to the Kishneff Pogrom of 1905-1906 in Russia.

The two groups realized that they could not create two synagogues independent of each other. For that reason, they put their differences aside and united in building a large shul. This joint venture took the shape of a brand new congregation. A neutral president was selected in Isaac Rosen. The vice-president was the Independent Order of Beth Abraham's Treasurer in Moishe Horvitz. The treasurer was Albert Kol who was the old secretary of Agudath Achim.

This meant that the union was a most unusual one but the best one at the same time. The glue that held this union together was found in another institution in Carmel which was founded in that same year.

The creation of the Carmel Athletic Association would have a tremendous impact on the community as a whole in a variety of ways. This organization was the melting pot for the community and it united the community in one goal for its children initially. Joseph Chasin who instructed the children in their religious studies in their homes was the founding President. The organization took its cue from the Norma Athletic Association which was formed in 1904. Coincidentally at the time of the Norma group coming into existence, its religious community were at two opposite ends just like Carmel.

This cycle of two groups and two ideals would be duplicated in Carmel. The Norma Colony was a similar situation only going through this process a few years earlier. In 1904, the activity of the newly formed Norma Athletic Association help to unite each group in Norma and thereby create an atmosphere of working together. This was needed in Norma since the two groups could not build two separate synagogues. B'nai Jacob of Norma was later replaced by a joint effort to create one synagogue and renamed itself Agudath Achim.

The early years of the 20th Century witnessed a number of institutions and organizations develop in Carmel. A second cemetery was created in 1901. The Ladies Aid Society followed and the Ladies Relief Society was formed to tend to women during confinement. By 1902, The Carmel Library Association was reorganized with the aid of the State of New Jersey. All Colonies had a library as part their enhancement programs.

A community leader was found in Samuel Gelb. For six years he tried to unite the community to have one Shul built. Mr. Gelb would not live to see his dream forefilled. But his efforts did succeed in uniting the two groups of Jews into one group if not one congregation.

Finally in 1906, the Independent Order of Beth Abraham Lodge # 246 extended themselves in uniting the community. This was done by the Lodge buying the mortgage of the new shul. Money was borrowed from factory owner, Henry A. Dix by the Lodge. All parties were paid back and a deed was turned over to a neutral community leader. This person being founded in Isaac Rosen. Mr. Rosen was then selected as president of the new shul in this manner.

Preparation of the interior and exterior was extensive. The outside was made of brick, which symbolized a permanent Jewish community. The interior was elaborately decorated, furnished and outfitted. On the inside, the Aron Kodesh or Holy Ark was constructed by William Pollock. The carvings of the lions on top of the Ark was completed by David Moscovitz. The Ladies Aid Society collected money for the Ark by going door to door in Carmel. The two sefer Torahs were donated by opposing groups and who were now united under one roof. This was community synagogue in the truest sense of the word.

The name of the synagogue was in honor of its beloved benefactor in Henry Dix. The shul took its name from Henry's Hebrew name, Hillel. And so, the shul was named Beth Hillel. Not only did Henry Dix lend money necessary to complete the shul, but he also have a \$ 500 donation at the outset of the synagogue's history in 1908. Professor Mounier and Henry Dix helped to design the shul.

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TALMUD TORAH - 1903

The new congregation was not only a combination of the two different groups of Jews in Carmel but it represented a third group. The general community at large was represented by the Independent Talmud Torah. This group of members demanded that before this union take place it was necessary to continue the Jewish and Hebrew education of their children as provided by the Talmud Torah. This meant that a school had to be maintained within the shul. This was radical thinking for those days in 1908. Hebrew Schools and especially Talmud Torahs were not side by side or placed within synagogues as a rule until the 1920's in Philadelphia. Carmel was a progressive town when it came to applying Jewish concepts in an ever changing new world. Moses Herder gave his collection of Jewish books to the shul as a symbol of this change before he left for Mullica Hill.

Cyrus L Sulzburger of Philadelphia was the keynote speaker at the dedication of the new shul on August 28th, 1908. Rev. Margoles was joined by many distinguished guests. Rabbi A. Reznick of the previous Agudath Achim Congregation was joined with Rabbi Flachs and Rabbi Emdem of the Talmud Torah. The Talmud Torah had been in existence since 1893.. These men all gathered together in a union that would benefit the community all under one roof.

Professor Mounier worked outside of the shul in stimulating cultural activities. The Jewish Colonies were described as Utopias of places where all things were like in paradise. Yes, there was a real chance for the Jew to reach out and become somebody as he increased his self worth. This was not allowable in the old world. But for Jews who tilled the soil like my Great Grandfather, Max Meyerowitz in the late 1890's up in the Perkiomen Valley, Pennsylvania, life was not a Utopia! It was Sweat, Toil and Prayer! Jewish life was at peace within this framework for the pioneering generation.

But at last, tradition is continuous and so Jewish life demanded a shul in Carmel. Jewish life would grow in this community. It was the dedication and the devotion of the Jewish spirit that was applied that made this shul a reality. These people applied themselves to the soil and transplanted their souls and carried their Yiddishkeit forward to the new world.

Outside of the shul was a new world at their doorsteps. Public school was a part of this scenery. This is where the children learned their first words of English. The instruction was slow. But finally, by the 1910's, many Jewish Colonies could boast of the home grown Jewish public school teachers.

Ground in this area was broken by the Carlisle family in 1902. Jennie Benjamin, Reba April and Bessie Shapiro all taught in the 1910's at the multi-room school house in Carmel.

Private Hebrew instruction was taught in the home and conducted by Mr. Chasin from 1906 until 1914. In the late 1910's, Rabbi Yorishomy arrived from Palestine to conduct the religious instruction of the children and oversee the shul.

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This was a time of radical change in the Colonies. More and more Jewish people were leaving the countryside for the big cities. Rabbi Yorishomy left the area while Professor Mounier continued his lectures on culture in Carmel until the early 1920's.

Yiddish culture was still held in high regard by the community and not Hebrew or Zionist views! Rabbi Brickman of Norma would help to fill the void in Carmel as the 1920's got underway.

Abe Dichter who owned a large tract of land south of Carmel took over instilling Yiddishkeit into the youngsters of Carmel until the late 1920's. There were 22 children who learned their Hebrew instructions in this manner at the time

The Ted Rosen Memorial was dedicated during this time in honor of one of its own native sons. Ted Rosen served as a Captain in World War One and later became a Judge upon his return. The Rosen family had played an important role of leading the community in religious and civic affairs. It was befitting that a memorial park was erected and stands between the shul and Columbia Hall attesting to this fact of life in Carmel.

Clare Popovsky (Ostroff) was born in Carmel. Later on as a young married bride she moved into Rosenhayn. The following is a recounting of the early years of her life in Carmel.

By the time Clare was a year and half old, her dad had passed away. Her family had come from Bialostyok at the turn of the century. Her Bubbe helped to raise her family. On the farm they raised tomatoes, sweet potatoes and beans to sustain the family. Walking to the shul was part of her life even as a young child. Her other Bubbe Weinstein was blind. At one time there was two shuls in Carmel. The two congregations did become one congregation. But some traditions would not be observed.

Clare was seven years old when her Zadhe passed away. When Clare was 22 years old she became engaged and her remaining Bubbe passed away at this time. The Bubbe would say, " she had seen her grandchildren ride to shul on Shabbas when the other children would be growing up,too." She did not want to be living to see this occur. Her attachment to her lifestyle that was transplanted to America was unbroken. It broke her heart that his abolition of tradition and ritual was taking place before her very eyes and right in her own mispoaha or family.

Superstition and understanding the natural order of the things to come was old world spun in belief. She understood her grandparents belief in Yontav and Shabbas. But she couldn't understand how her Zadhe would come to understand his own faith one night.

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Clare's Zadhe was 70 years old by this time. He had taken ill after his birthday. The man was treated for stomach ailments and not lung ailments as Clare recalls. Zadhe would make Kiddish every Friday night in his home after returning home from the shul. This one Friday night he was severely ill and he missed services at the shul. This was not so severe if it hadn't been Rosh Chodesh or the new month. Special prayers for the new moon were said at this time. Instinctively he knew that he would die shortly thereafter.

In South Philadelphia, many men brought a love of the Rosh Chodesh with them from the old country. These men even decorated their shuls with the Jewish Zodiac signs and symbols. B'nai Reuben of Sixth below South Street in South Philadelphia encrolled these symbols upon the ceiling in the 1910's. Shortly after missing this appointed time in the synagogue he passed away.

Jewish families in Carmel numbered 50 in the early 1910's. Some owned factories that manufactured clothes. Others were dirt farmers. These people made their own raisins and prunes by allowing the grapes and plums to dry out on long boards in the sun. These were the days before the icebox and vegetables were stored in the ground or canned. Clare's mom would pickle many items to preserve them for any length of time. This included apples, watermelon slices and green tomatoes. Wine for religious reasons was made on a seasonal basis.

For Sukkas, the Zadhe would build a little sukcah or booth outside of the home. He would sleep in the booth and eat there,too. The sukcah would be covered with greens and vines as prescribed by the Bible. At the end of Sukkas came Simhas Torah. The shamus of the shul would come to Zadhe's home and bring the Luvav, the myrtle and the fragrant estrog. A blessing would be made in the home and this was an honor. Clare would take the myrtle and put it over a closet for good luck after the passing of the holiday. Mr. Stollup who was the shamus was a welcomed guest here.

No English was spoken by her parents. English was a second language. On Yom Kippur, as a young child, a lunch was packed for the her and taken to the shul. The adults themselves would break from prayer about 2 P.M. and later return to synagogue for the conclusion of the service. These services would run well into the evening. Darkness would settle in over the synagogue by time they concluded with the blowing of the Shofar.

In Carmel, the bima was like a stage. The men and women sat separate. The Balcony would be only for women. The children would be separated,too. These were the years that the fire hall served as the court house. Up until 1960, a Jewish flag hung side by side with the American one due the hall being organized by the Jewish pioneers.

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Ben Soloff's father and his brother arrived in Carmel in the early 1900's. Ben's father, Barney had immigrated from Russia. In Russia, Ben's father was a forest worker. Ben's grandfather was an overseer of a grain mill. The life of Carmel was not much different from the one in Russia. With the exception that the Soloff's were free to be Jews here in America. Father and son came to settle on 50 acres of land in Carmel. This was a family affair. Aaron came first. Barney would follow with two of his aunts as travel companions. Barney would establish himself and buy his own property of some 40 acres in Carmel. He would marry and later die here, too. Mrs. Soloff worked at the Dix factory nearby the Carmel Lumber Company. Being a farmerette was not the future idea Mrs. Soloff had in mind when she met Barney in the early 1910's. Ben turned his attention to being a dirt farmer in raising vegetables that included peppers, beans, onions and potatoes.

This life was passed from grandfather to son and later to the grandson. Ben was born in 1919 and lived the life of a Jewish farmer's son for many years.

Religious education was a commitment to living on the land and being attached to the soil. From the age of 5 until Ben was almost 16 this cycle would be continuous. Later Ben would start to go to public school in Carmel. His father's farm was on the borderline of Deerfield Township and close to Millville Township by a couple of hundred of feet. The first five years Ben would go the Carmel school. Millville would build a new middle school. Then Ben was bussed to this new school.

Ben's daily routine included going to the Carmel school and then going off to the Cheder. The Hebrew School was located in Columbia Hall right next the shul.

This was now the late 1920's in Carmel. Times were changing. Rabbis came and left Carmel during this time. Mr. Dichter ran the shul and the Hebrew school for a number of years. By 1927, Max Berstein had donated \$ 1,000 towards the permanent establishment of a Talmud Torah. It was in this year of 1927, that the shul took on the religious school as an obligation. During this time, Rabbi Levenson, Mrs. Shariff and Mr. Shepko ensured the Carmelite Jewish children of their religious education.

The new Berstein fund helped to encourage others who couldn't afford to send their children to a melamed to receive a community Jewish education.

Rev. Morris and Abraham Narovlansky assisted in this transmission of Jewish learning in Carmel. These men were both shochets. People in the community would bring them live chickens to slaughter according to Jewish Law for a fee.

One big room in the shul which was located off the balcony upstairs was used as the cheder and new Talmud Torah. Rev. Narovlansky would teach 2 classes at a time. Between 20 to 25 children were taught in this manner.

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Rev. Narovlansky was a farmer. Different sizes of children attended and all ages were mixed in this setting. Some sessions were split. This was a daily routine from 3:30 to 5 P.M. Sunday morning was also part of this routine. Ben recalls, " you didn't go to Cheder to learn!" You would go to play marbles on the side of the shul. The woods right behind the cheder was used by the children and everyone played ball there, too.

The stick ball games were a favorite past-time. A good basic background in reading and writing in Yiddish was offered here. The children were all taught in their Yiddish language that they knew and understood.

The Ladies Aid Society was outside of the realm of the shul. This group met in people's homes. They would help in providing a spot for a strange Jew in town to stay. A meal and a place to stay was a tradition in Carmel to many passerbys. Different farmer's houses were used. Later a room was built in Columbia Hall for the Wayfarer.

Ben would go to services with his father and sat together at the synagogue as he grew older. On occasion, the children would sit together. The women rarely came on Shabbas in the 1930's.

On Yontav and Rosh Ha Shannah, everyone in the countryside came to shul. The chickens and the livestock had to be fed regardless if it was Yontav or not! As Ben became older he would walk from the synagogue to the farm to feed the animals. Later he would come back to shul for the rest of the day.

On Yom Kippur, when the congregation would break for a recess in the afternoon they would walk over to Isaac Blumberg's place. You weren't pinned to your seats in the synagogue. This was true even though each member had his or her own seat. Barney Soloff sat in one seat to the left of the bima.

Originally the Torah was read in front of the Aron Kodesh or Ark. The Tabah or the reader's table was a few paces from the Ark. This was surrounded on the bima by a banister. The banister had lights in later years and originally had candles placed in them during services on the end posts. The bima itself was raised or elevated a few steps.

Carmel in the 1930's as a farming community was dying. It had prospered until the late 1910's. After World War One, many Jewish people were leaving the farms for the cities. The ones who stayed began poultry farms.

The biggest farmer and benefactor of the shul was Morris April. He bought more land for his orchards on the outside of Carmel. The Tuckers property and many other people's ground lay vacant and grew with thick underbush. Barney Goldman had 10 or 15 acres lay in this fashion for years.

Carmel

During the Depression, the reverse in Jewish life took place in Carmel. Most congregations were moving their Tabahs up to the Aron Kodesh area. Here in Carmel, the Tabah was moved down from the bima into the center of the shul. This occurred after Ben was called to the Torah for his Bar Mitzvah. The fact that this shul was the only Sephardic one in the Colonies could explain this change. The prayer books used were Sephardic, too. Ben was given a siddur in both Hebrew and English for his Bar mitzvah. But this was a Sephardic one. The fact that he received a Siddur in both Hebrew and English was symbolic of the changing times. But for the next twenty years in Carmel this return to the old world style of prayer remained in effect.

On Simhas Torah, the congregation would parade inside of the shul. The children would attend and display their apples and Jewish flags proudly. Morris April's father lived on the outside of town in Millville Township which was about a mile from the shul. He was the Gabbai or watcher of the shul. Members would meet here in the afternoons of the Yontavim. The children, women and men would have a get together here as one big family into the 1920's and 1930's. This tradition goes back to the 1890's in the Carmel Colony. The Jews were still the majority in Carmel in the 1930's and would parade joyfully into town and up to the shul. Fifty or sixty farmers comprised the congregation during these days. Jews lived on the Bridgeton to Millville Pike, in Cedarville and further South.

The Cheder would prepare the children for the Jewish Holidays. Instruction was given in Yiddish. Basic learning would be transferred to the portion of the Torah that was to be read for the Sabbath or festival. This was done by transliteration from the Hebrew to Yiddish. It was impossible to go through the whole portion in one week. So two or three paragraphs were slowly translated by this process every week. You acquired the history part but its was incomplete. The group of children would read two or three words and then translate them into Yiddish. Ben wanted more! Ben thought that if they translated from Hebrew to English, more material would be digested and thus learned. But Rev. Narovlansky disagreed.

For Purim, noise makers were home made. This was part of the life styles for the Jew in the country. You didn't have to worry about your neighbors complaining of the noise being too loud. Because they were Jewish, too. Your Jewish life and everyday life were one and the same. The shochet was expected to be the Rabbi and teacher all in one person. During the 1920's this did not work.

With the onslaught of the Depression it was a changing situation that brought religious life down to a different level. By the Depression years, a lay teacher who doubled as a farmer and Chazzon led the synagogue and the community. For economic reasons of his own, Rev. Narovlansky would also oversee the Salem congregation some twenty three miles away from Carmel after Mr. Weinstein from Clayton stopped his activity there

The Talmud Torah was half girls and half boys until the children got older. Then the girls stopped as the boys continued. Many boys did not continue after their Bar Mitzvah. But all the boys would continue to lay Teflin and say their morning prayers.

For one's Bar Mitzvah, you not only knew how to say your Haftorah but you had to know other Haftorahs as well. This was done on a rotational basis during the rest of the year. You were prepared to say any Haftorah in this fashion. On one such Shabbas, Ben was set to say one Haftorah when the elders of the congregation realized that it was Rosh Chodesh. Ben was assigned another portion. He fumbled through it but finished his portion. The boys were expected to do a half dozen Haftorah's during the course of the year. This way of instruction helped to foster a keener sense of community in religious affairs for any Colony. This preparation for the next generation to take over in ritual was done in a very precise and painless manner that would have long lasting results.

The Aliyah's were sold for \$10, \$ 15 and \$ 20. People who wanted to donate money to the synagogue would always run up the amount! This was a custom well into the 1920's. The 1930's severely limited what Jews could donate to the shul. There was no money to be made and the shul would go into a dormant stage. Aliyahs were discontinued during this time.

Taslich was observed with the women and the Rabbi. Mrs. Blumberg, Ben's mom and other women would go down to the stream about a half mile from the shul. Prayers were said and casted into the waters under the little bridge near Sugarman Avenue.

On Shavous every year, Ben would pass the low lying marsh ground on the way to the shul. There willow trees grew. The kids would get up early and strip the willow trees before going to shul for services. This was great fun and the children would stand in front of the shul selling these branches to people going inside. The children would make 30 or 40 cents for their extra efforts. Of course the money was paid a few days later when money was allowed to be carried again. In the middle of the summer time, Tish AB would be observed. The women would attend with the men and wailed so the whole shul shook! The men were all somber as the service dictates with recitation of Lamentations or Psalms being said as the men sat around the bima on the floor cross-legged.

Phillip Goldstein would come as a welcomed guest of the Chataqua Society and teach at the Columbia Hall Jewish history in the middle 1910's. It is important to discuss this time period. Some Jewish children in the community would attend this type of school.

Some children received a traditional Jewish education while others received an abbreviated education provided by the Chataqua Society. Even though the community insisted on the need for the shul to have a Talmud Torah within the shul there was no real program. But at the outset in 1908 it never really served the entire community's needs

Thus as times changes it became more acceptable to send one's children to the Columbia Hall to learn one's Jewish History in English and to put their religious background on the side. In this way Carmel was characterized as being less religious of a Colony than the rest of the Jewish settlements. Even though this was true, there was a large nucleus of religious men in the community that took the time to ensure that ritual was being followed and passed onto the next generation. In his thesis, Phillip Goldstein listed 78 children as receiving a Jewish education in Carmel in 1919. This was the largest amount of children in the Jewish settlements that were receiving such an education at the time. This was by no accident. For Moses Herder had insisted on Jewish education in the Colony since the early 1900's. His son, Fred would carry on the tradition in Carmel. Meanwhile, Moses would leave Carmel in the early 1910's and set up a farm settlement in Mullica Hill near Glassboro. Others left Carmel to assist other Jewish settlements. Solomon Aaron left Mizpah during this time .

The men of the community could boast of their own mikveh just like Norma. Mr. Tudras created his Shivtz by heating his water room with hot stones. Hot turkish baths were a normal occurrence in the old country. But for the religious men of the community it was an absolute necessity. They would cleanse themselves before Shabbas every Friday afternoon and before the start of Yontavim.

For the children of the community, these places were there to ensure a good time and take a break from the heat in the summertime. One such place was called the " Box ." It was built by Mr. Skudivitch . This was a swimming hole with four walls. Benches lined the room. You had to go through private property to get to the swimming hole. One would have to pay a penny to get through his property and another penny for entering the swimming hole. This path to the area was a half a mile north of Carmel. This was the way to the Lebanon stream. By the late 1930's, the swimming hole had filled in with dirt and the children were all grown up.

The Carmel area was devoid of Anti-Semitism except for mysterious fires at the outset of the 1930's. An awareness of Hitler's ideals was carried into the Jewish countryside. First a volunteer fire department was formed to deal with this danger. No insurance could be written on the old farmsteads. The shul chartered the fire department. Jews were leaving this area and the fires ceased.

This was the time of the Great Dry Out. Prohibition meant that wine for Kiddush was severely limited in quantity. It became necessary to use strawberries to make wine during this period since grape wine was not available.

The 1930's was a time of quiet religion in Carmel. The children were being educated as Jews. Mr. Cherkasky was the president of the shul. Rabbi Rothstein was leading the congregation. The council of Jewish Women would send their representatives to Carmel to help create the curriculum in the Talmud Torah and instill a sense of pride in Yiddish culture.

Even though 50 years had passed since Carmel was originated as a Jewish settlement it was clear to see that tradition was being passed from second to third generation. Farming of the land in Carmel was still being done but on a lesser scale.

For the Popovsky's, preparation for Pesach or Passover in the 1930's was ages old. Meticulous scrubbing of the farm house and the kashering of the kitchen for Pesach was an annual ritual. In addition, the silverware would be kashered or made fit to use exclusively for this Holiday. This activity took place outside in their back yard. The men would dig a large hole. They would fire up a piece of steel until it was red hot. The silverware was wrapped and tied with string and then placed into the hole in the ground. Water was added and the hot piece of steel was placed in the water with the silverware. Next, forks, knives and spoons were ran through the coal fire to dry. This ritual would continue well into the 1930's.

This ritual was brought from Europe and practiced throughout the Greater Delaware Valley. Even in the back yards of the Jews who lived near Marshal and Girard Avenues in Philadelphia would practice this ritual. Those Jews were mostly from Central Europe but this ritual was universal in use.

The Depression lingered and many people would move off the farms. For the families that stayed , this tradition was practiced until the early 1940's. It was not until this time that the Popovsky family could afford a second set of silverware. The second set was bought on the installment plan. This meant that they paid 10¢ per week to Chaim of America who was the well known peddler. Chaim would deliver the goods to the family after receiving 50% of the money.

Fay April meets and marries Frank Schwed at this time in the late 1930's. Both came from large families of ten children. This union would mean more to the future of Carmel than anyone would ever imagine. Frank's father settled on a farm in Michagan and later came East in the late 1930's with all 10 children after his wife died prematurely. Meanwhile, Fay's father, Hyman April would rear 10 children with his wife in Carmel. Frank and Fay moved to Bridgeton as a young married couple. Frank worked in Bridgeton during the War. But they managed to belong to the Carmel shul as a matter of tradition on Fay's side of the family.

Frank would attend Shabbas services and High Holiday services. He would later be asked to become part of the Chevra Kaddisha or Carmel Jewish burial society. During the Second World War, Shabbas services in Carmel would be conducted by 28 families. These families all belonged to the shul in Carmel. Yazhreits were observed in the home and Yiskor services dictated a morning minyan service at the shul. During the entire length of the war, this tradition would continue.

After the war, the young men of the community started to rear their families. The Talmud Torah continued to educate the Jewish children in Carmel as in years goneby. Rev. Narovlansky was the religious leader in Carmel in 1939. This is exactly when Frank Schwed came to Carmel. After the war, Rev. Morris Narovlansky passed away and his brother who was also a shochet, took over for the next six months. Mr. Schwartz then took over as the Gabbai and religious leader until a new religious direction could be agreed to by the congregation.

In the late 1940's, the Carmel Talmud Torah included 13 or 14 children. Some girls attended the school. For Yontav, 30 men would come to services. Lillian April would lead the women in the balcony section upstairs. Lillian would be at shul on every Shabbas up until she passed away in the 1980's. She would not attend Friday evening services that included Mincha and Maariv. A Friday evening minyan was conducted up until 1966. Later Mincha and Marris would be held in each person's home unless there was a Yazhreit or memorial service. Then a minyan would be gathered and the community observed the Yazhreit together.

In the late 1940's, Rev. Narovlansky wanted to conduct Sunday morning services. The Jewish farmers who were still farming the land in the 1940's couldn't spare the time on Saturdays to attend services. So services were extended to Sunday's. During the harvest season, the farmers could be there on Sunday's. A new generation meant changing values and hardships to follow.

Another reason for this idea of the Sunday morning service was to attract the young boys who were new Bar Mitzvahs. These boys would participate in laying teflin in the adult services. This was done by the inclusion of the full congregation to conduct services. Still there was no Torah service conducted! This was a very positive step for the congregation. Many Bar Mitzvah's were occurring and this was one way to encourage active participation beyond the age of thirteen in a meaningful way. If a Bar Mitzvah did occur a Saturday service was conducted.

Finally, a Rabbi with a French background was hired by the congregation. This was to be a full time rabbi. A house was provided for the new Rabbi. Later he was followed by Rabbi Zeff. At this time all Jewish Holidays would be celebrated.

The farmer embellished the Jewish Holidays with Jewish Tradition. From the Soloff's home, a procession was sent to the shul as a tradition in Carmel was carried forward into the future. Tashlich was observed in this manner. A procession from the Soloff's home would start off and wind up at the Blackwater branch of the Lebanon stream for this ritual of casting one's sins away before the start of the 10 days of introspection at the High Holiday season.

Nearby was the " Box " This was one of the more popular swimming holes in the vicinity. The " Box " was located near where the Schwed's lived. This was the Wiseman's property. This area was now located on the map and known as Wiseman's Pond. Mr. Wiseman was the town's barber and he had his barber shop in the other half of the Rabbi's home. Another swimming hole was located on the road to Rosenhayn. This swimming hole had a little boardwalk and a beach. The Lebanon Branch stream ran behind the Schwed's property. The Lebanon stream was so named because it ran through the cedar swamps and the cold water was reddish brown in color. Many of the people who drank of this water lived well into their 80's and 90's. This water was very healthy to drink and was pure spring water. It was a soft water and had very few heavy minerals in and thus ran very cold even in the summertime.

Two Kosher Butchers would serve the Carmel community for some time. They included Mr. Rezneck and Mr. Fishman. Later Mr. Wertzler would follow them.

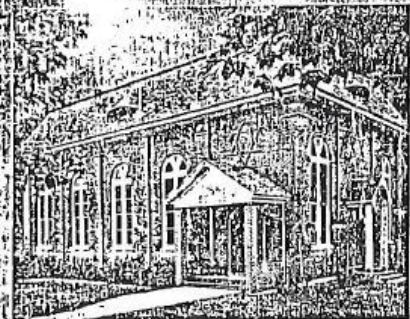
The community in the 1940's was still built around the celebration of the Jewish Holidays. On Sucas, the children were assigned the major role in the ceremonies. The children were not only part of the congregation but the real reason for it continuing into the second half of the 20th Century.

During Pesach time, each family would hold their own seders. Mr. Hyman April took a great deal of pride in this achievement. His family would read the Haggadah from cover to cover. The children were allowed to drink the wine and would fall asleep at the table in their mothers arms. The actual eating of the Passover meal would not occur until very late that evening.

The April family would be a close knit family in Carmel for many years. On Selicos or the period of time that ushers in the High Holiday period would mean a change in the season for the families on the farm. Pleasurniks from South Philadelphia would stay by the April family and in the Summertime stay all season long. The Aprils would enjoy the time right before the start of the High Holidays with day trips. One such favorite place was nearby. The April family would load up the wagon with straw and food. They would then schlep off to Indian Head for the day. This is where the Maurice River met another river. The currents at this junction were very swift. This was four miles back in the wilderness from Carmel .

Congregation: Beth Hillel

101 Carmel, New Jersey



1908 • REDEDICATION • 1958

75th Anniversary of Carmel

AUGUST 31, 1958

BETH HILLEL REDEDICATION VOLUME

OFFICERS

| | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| MORRIS APRIL | Honorary Chairman |
| HYMAN EBERSON | General Chairman |
| RAUHL MEIER ZEFF | Ceremonial Chairman |
| BARNET SOLAD | DAVID KANE |
| | Co-Chairmen |
| ABE COTLER | Treasurer |
| LENOIRA ZISLIN | Secretary |
| ISRAEL LUBEL | Religious Chairman |
| MATT DOBROFF | MAX APRIL |
| ABE KAZAN | EDWIN APRIL |
| GEORGE SCHWED | VERA COOPER |
| | Co-Workers |
| JACK HOTHBART | Program Chairman |
| BERNARD BERGSTEIN | Entertainment Chairman |
| JACK FRIEDMAN | Publicity Chairman |
| RITA POPELSKY | Ladies' Committee Chairman |
| LILLIAN APRIL | Business Committee Chairman |
| FANNIE KAZAN | SARAH TEPPER |
| MARY STEIN | HUNNIE APRIL |
| DOROTHY SKLARWITZ | GRACE APRIL |
| | RACHAEL KANE |
| | Co-Chairmen |
| HARRY and EDEE ROBLMAN | Historians |
| RENNE GOSSIAUX | Carmel Fire Co. President |

Carmel

Mrs. Zeffin lived in Carmel and had a large hotel. It was 2½ stories high and an addition was added on as the area grew. This was a favorite spot for many Pleasurniks. These were just memories in the mind of Fay (April) Schwed by the late 1960's. Raising a family was no easy chore and this took a lot of time plus devotion. Devotion was the key for the Schwed's would move to Carmel in the early 1940's and devote a lifetime of hard work to the community and the Carmel shul.

The 1960's would give way to the new generation of the 1970's. Rev. Abraham Narvolansky would pass away in the late 1960's. Frank Schwed would become the Shamus or caretaker of the shul as the congregation started to fade away. Abie Cutler died in the early 1970's. This was the end of the very religious nucleus that came to respect and love Lillian April. Lillian April became the matriarch of the Carmel Jewish Community with the Talmud Torah being named for her in the late 1950's. No matter that a men's club was formed at this time. Miss Lillian April was the Rebecca Gratz of Carmel!

This was a time of change and new direction. By the early 1970's, Reform Judaism would gain a foot hold in Carmel. But it never materialized into anything. Morris April was the president of the shul in the early 1970's and was able to do little about this change in the community. David Kane would assist Mr. April. Lillian came to Frank Schwed for a talk on the future of the congregation.

Mr. Schwed came out of a serious operation and was just getting back to being healthy. The rest of the men in the congregation were older than him and in good health.

Fourteen to fifteen men would make up the minyan of the shul in the early 1970's. A dying congregation it was not! Just that there were no more people. The older generation died off. Older families moved away. The second and third generation moved away, too. Eighty percent of the male youth over the last 50 years were professional people and lived in the cities of Bridgeton, Millville or Vineland. Many followed their professions in Cumberland County. Many lived to the old age of ninety.

Carmel

Abie Culter lived on Irving Avenue and he was in the cattle business. By age 55, Abie retired and turned very religious. Frank and Abie Culter were preparing the funeral for Morris April, when Abie suddenly passed away that morning.

Services for Shabbas was a struggle since few were living! The regular people in Zeke, Sam, Morris April and Abie Cutler were painfully lost. Mr. Schwartz would now move away Mr. Altman died, too. Twelve to fifteen men would die in this community within a four year period of time! Carmel struggled to gather a minyan on Saturday mornings. Nearby, it was exactly the same. For the Garton Road community could no longer hold regular Shabbas services either. So the two congregations joined forces. The Rosenhayn Congregations had closed and disbanded by the 1960's.

Superstition entered the picture. Fay was told that her mom's soul went to heaven when she died. Fay was only a child then. In the midst of all this, eating prunes and hot milk entered the picture. Fay thought that she would have to eat prunes and hot milk once you got to heaven. So Fay never ate prunes and hot milk anymore. The community was full of this kind of folklore from the old world.

Fay was raised by her sister, Gussie and brother-in-law, Mattie. Later in life her brother-in-law passed away. Her sister was very ill and was placed into a nursing home. Gussie never regained her full strength. But for one full year she fought for her life. Then in March in the late 1970's her sister was declared dying. The family rushed to her bedside but she held on until April the third. April the third was the date the couple would have been married 52 years! There was a belief in this mysticism due to where the people had come from in the old country.

Fay and Frank seen many of the Carmelites passing away. This happened one after other. Frank was declared the youngest of the old group. He was ill and his acquaintance with the shul was much appreciated. Lillian April convinced him to think unselfishly about why G-d spared him so he might conduct the affairs of the Carmel shul. Frank promised Lillian that he would continue the shul and the cemetery plus move it into the future for as long as he was alive.

A few men younger than Frank helped in the administration and the physical upkeep of the shul. Larry April and Sol Spector both helped in this manner. These men never missed a Shabbas service or skipped a High Holiday service.

The New Age of Reform in Carmel during the 1980's

The May and June 1988 Soviet-American Superpower Summit was underway and was a backdrop as this chapter was being compiled. Jews are not free in the Soviet Union to be Jews! Yes, they were persecuted 100 years ago but free to leave! Jewish life is difficult to uphold in the Soviet Union today. The following would not have been possible if our Brethren were not permitted to leave at that time. At this tragic hour of Judaism, it is imperative to support Freedom for Soviet Jews to emigrate to where ever they wish!

Synagogue services in Carmel in the late 1970's was a struggle but a must! The Rabbi's home was sold during this time. A trailer was rented so that visiting Rabbis could stay in Carmel in a Kosher environment. The last permanent Rabbi in Carmel was during 1975 until 1979. This was found in Rabbi Steinberg. Barney Goldman z"l had the job of seeing that the Rabbi's parsonage was in good working order. But the pipes froze during a cold snap in 1979. It would cost \$ 1800 to repair the damage. This was done and it was decided to sell the property since the next Rabbi would only stay for five or six Holidays.

Sol Spector lent his trailer for one year. Rabbi Hermap came to Carmel for the next five years. Sometimes he would stay by Lillian April. Rabbi Herman's father was the Cantor under Rabbi Kellman at Beth El in Cherry Hill and Camden for over 25 years. While Rabbi David Herman was going to school in Baltimore, he would come down the three Sundays before the High Holidays to help Frank Schwed attend the needs of the families that came to visit relatives in the cemetery. The Chesed Shel Emeth Cemetery always provided a Chazzon or Rabbi for this meaningful ritual in the Jewish ritual. A prayer or Moled would be made by four or five men of the Chevra Kaddisha in years gone by. But now they too were interned in the cemetery themselves and the tradition would continue. Morris April, Fred Stirva, David Kane and Max April would be here in those years to assist families in locating loved ones and reciting prayers at their graves. Now Frank Schwed was the only one alive and reached out to the community.

By 1983, the Garton Road Shul was in a state of deterioration. The remnants of that community would come to Carmel for services. The families of Garton Road numbered more than Carmel with 8 or 9 members. Carmel was down to about seven families. The Ostroffs, Jules Pearlstein, Mr. Zilverberg from Millville helped to make the Shabbas services in Carmel a reality. This scene was being duplicated in South Philadelphia at exactly the same time. With exactly the same type Jews. Except the city brethren were not farmers. For the High Holidays, the extended families totaled 35 to 40 people which was very good.

Rabbi Herman would get married and stayed one more year. Michael Kleinman was then hired as a chazzon from New York from 1983 until 1986. These were the transitional years of the orthodox congregation known as Beth Hillel. Times were changing and Frank had a promise to keep.

The New Age of Reform in Carmel during the 1980's

Frank first put an add in the local newspapers. The adds ran in all the Cumberland County newspapers for orthodox families to join and help save the Carmel shul. But this failed.

Some of the relatives of the older people were now part of the congregation. Something had to be done to keep the shul moving into the future and not fading away! The group reached out in order to understand its destiny. Here the Carmelites invited the Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist groups to present a plan of the future for Carmel.

The synagogue group consisted of Sam and Helen Ostroff, Frank Schwed's son, Henry, Jay Eisenstein, his wife, Mel Kornbluh, Zane Osborne and Mark Stoltz. Rabbi Seymour Rosen of Margate was invited to talk to the congregation in Carmel about Reform Judaism. Barbara Kornbluh grew up as a child in Rabbi Rosen's congregation.

I. Harry Levin made a statement at this time. He said, " a synagogue is a synagogue." This is true and the new congregation did make a vibrant difference. Reform Judaism did not have a chance or the appeal to the newly arriving immigrants in the later part of the late 19th Century and the early 20th Century.

The impact that Rabbi Rosen had on the community could be found in the eyes and hearts of the two older members of the Carmel Congregation. This included Frank Schwed and Larry April. A question came up in a discussion about the young people of Vineland. Since the new blood would have to come from outside Carmel, it was natural to look into this situation.

The Carmel synagogue would be the first synagogue in the Greater Delaware Valley to change its format from Orthodoxy to Reform in close to 100 years of settlement in Southern New Jersey. German Congregation Rodeph Sholom of Philadelphia did choose to become Reform in the late 19th century.

It had been only less than three years since the population of the synagogue had dwindled to less than ten families making the end of the synagogue a real possibility. Even the three Torahs were stolen in a rash of similar occurrences up and down the East Coast during this period of time. The fact that the Shul lent itself to a place on the National Register of historic buildings did stop time from taking its toll.

But the Carmel shul had one very strong piece of evidence built into its future. This was founded in the community's understanding of how to pass the baton of tradition onto the next generation in anticipation of the future. This was done no matter what may lie ahead. The will of the synagogue was sealed in a commitment to continue as a part of its tradition and heritage. This was sealed in the hands of Frank Schwed.

The New Age of Reform in Carmel during the 1980's

By 1985, it was estimated that there were 2400 Jews living in Cumberland County. Many Jews were identified as being un-affiliated. Why should this be the case in such a family bound community. Jews in this community still have religious needs to be forefilled as in generations past.

Dues and Jews did not mix well in this urban-country setting in the latter part of the 20th century. The due structure at Congregation Beth Israel was considered to be very high for the average Jewish family struggling to keep up with all the financial demands of the current society. At about \$ 600 per year was very expensive price. This was out of reach for many families with children who needed and wanted a Jewish education. It showed a similar situation developing in the community such as the elderly Jews who can no longer go to shul and the end result is the closure of a synagogue. Then the individual must choose to keep the ritual going in his or her own home. Judaism is designed to be communal and this means responsibility for the other Jew! At the same time, Judaism was not meant to be a burden upon the average Jewish family in regards of supporting their communal house of worship. Paying a monthly bill of \$ 50 or \$ 60 meant that some Jewish families would have to count belonging to a synagogue the same as a gas or electric bill! Sure in those areas, one could conserve and thus reduce the monthly billing. But this could never happen to the dues! When have you heard of dues for a synagogue going down?

Judaism was never meant to be a pay as you go society or a religion only for those who could afford Dues! These people are no different than other people in various communities across the United States in the 1980's who also have to choose whether to belong to a synagogue or to abstain from belonging to one based on their complete ability to pay high set dues. This is not the fault of the individual institution alone. High cost in our society mean different things in the economy of the community. But this should not affect Religious affiliation.

Years ago in the 1940's and 1950's, it was common to separate yourself from a synagogue based on your ability to participate. Even then, no participation did not mean no Judaism in the home.

Times change. The people in this community all wanted to belong. But they did not want to be a burden to a religious institution in their community. These people all had children and couldn't afford the high price of Judaism in Vineland. So they dropped out of Judaism and would resurface in Carmel through friends in the community.



Union of American Hebrew Congregations

June 19, 1988

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE OFFICE
New Temple Building
Fourth Floor

Beginning in early June, the Torah commences the cycle of readings from the fourth book, Numbers.

The setting of that hour in the wilderness of Sinai and the tent is filled with many striking and vivid passages.

In various passages the Torah contains references to the sanctuary. In the early sections of Numbers we see passages dealing with aspects and actions to be practiced therein. These themes are necessarily relevant to us, particularly after this year of growth and vitality.

We know that it is a sacred task to establish a sanctuary. We seek of our people's dedication to the task of bringing the idea and ideal of the spiritual into our often hurried existence. Much is expected of us.

Yet, the numbers of Beth Hillel, have done a great deal to meet the requirements of the task. There has been a sense of progress, growth and strength during your year. All of the members, and especially the Temple's leadership, meet the task. Now, the greater challenge lies before us... to build on the foundation, we continue to move forward.

The number is a sign for reflection and rest. For us it may also be a time of gathering resources for next year.

Once again the Synagogue makes your year and end and begins. There is much to do. New commitments are being made. We are grateful for your presence, your support. This is done for your realization, your vision, your dream.

We are convinced that the sanctuary is a place for all people. Beth Hillel is yours and you are invited to the end your efforts to build on the successes of this great year.

Consider well the privilege of being committed to create this new house in the Jewish community. The great task of continuing the good work is before us all, and we can be proud of what we have done this sacred task.

Sincerely,

Richard F. Adams
Richard F. Adams
Regional Director
Memphis, Tennessee, USA

Lighted Shema candle

TORAH DEDICATION

Tomorrow Evening
FRIDAY
DEC. 13th, 7 p.m.
TEMPLE BETH HILLEL
Carmel, N.J.

The New Age of Reform in Carmel during the 1980's

No matter what faction of Judaism the Carmel congregation would adopt for its norm was not going to affect the due structure here in Carmel. It was going to be less expensive to belong and that meant out of pocket affordability was in the reach of many families that couldn't afford to join a Synagogue in Vineland. These people could now send their children to Hebrew School.

Many families dropped back into their Judaism. The rebirth of the Carmel shul was by no means an accident. This was one thing for sure. The mixing of the right climate to adapt to change had occurred in unison for this community! The new congregation's interest was high and the idea of Reform Judaism appealed to these Jews. These young families would join together and support the synagogue. Growth was steady and sure.

In 1985, the synagogue was set in a new direction. A new name was adopted. This being that of " Temple Beth Hillel of Carmel" A new Torah was dedicated by the synagogue in December of 1985. A loaner Torah was no longer needed at this synagogue. New prayer books were acquired and used. Cantor David Kember would conduct the High Holiday services for a short time here. He was joined by Rabbi Richard Address who heads the Delaware Valley Region of Reform Congregation located in Philadelphia.

Rabbi Address resides in Cherry Hill and within driving distance of the new reform congregation. New activities started to take place in the synagogue that only a few short years ago earlier could not see beyond one Yontav to the next. For every Yontav, it became a matter of question whether to continue the operation of the Carmel synagogue without people to attend. That was all behind the history of the Carmel synagogue now. New activities started to take place and they included more than just Hebrew school and Services. Art auctions, adult education programs and various fund raisers infused new life into the synagogue on Sherman Avenue. A new look for the synagogue was realized with over thirty families now part of the congregation.

The renovations included new lighting and electrical work. The natural gas lights that were used to feed the lighting system existed for decades had to be removed. In addition, a new air conditioning system was installed, new carpeting was laid on the floors, a new cesspool was installed. plus the refinishing of the wood floors were all done in time for the High Holidays of 1986!

The New Age of Reform in Carmel during the 1980's With all of this activity, dues were set at \$ 225 per family and \$ 135 per individual. In addition, High Holiday tickets were set at \$ 100 per family and \$ 60 per individual. You could pick the level of participation and the commitment you wanted to apply to the community institution that was called Temple Beth Hillel. As in years gone by, no Jew was turned away from praying during this very special time of the Jewish Calendar.

When Cantor Kleinman came to Carmel to conduct the religious services, he would stay by the Ostroff's. But on Yontav, Cantor Kleinman would not travel. He would stay with the Schwed's. A problem developed at this time. For on Yom Kippur the Cantor would not ride to shul. By this time, the Schwed's had sold their home in Carmel where they lived for the last forty years. They moved to the other side of Vineland beyond Main Road.

The idea of how a congregation goes from Orthodox to Reform is an interesting experience all by itself. Before the passing of Lillian April would occur, it was agreed upon that the very existence of the shul was its survival. Frank Schwed and others from Carmel agreed that " we " meaning us Jews were chasing the Jewish people away from their religion. This idea was expounded on in a variety of ways in conversation one summer evening in 1984. From their roots, the Jewish people were being chased due to the intermarried situation. This was not to mention the high rate of divorce in America in the 1980's that was now filtering down to the Jews, too! Orthodoxy would not allow or accept one spouse if the other spouse did not convert. This left many Jewish borned people in Cumberland County a people without a religion. Frank Schwed was convinced in his direction as a leader to do something for the young married couple that found themselves in this situation.

The acceptance of the one Jewish partner in the marriage as an active participant in the shul was okay even if the other partner never converted to Judaism. This was enacted before the Congregation of Carmel embraced Reform Judaism as their format. It was conceived as not being a 100% deal whereby both spouses had to be Jewish in order to join the Carmel synagogue.

Frank Schwed understood the Jewish demographics of his community and the area in general. These people wanted to be here as recalled by Frank. So why not give them a reason to do just that and belong to a synagogue! These persons were welcomed as a people.

This was a beneficial setup. In Carmel, it was conceived that of the stronger spouse is identified as being Jewish in terms of religious identification. Then the other spouse is going to be identified as ACCEPTABLE to Judaism! This arrangement was acceptable to many families in the area who were asked no questions about being Jewish. The main issue was that that their children were going to be raised as Jewish children was the right step to be taken in Frank Schwed's mind. The new directors of this synagogue felt the same. Thus a newly reorganized Carmel synagogue would begin to flourish in Carmel.

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Now the congregation grew to over 40 families. If these families wanted to follow the Jewish faith and their children were going to be raised as Jews, why make the spouse convert? Conversion of the child for religious reasons of marriage to an orthodox Jew would have to be dealt with later in the life of the individual. This was understood by all in the community.

The earlier Carmel shul was chasing the Jewish element of the marriage away from the synagogue because the other spouse would not concede to formal conversion to being a Jew. Families were torn apart by this dilemma. Thus the synagogue lost or chased away the whole family and their children never received a Jewish education they might have obtained if the regulations of belonging to a synagogue were loosened to fit the community's internal needs.

Reform Judaism says it is okay to raise the children Jewishly. But what about the children being Jews? The Reform movement in America in recent years within the 1980's have adopted a minor view on this very issue! This is to state, whereby the father is Jewish and not the mother, it still deemed that the child is a Jew.

Hyman April was the Treasurer of the Orthodox Beth Hillel synagogue for many years in Carmel. Fay (April) Schwed grew up under very traditional circumstances. She found this new idea of " being Jewish " difficult to accept , especially for the operation of the Carmel synagogue. But for an equally long time, the shul worried that the young people were being pushed away from their religion in the modern period of history of this synagogue. Fay recalls the group discussion that " we were losing Jews because of intermarriage " argument all the time in Carmel. The non-Jewish spouse did not understand the service at all she snaps! This was an agreement to welcome back the Jews which wanted to belong all along but couldn't.

The format of the congregation had to change. In fact it did change! The Reform Judaism format matched realization in the community of the level of participation for many congregants.

In 1988, 52 families now belong to the Carmel Synagogue. Carmel is dead in the middle of Cumberland County and serves a large area within a ten mile radius that includes Bridgeton, Millville and Vineland. Some people are coming from the outlying areas. With the anticipation of the completion of the route 55 superhighway projected for within a short period of time means that Philadelphia will be connected to Vineland by one continuous road! What a feat that was never dreamed possible over a hundred years ago except by the use of the railroads! This will have a positive impact for Carmel and other areas where new Jewish families might live in the near future. The congregation is fortunate in having a person in Rabbi Address, who has led them through a very historically difficult change and adjustment.

Standing room only during the 1987, High Holidays has meant that expansion of this landmark building in Carmel is forefilling a useful necessity. The future of this congregation is very bright for the near period of time immediately ahead before the year 2000! Six acres behind the synagogue where the children of the pioneers would play hide and seek has laid vacant for all these years for a purpose! The need to expand is real. For each new generation a new congregation will exist. This could mean a new or renovated facilities may come to fruition.

A woman Cantor is part of the new scenery here in Carmel. The idea of a woman Cantor in American Judaism is brand new! Marlena Shapiro has been an added addition to this new and vibrant change in Carmel. Twenty eight children are being educated in a Jewish environment here in Carmel in the late 1980's! Four or five Bar and Bas Mitzvahs are occurring each year in the late 1980's as a result of a dramatic changes.

A new format, a new name, a new Torah and even a new Chevra Kaddisa is going to be found here in Carmel in the near future. New regulations will have to be developed in order to meet the needs of the community. The Jewish Cemetery of Carmel which includes actually two cemeteries will now have a third section of about 2½ acres added to meet the needs of the next generation as it unfolds in Carmel. The 21st Century has arrived in Carmel and Jews still pray and are buried here!

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