Shaaray Tefila

ITS HUNDRED YEARS

1845-1945

Shaaray Tefila

A HISTORY OF ITS HUNDRED YEARS

1845–1945

by

SIMON COHEN, D.D.



New York

GREENBERG : PUBLISHER

Digitized by Project Zikaron
Touro University-NY Libraries
www.zikaron.tourolib.org
2026

COPYRIGHT 1945
BY GREENBERG : PUBLISHER



THE 82ND STREET SYNAGOGUE

CONTENTS

	PAGE
FOREWORD	v
SHAARAY TEFILA'S HUNDRED YEARS	viii
1. THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CONGREGATION	1
2. THE WOOSTER STREET SYNAGOGUE (1847-1864)	11
3. THE BROADWAY SYNAGOGUE (1864-1869)	21
4. THE 44TH STREET SYNAGOGUE (1869-1894)	25
5. YEARS OF GROWTH (1894-1923)	39
6. YEARS OF MATURITY (1924-1945)	49
7. THE ORGANIZATIONS OF THE CONGREGATION	62
8. THE CONGREGATION AND THE COMMUNITY	74
BIBLIOGRAPHY	85

ILLUSTRATIONS

The 82nd Street Synagogue

Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs, Rabbi—1846-1876

The First Constitution and Its Signatories

John I. Hart, First President

The Synagogues on Wooster St. and 44th St.

Rev. Dr. F. De Sola Mendes

Other Rabbis of the Congregation

Interior of the 82nd St. Synagogue, Before the Fire of 1937

Interior of the 82nd St. Synagogue, After the Restoration

Cantors of the Congregation

Harry N. Wessel, President

Officers of the Congregation

Proclamation of the 100th Anniversary

FOREWORD

Once in a lifetime, but not in every lifetime, is one privileged to serve as head of a committee charged with publishing the history of a century of faithful and devoted service in the cause of American Jewry. This volume is the product of that function and is published as part of the commemorative services and anniversary program of the centenary of our beloved Congregation Shaaray Tefila.

From a small and modest beginning and through hardships and over rough seas, this Congregation has reached its present splendid standing in the community. Whatever vicissitudes time may bring, it and we, its members, are dedicated to the endeavor to uphold the high standards of its past, to meet the essential needs of the community for the care of the poor and the suffering, and in truth to make it, as is written above its altar, "A House of Prayer for ALL Peoples."

The committee acknowledges with keen appreciation the active and devoted services of the President and the Board of Trustees, our Rabbi, Dr. Bamberger, our Cantor, Mr. Phillip, the Clerk of the Congregation, Mr. Rains, the Isaacs family, the Drucker family, Mrs. Benjamin I. Hart, and others equally deserving but too numerous to mention. We are grateful also to those who, as their contribution to the Centenary project, have given freely of their time and effort to making this book a worthy memorial of the occasion: to Mr. Jacob W. Green-

berg, the publisher, whose ready interest and technical skill have rendered this volume a thing of beauty, and to Mr. Alexander E. Somach, who has generously provided the half-tone illustrations with which it is embellished.

We were fortunate, indeed, in securing the Rev. Dr. Simon Cohen to write this history. He has brought to the task a wide scholarly experience, especially as Director of Research for the Universal Jewish Encyclopædia. He also graciously officiated in our Synagogue for some months prior to the arrival of Dr. Bamberger, so that he knows the Congregation from within and thus approached his researches with a warm and sympathetic understanding. Though circumstances compelled him to finish the work within rigid time limits, his learning and literary charm are manifest in the book. His personality has made it, for all who were thus privileged, a keen delight to work with him.

GORDON S. P. KLEEBERG, *Chairman,*
Historical and Publications Committee.

New York, October, 1945.

SHAARAY TEFILA'S HUNDRED YEARS

Shaaray Tefila's first century of existence comprises a period extremely fateful for both world and American Jewry. Within these one hundred years the whole structure and character of Jewish life has been completely altered. A stream of Jewish migration poured into the New World, making America the newest and most influential center of Jewish life, and New York City, in particular, the seat of the largest Jewish community of all time. The old, unified, closely contained Jewish life has been completely broken up. New institutions have been created to serve the educational, philanthropic and social needs of the community, and countless individual congregations have replaced the old compact Kehillahs. Great currents of modern thought have swept through the corridors of Jewry, creating on the one hand a transformation of the religious service, and on the other, a revival of Jewish nationalism.

The history of the congregation again and again reflects these sweeping changes. The little group that first organized a religious society in a small room downtown in the year 1845 would be astounded if they could return to the congregation of today. They might be saddened at the loss of some of their own religious fervor; but they undoubtedly would rejoice in the growth of the congregation, the richness and abundance of its sanctuary and its activities, and in beholding how faithfully their descendants have adhered to their ancestral faith. Through all the

years, through weal and woe, through prosperity and adversity, the "Gates of Prayer" have ever remained open.

Although in many respects the history of Shaaray Tefila is parallel to that of other congregations of America, it has unique features of its own. Ninety-eight of its hundred years were spanned by the careers of its first three rabbis, all of whom served for over twenty-five years, and thus Shaaray Tefila possesses an unusual continuity. Due to the influence of its earliest rabbi, Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs, the congregation persisted so long in maintaining the forms of traditional Judaism, while the personality of its second rabbi, Dr. Frederick de Sola Mendes, enabled Shaaray Tefila to pass through the period of transition from Orthodoxy to Reform without bitterness or dissension. Their successors in their turn broadened and improved the activities of the congregation until all its men and women, youths and children, could participate in them.

In addition, the congregation has ever been strongest when it was confronted with trials. More than once it was faced with difficulties that might have resulted in extinction; each time its members, led by devoted officers, rose to the occasion and willingly sacrificed time and money until the crisis was passed. This quality of resourcefulness appears frequently in the pages of Shaaray Tefila's history.

Still more important, Shaaray Tefila has been and still is a friendly congregation. In its early years its members were linked together through kinship and common service, and as it grew it brought others within its fold and welcomed them to its fellowship. Its synagogue has never been merely a place of worship or a lecture forum, but rather a community home from which goodness proceeds.

These three qualities—continuity, resourcefulness and

friendliness—are the surest guarantee that Shaaray Tefila's future will maintain the standards set by its past.

A hundred years is a great age for a human being, yet in the life of a congregation it merely marks the beginning. The story of the pioneers and the generations that followed them, their lives and their ways, the gradual evolution of congregational life, is not a tale that is told but a prelude to a larger and grander history to come. Let us read then the story of Shaaray Tefila's past which, through the grace of God, shall be the beginning of a still greater future.

S. C.

1. THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CONGREGATION

In order to understand the reason why Congregation Shaaray Tefila was formed in 1845, it is necessary to go back further in history and review the current of development in the New York Jewish community.

For more than a century and a half after the Jews first settled in New York City in 1654, there was but a single community and a single synagogue, Shearith Israel. By far the larger part of its membership were descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jews, and it was but natural that of the two forms of the Jewish ritual service they preferred the simpler Sefardic (so-called "Spanish") form to which they were accustomed, and that they organized the congregation in their ancestral traditions. Their administrative officers consisted of a Parnass, or president, a Gabbay, or treasurer-vice-president, and a board of trustees; their religious functionaries were a Hazan, or reader and preacher, a Shammas, or sexton, and a Shohet, or ritual slaughterer.

Prior to 1815, the New York Jewish community was small, amounting to barely 400 persons. In the next ten years, however, its numbers were more than doubled by the arrival of newcomers from England, Holland and Germany. Most of the latter were not accustomed to the Sefardic service; they had been reared in the more elaborate service then prevalent among the majority of the Jews of Europe, the Ashkenazic ritual, popularly known as the "custom and usages of the German and Polish Jews." Though they joined Congregation Shearith Israel,

they were unhappy in its form of service. By 1825 their discontent assumed a definite form. In May of that year, a group of about fifteen members, headed by John I. Hart, requested permission from the trustees to hold separate services according to the Ashkenazic form of ritual. This request was denied, and the result was that in October of the same year a number of the members of Shearith Israel seceded to form a new congregation, which they named B'nai Jeshurun.

The first president of B'nai Jeshurun was John I. Hart, a son of Rev. Judah Hart of Portsmouth, England; the names of its membership indicate that they were mainly English Jews, with a few from Holland, Germany and Poland. A synagogue was acquired on Elm Street and a burial ground on East 32nd Street; the organization of the congregation was much the same as that of Shearith Israel, and the two congregations maintained cordial relations.

In 1839 the congregation elected as its Hazan Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs, who had been born at Leeuwarden, Friesland, Holland, in 1804. His father, a banker, had lost his property during the Napoleonic Wars, and had migrated to England in 1814. Samuel Isaacs pursued rabbinical studies, and prior to his call to America had been principal of an educational institution, Neve Tsedek, in West Norwood, London. His agreement with the congregation provided that he should not only read the services as Hazan, but also preach on Sabbath Shuvah, between New Year and the Day of Atonement, on Sabbath Hagadol, before Passover, and on every Sabbath before the New Moon; this was the first regular preaching to be held in any Ashkenazic synagogue in the country. In 1843 he organized the Ladies' Hebrew Benevolent Society

(Hevrat Nashim Hesed Ve Emet), composed mainly of the wives and daughters of the congregation.

In the next few years the congregation grew rapidly, and in course of time factions arose out of the rivalries of the various groups for control. As early as 1835 some of the members of B'nai Jeshurun attempted to organize a new congregation, Ohave Tzedek; its minutes from October 28, 1835, to January 13, 1836, have been preserved in the Shaaray Tefila archives. Its officers were Arthur L. Levy, president, Barnett L. Solomon, treasurer, and B. (apparently Benedict) L. Joseph, secretary. Services were held during the fall holidays of 1835 and a Scroll of the Law was temporarily loaned to the congregation by Simon Content. John I. Hart is mentioned as asking permission of the president to perform the ceremony of marriage between his daughter Julia and Barnett L. Solomon; for at that time, by Jewish usage and state law, it was perfectly permissible for an informed Jewish layman to perform a wedding ceremony. Benjamin I. Hart is recorded, too, as having offered his services gratuitously as a collector. The congregation does not seem to have survived long, apparently because of difficulties in securing a suitable reader and means for worship; its members accordingly returned to their former congregation. It is noteworthy, however, that every name mentioned in the minutes is that of a future founder of Shaaray Tefila.

In the decade that followed, the contentions of the various groups within B'nai Jeshurun continued. The struggle came to a head in 1844, when the congregation held its annual meeting to elect two trustees for a term of three years to succeed Morland Micholl and John D. Phillips. 135 electors came to cast their votes; but 28 of these were rejected by the inspectors on the ground of a by-law

of the congregation which provided that anyone not a charter member or the son of a charter member could not be an elector unless he paid a fee and was duly admitted by the vote of the trustees. The remaining 107 votes were then cast and counted and a small majority was found for Morland Micholl and Henry I. Hart. However, it was apparent that if the disputed votes had been admitted, the election would have gone differently; accordingly, only one of the two inspectors of elections was willing to sign the report.

The congregation now split up into contending groups. One faction maintained that the election had been valid and that Hart should assume his seat on the Board of Trustees. A still larger group held that the rejected votes should have been counted and that the two unsuccessful candidates should rightfully serve. The trustees maintained that there had been no election at all, and the old board continued to serve, while a suit was commenced, by mutual agreement, in the Supreme Court to determine who was legally elected. However, it was impossible to leave matters there. The trustees insisted that dues be paid to the treasurer; certain dissident members refused, and were threatened with deprival of their rights in the congregation.

Early in the year 1845 matters became more serious. When the son of one of the opposition group was to become Bar Mitzvah, he applied to the trustees in the customary form, asking permission to have his son read from the Torah on the proper Sabbath. The trustees refused to grant this permission. When the Sabbath day arrived, the officials of the synagogue were deliberately absent, but other trustees permitted the Bar Mitzvah to take place. The officials then proceeded to lock the synagogue doors,

and when the worshippers arrived for the afternoon services they were unable to enter the place of worship. They called the minister, Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs, to come and open them, but he refused on the ground that he was obeying the orders of the officials, whereupon the opposition party managed to open the synagogue, conduct the services, and seize control of the congregation.

Now the original officers and their followers realized that they were in the minority and that the congregation was in danger of being seriously damaged if they persisted in their course. They decided that it was best for them and their group to withdraw from the congregation and to form a new one of their own. After some discussion their plan was accepted, and on May 6, 1845, an agreement was drawn up whereby about fifty members of B'nai Jeshurun resigned their membership, but retained for fifty years the right of interment in the congregation's burial grounds. With them went Hazan Isaacs, the Ladies Benevolent Society which he had founded, and the Shammas, B. M. Davis.

The seceding group included many who had been prominent in the first twenty years of the B'nai Jeshurun congregation. Morland Micholl, resigning Parnass of the congregation, had been one of its founders and a contributor to the Elm Street Synagogue; he had served for six years as president, for three as treasurer, for two as clerk, and five as trustee. John I. Hart had been a founder and first president of B'nai Jeshurun, had contributed to the Elm Street Synagogue, and had been president for five years and trustee for one. Theodore A. Meyer, another resigning trustee, had been serving for two years, and Louis Simmons had served for six. The list included both the successful candidate for trustee in the disputed elec-

tion and one of his defeated opponents; the former, Henry I. Hart, had been trustee for three years; the latter, Arthur J. Levy, had never served before, but was destined to play a larger part in the new congregation. Barrow A. Cohen and Louis Levy had helped found B'nai Jeshurun and had served as its officers; Simon Content and David Davies had been originally members of Shearith Israel and had joined B'nai Jeshurun in time to aid in erecting the Elm Street Synagogue. Lawrence Myers and John D. Phillips had also served briefly as congregational officials.

Other members who severed their connection with the old congregation were: A. Abrahams; Nathan Adolphus; John Bennett; B. Cain; I. Cohn; John M. Davies; Isaac Falk; Abraham Godfrey; George Godfrey; Benjamin I. Hart; Solomon I. Hart; Edward A. Heilbuth; Israel Isaacs; Benedict Joseph; Max Josephi; Abraham Kastor; Carl King; Henry Leopold; George Levi; Maurice Levitt; David J. Levy; George G. Levy; John J. Levy; Michael Levy; Saul J. Levy; Charles S. Lyon; Robert Lyon; George S. Mawson; L. Mawson; Edward Morrison; Louis Morrison; Moses Morrison; Aaron Moss; Abraham Newmark; I. Phillips; Samuel Phillips; Isaac Raunheim; Isaac N. Samuels; Barah Seligman; Henry Seligman; Emanuel Seller; J. L. Simmons; Henry Simons; Aaron S. Solomon; Barnett L. Solomon; Morris Wilson.

The group first organized as a religious association without any special name. Louis Levy was their president, Isaac N. Samuels, treasurer, and Aaron S. Solomon, secretary. By June they had acquired rooms for worship over a stable at 67 Franklin Street, near Broadway, and began to be known as the Franklin Street Synagogue. Apparently they held services for the fall holidays, though

no records of these have been preserved, the minutes of the congregation beginning on October 27, 1845. In this and the subsequent meetings of the association, a number of new names are recorded as seat-holders and as members: Joseph Benjamin; L. Benjamin; L. Cain; M. Content; Andrew M. Davies; D. M. Davis; John Davis; I. De Young; E. Ephraim; Aaron Jacobs; I. Jacobs; Lyon Jacobs; Edward Josephi; Henry Josephi; I. Kahn; S. Kohnstamm; M. L. Lauman; A. Leopold; Charles Levi; L. Levi; David J. Levy; G. G. Levy; I. Levy; Joseph Joel Levy; Henry S. Marks; M. S. Myers; C. Phillips; P. Phillips; S. Rode; L. A. Schottenburgh; M. Seligman; W. Seligman; E. Simons; Louis Solomon; Adolphus S. Solomons; Morris Woolf; Simon Woolf.

From the names of the early members of the congregation it appears that the majority were English Jews, the remainder being mostly of German descent.

The first concern of the new organization was the purchase of a burial ground and of a lot on which to build a synagogue. On January 11, 1846, the committee announced that they had purchased a burial tract on 46th Street, between 9th and 10th Avenues. At the same meeting a constitution was adopted, and two weeks later a set of by-laws. The name that was chosen for the congregation was Shaaray Tefila, "Gates of Prayer," a distinct religious title, and the preamble to the constitution shows the spirit that animated the group:

> "Whereas it has pleased Almighty God, whose unity and omnipotence we have not ceased to acknowledge, to gather together a part of His chosen people in this happy land where the wise and republican laws are based upon universal toleration, giving to every citizen

and so-journer the right of worshipping according to the dictates of his conscience, and being anxious to instill into the minds of the rising generation the pure and holy principles of our sacred religion,

"Therefore we, the undersigned, bind ourselves under the name, style and title of the Congregation Shaaray Tefila (written in Hebrew), or Gates of Prayer, and to worship therein according to the rites and usages of the Polish and German Jews as is now in use in the congregation."

The first organization of the congregation provided for five trustees, one of whom was to be elected Parnass, or president, by the congregation, and another as treasurer by the trustees themselves. The election was to be held in the month of Iyar (April-May); the board would organize on the first of Sivan, and the officers would assume office on Shabuoth. In order to avoid a monopoly of office by any one family, members who were closely related to one another, such as father and son or son-in-law, brother or brother-in-law, were not to serve as trustees at the same time. It is noteworthy that there were at that time no restrictions on membership except that they should be of good character and acceptable to the trustees.

In January the association passed a resolution to incorporate as a congregation, but a more cautious mood prevailed, and on February 22nd, the resolution was rescinded. At the same time the committee reported the purchase of two lots at 110 and 112 Wooster Street, a central location for the Jewish community of that time. The next few months were devoted to collecting funds, for it was resolved to spend about $20,000 for the building. A special meeting was called in March, 1846, at which

pledges for $5,650 were given; these were regarded as loans, the congregation issuing scrip at 5% that was to be redeemed over a period of years. In the next months several further thousand dollars were raised; the Ladies Benevolent Society put its funds, to the amount of $400, at the disposal of the congregation; Abraham Kastor made a loan of $6,000. The congregation felt emboldened to go ahead with plans for a building. An architect, named Brady, was commissioned to design a modest edifice, and the ceremonies of laying the cornerstone took place on July 7, 1846. The program of the exercises, which has been preserved, contained the following: En Kelohenu; a prayer for the government especially composed for the occasion; the singing of Psalm 29; a Hebrew prayer; the laying of the cornerstone; an address by Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs; Adon Olam.

It was almost a year afterwards, on June 25, 1847, that the completed edifice was consecrated in a special service at which speeches were made by Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs, Rev. Isaac Leeser of Philadelphia, the acknowledged leader of American Orthodox Jewry, and a member of the congregation, Henry Morrison.

The burial grounds originally purchased by the congregation were found not to be suitable. They were sold, and in January, 1847, a parcel of land was secured on 105th Street, in what now is Central Park. Accordingly, the members felt free to relinquish their right to burial in the cemetery of B'nai Jeshurun, and in March most of them executed a deed to this effect.

Like its predecessors, Shearith Israel and B'nai Jeshurun, Congregation Shaaray Tefila felt a close kinship to the Jewish community of England. The only reference in the minutes of this period to any event outside of the

immediate needs of the congregation is a resolution, passed on January 11, 1846, to send a letter of congratulation to Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler on his appointment as Chief Rabbi of England. George S. Mawson, one of the members, conveyed this letter to the Chief Rabbi while on a trip to England, and the latter's cordial reply was so appreciated by the congregation that it ordered it to be spread upon its minutes.

2. THE WOOSTER STREET SYNAGOGUE (1847–1864)

The arrangements of the synagogue at Wooster Street conformed to all the requirements of Orthodox Jewish worship. There were no pews, but individual seats; men and women were separated, the former being seated on the main floor, the latter in the gallery. The reader and worshippers faced eastward towards the Ark, and there was a separate Almemar, or reading desk, from which the Scroll of the Law (Torah) was read. The Ark contained several such scrolls, the property of various members who loaned them to the congregation. Charity-boxes were provided for those who wished to aid the needy.

Services were held mornings, afternoons and at sunset. In order to insure a quorum (Minyan) of ten men at the daily services, the congregation hired Minyan men; these were poor Jews who were given stipends in return for always being present at the services. The prayers were chanted by the Hazan, who was assisted by volunteers from the congregation, such as a Baal Tefillah, or reader of the prayers, and a Baal Kore, who intoned the Sedra, or Torah portion for the Sabbath. At least eight members at the service were called up to give the blessings over the portions from the Torah and to chant the Haftarah (Scripture portion from the Prophets). During the fall holidays the services were so long that several members shared them with the Hazan.

Every participation in the service by a member of the congregation was considered a Mitzvah, or meritorious act, and hence an honor. Since there was considerable

rivalry for such honors, they were carefully apportioned by the president and trustees; in return, the recipient of such a Mitzvah would make a Misheberach, or offering to the congregation. Such offerings, in fact, were a considerable part of the revenues; but since no money could be paid out on Sabbaths and festivals, they were mere pledges that were sometimes redeemed very slowly, and the congregation had to hire a collector who was paid a commission on the sums he brought in.

In preparation for the fall holidays, the trustees would meet in advance to decide who should participate in the services, including the one who was to "call the Tekiahs," that is, announce the names of the blasts from the Shofar on the New Year. They also voted on two of the highest honors allotted on the feast of Simchath Torah, namely those of the Hathan Torah, who pronounced the blessings on the closing section of the Torah, and the Hathan Bereshith, who did the same for the opening portion of the Torah which immediately followed.

The principal functionary of the congregation was the Hazan, whose salary ranged from $1,600 in 1847 to $3,500 some thirty years later. He conducted the services, preached at least once a month, and, after having received permission from the president, officiated at marriages and funerals. The Shammas received a smaller emolument, but received free quarters in the basement of the synagogue and various fees from the members on occasions of celebration or sorrow. The congregation at first thought of engaging a shochet, or ritual slaughterer, of its own, but was content to depend upon the services of those of the other Orthodox congregations. The secretary, soon after the beginning of the congregation, was granted a small salary for his services.

By the fall of 1847 the Shaaray Tefila religious association felt sufficiently sure of itself to apply for a charter as a congregation. Application was made to the state by Isaac N. Samuels and Benedict Joseph, and on October 31, 1847, five trustees were elected; Louis Levy, Lawrence Myers, Henry Seligman, Theodore A. Meyer, and Barrow A. Cohen. The following day the charter was issued, and the congregation officially established. In the following month the congregation proceeded to re-elect its functionaries: Hazan S. M. Isaacs "during good behavior," or for life, and the Shammas, B. M. Davis, for the term of a year, which was annually renewed until his death.

In January, 1848, the first president, Louis Levy, resigned and was succeeded by John I. Hart, who thus for the second time became Parnass of a congregation. On February 20 the congregation adopted a new constitution and by-laws. These incorporated and enlarged on the early constitution and by-laws of the religious association, but did not essentially change the government of the congregation or the form of its ritual. The time of the election of trustees was changed to August, so that they could assume office in time for the fall holidays. In order to become an elector, one who was not a charter member or the son of a charter member had to pay a fee of five dollars and sign the constitution; this was almost identical with the by-law which had caused the original schism in the B'nai Jeshurun congregation. A member who married out of the faith or failed to have his son circumcised could be expelled; this by-law was actually enforced as late as 1873. Indicative of the problems of order that faced the congregation were the series of fines which the trustees could impose. There were fines for refusing to

serve as trustee; for refusing to serve as Hathan Torah or Hathan Bereshith; for refusing to serve as auditor or inspector of elections and for refusing to make a report as such; for refusing to appear before the trustees as summoned; for refusal to serve on a committee; for non-attendance at a special meeting after signing a request to convene one; for refusing to come to order at a meeting. The highest fines of all were for not attending services when assigned an honor and for disturbing divine worship. In the early years of the congregation such fines were actually imposed on more than one occasion, though they were often cancelled on a promise to give as much or more to the congregation as an offering.

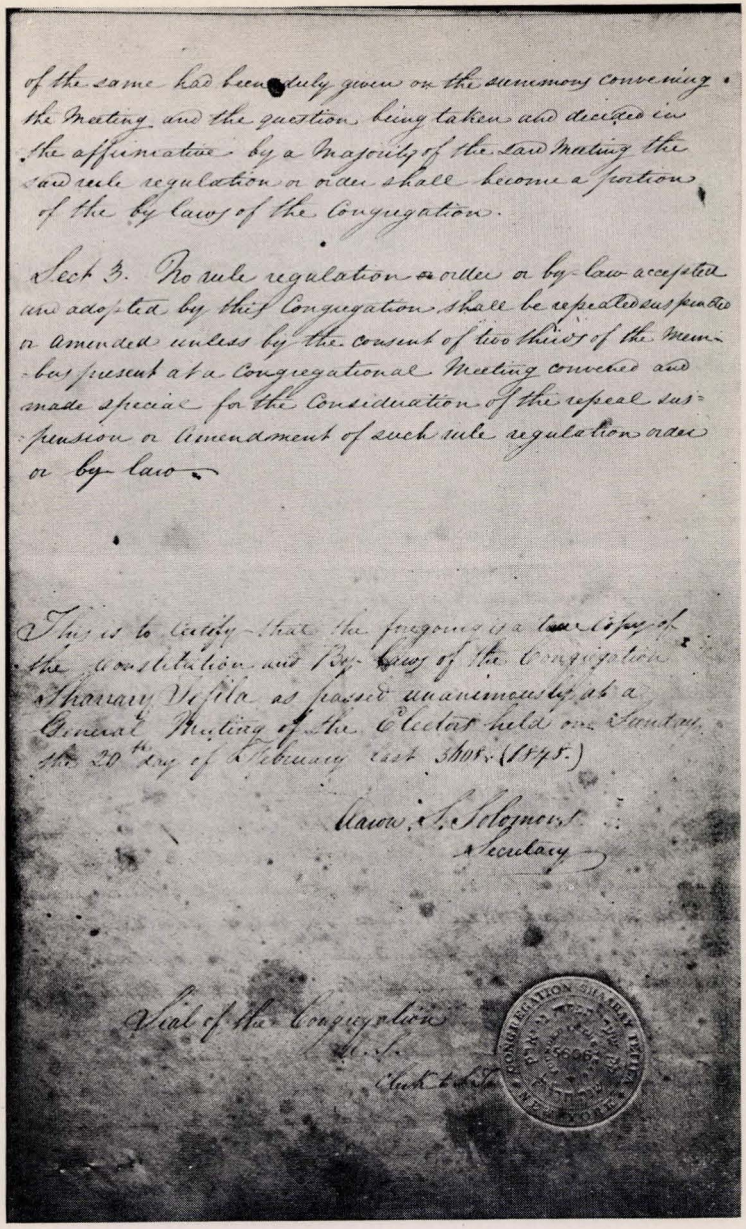
The trustees who were elected during the period of the Wooster Street Synagogue, in addition to those already mentioned, were: Joseph Newmark; John D. Phillips; Abraham Kastor; Lewis M. Morrison; Henry Simons; Alexander Josephi; Lewis Solomon; John M. Davies; Edward Josephi; Joseph Aden; Aaron S. Solomon; George Godfrey; Maurice Werner; Samuel Wolff; Henry I. Hart; Rowland Davies; Morris Poznanski; Sigmund T. Meyer; Barnett L. Solomon; Lewis J. Phillips. In 1849 M. B. Moss succeeded Aaron S. Solomon as secretary; he was succeeded in 1854 by G. Gottesheimer, and in 1858 by Myer S. Isaacs, the son of the Hazan.

During this period, when Reform Judaism was making great gains in the New York Jewish community, Shaaray Tefila stood staunchly on the side of Orthodoxy. This brought it into closer relationship with the other Orthodox congregations, Shearith Israel and B'nai Jeshurun. When the first Russian Jewish congregation, Beth Hamedrash, was founded in 1852, it received the cordial support of the older congregations. The story is told that



REV. SAMUEL M. ISAACS

Rabbi — 1846 - 1876



of the same had been duly given on the anniversary convening the Meeting and the question being taken and decided in the affirmative by a Majority of the said Meeting the said rule regulation or order shall become a portion of the by laws of the Congregation.

Sect 3. No rule regulation or order or by-law accepted and adopted by this Congregation shall be repealed suspended or amended unless by the consent of two thirds of the members present at a Congregational Meeting convened and made special for the consideration of the repeal suspension or Amendment of such rule regulation order or by-law.

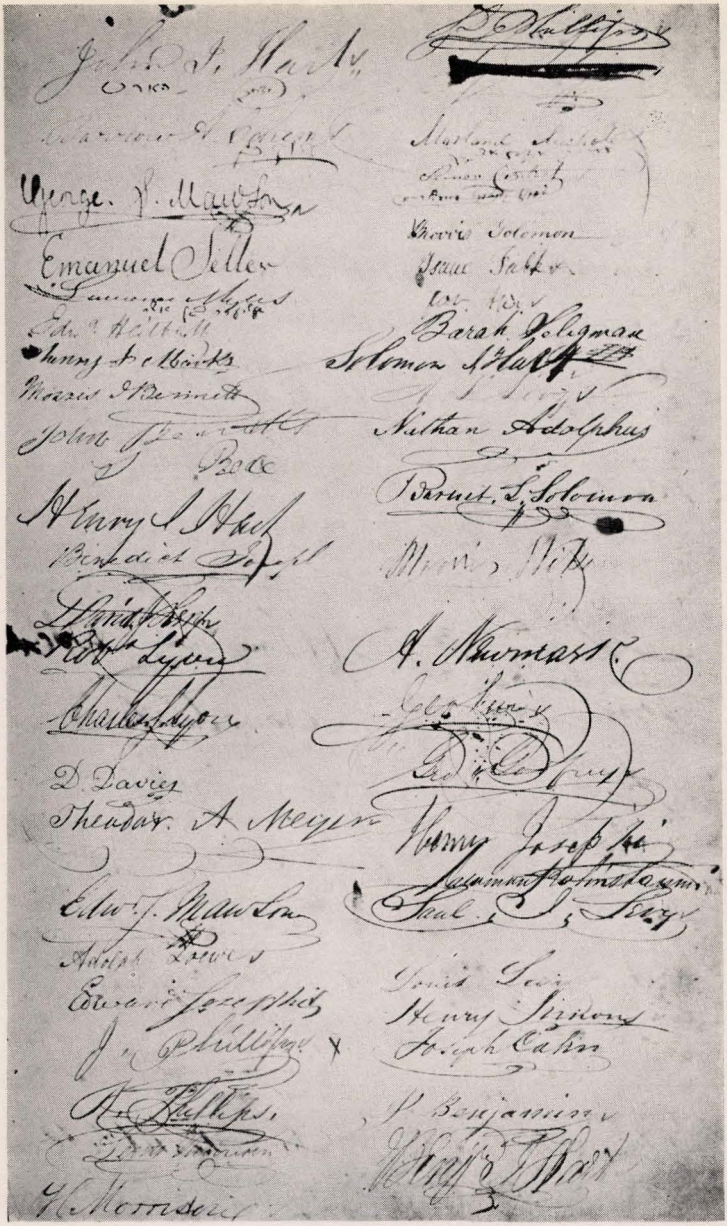
This is to certify that the foregoing is a true Copy of the Constitution and By-laws of the Congregation Shearith Israel as passed unanimously at a General Meeting of the Elected held on Sunday the 20th day of February 5606 (1845)

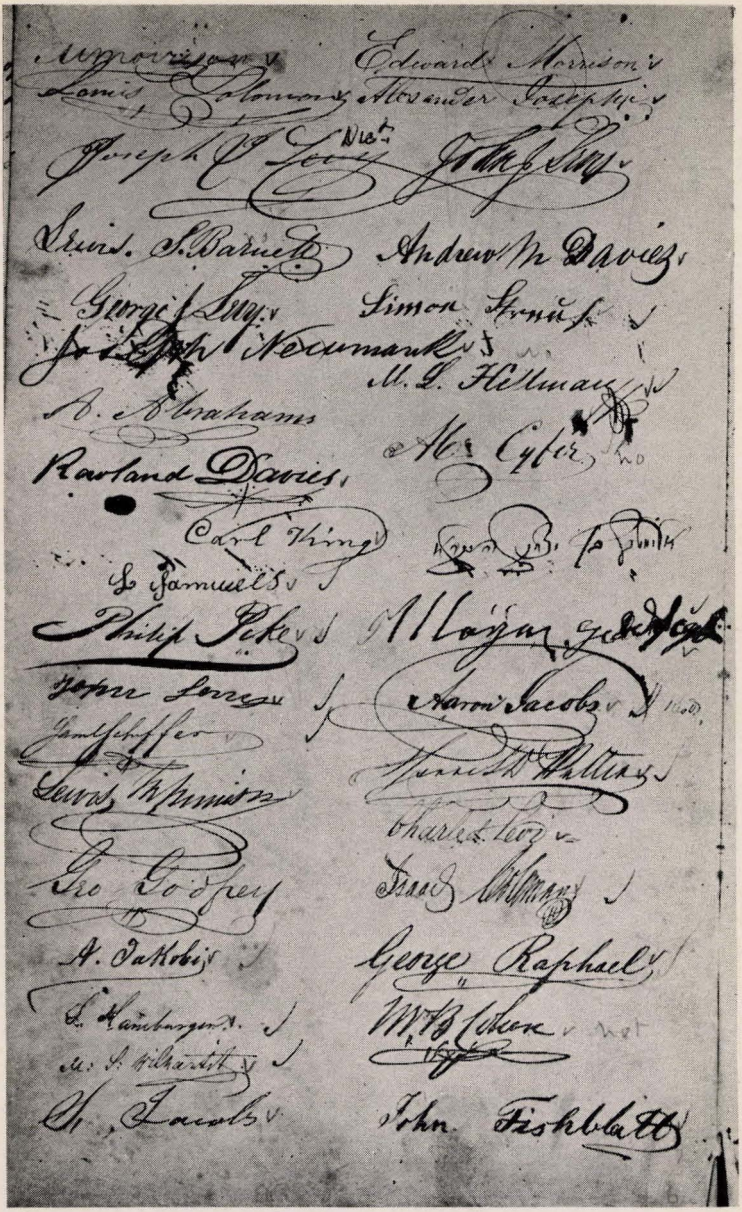
Isaacs S. Solomons
Secretary

Seal of the Congregation
N.Y.

CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL NEW YORK

THE FIRST CONSTITUTION AND ITS SIGNATORIES





John I. Hart once came down in his carriage to the Pearl Street Synagogue of the Russian Jews to say Kaddish on the anniversary of a parent's death. After the services he studied a chapter of the Torah and one of the Mishnah with Rabbi Abraham Joseph Ash and was so impressed with the latter's knowledge that he persuaded his friend, Sampson Simson of Shearith Israel, to contribute $3,000 towards the building of a synagogue edifice. Rev. Isaacs participated in the dedication of the Greene Street Synagogue of B'nai Jeshurun in 1851, and on more than one occasion the congregations helped one another by having their rabbis fill the pulpit when the regular incumbent was absent or ill.

In 1851 the first men's organization, the Hebrew Mutual Benefit and Burial Society of Congregation Gates of Prayer, was founded with John I. Hart as president. In 1853 the congregation took out life insurance for its rabbi, maintained out of its revenues. When the noted New Orleans philanthropist, Judah Touro, died in 1854, his will contained a bequest of $3,000 to Congregation "Shangarai Tefilla" of New York; in recognition of this the congregation established a Touro charity fund of $100 a year, and had its trustees accompany Touro's funeral procession to his burial place in Newport.

In December, 1854, the congregation faced its first serious financial crisis. The congregational revenues were not large, amounting to about $5,000 a year. Under these circumstances it was but natural that it could do but little to discharge the indebtedness it had incurred in erecting its building. The largest debt was the sum of $6,000 which had been advanced by a member, Abraham Kastor. Mr. Kastor seems eventually to have lost his patience and brought suit against the congregation. The trustees im-

mediately convoked the membership to devise means of extricating themselves from these difficulties. They met with an immediate response. Nearly five thousand dollars were furnished by voluntary loans; the balance was made up from the congregational funds, and in February, 1855 the loan was paid off and the suit ended. It is noteworthy that Kastor, despite this disagreement, continued to be a member of the congregation.

A dispute of a different kind occurred in the following year. Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs, being unable to live properly on the stipend furnished by the congregation, addressed a letter to it asking for an increase. A special meeting of the members was summoned, and by a vote of 41 to 5, his salary was raised to $2,000. Some of the members, however, regarded this action as illegal, because it was taken without consulting the trustees; the president and some of the trustees took offense, and high words were exchanged within the congregation. The upshot of the matter was the resignation of the entire board of trustees, and of the Parnass, John I. Hart. Louis Levy again became president, serving until his voluntary retirement in 1859.

When Central Park was created by the City of New York in 1856, its grounds included the tract on 105th Street which had been acquired by the congregation for burial grounds in 1847. This left Shaaray Tefila without any cemetery of its own; accordingly in March of that year, after B'nai Jeshurun had purchased a tract of land in Cypress Hills, the congregation bought part of it from its parent congregation for $3,000. The two congregations decided to administer the burial ground together, and by agreement a committee was formed composed of representatives from each. In 1859 they spent together the sum

of $2,675 for a "Metaher house," a building which provided a place for washing and preparing the bodies for burial and a chapel for holding funeral services.

On June 30, 1856, the congregation held a meeting to pass rules and regulations for the cemetery, an action which precipitated another crisis over authority in the congregation. The president, Louis Levy, refused to remain at the meeting on the ground that such regulations were the prerogative of the trustees, and his place in the chair was filled by another of the trustees, Joseph Aden, who was more amenable to persuasion and who presided so ably that the meeting passed off without further friction.

The preamble to the regulations began with the Hebrew passage: "May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead" (Ruth 1:8). It then goes on: "With all the religious duties with which Israelites are engaged, there are none they obey with more earnestness and solemn importance than the rite of burying the dead and seeing the mortal tabernacle enclosed in its tenement of clay. Not alone do they by these unselfish acts perform a great religious, moral and social obligation but the very acts are beneficial to those engaged in such solemn rites; for on those occasions they learn to untomb the faded past, to reawaken bygone scenes and to illuminate the gloom by the spirit-light of other days. In all ages and every clime have these acts been strictly regarded, and by no denomination with greater devotion than by the Hebrews."

The charter itself drew up minute regulations as to the sale and disposal of lots; among other things it prohibited any epitaph which was contrary to the Jewish faith or the burial of an apostate, a heretic or a suicide. In August of the same year the congregation reserved the right of burial to its own members; but three years

later, under pressure of financial stringency, it voted to sell lots to any purchaser.

In 1858 Benjamin M. Davis, the Shammas of the congregation, died suddenly, and the congregation voted to pay an annual stipend to his widow. The new incumbent was Isaac Bildersee, who served for the next seventeen years.

Shaaray Tefila was one of the constituent members of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, which was formed in 1859 to protect the interest of the Jews both home and abroad. From its beginnings to its merger with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in 1878 the congregation actually elected two delegates to the Board. The first president, Henry I. Hart, a member of Shaaray Tefila, served from 1859 to his death in 1863; another member, Benjamin I. Hart, was president from 1871 to 1874, while Myer S. Isaacs was the Board's first secretary, its last president and its historian. Other delegates from Shaaray Tefila were: Lewis M. Morrison; Joseph Heine; Lawrence Myers; Henry Josephi; Simon Sternberger; Alfred Benjamin; Benjamin J. Levy; Samuel Levy. In 1862, when the Board was urging the appointment of Jewish chaplains upon President Lincoln, the congregation subscribed $71.50 towards the maintenance of Dr. Arnold Fischell in Washington to act as a voluntary chaplain to the Jewish soldiers there.

Aside from this notice, there is little reference in the congregational minutes to the events of the Civil War. Its chief effect on the congregation was a straitening of its finances because of the uncertainty of the times. A still more important circumstance was the fact that the Wooster Street location was no longer central for the Jewish community. Many members were moving further uptown;

being Orthodox Jews, they would not ride on the Sabbath, and hence were constrained to sever their connection with the congregation. By April 20, 1862, matters were so serious that the trustees presented a gloomy report to the membership. The congregational indebtedness had grown to $18,000; of more than 200 members, scarcely 125 were paying contributors; the attendance at services had declined because the location of the synagogue was no longer central. The rabbi wrote a letter, embodying the same views and suggesting that many of his friends would join the congregation if its synagogue was more central. For some months, however, no action was taken.

During this period the congregation changed its presidents at frequent intervals. Louis Levy was succeeded in 1859 by George Godfrey, who remained in office only a year, when he was followed by Edward Josephi. In 1861, Josephi and Henry I. Hart received a tie vote; the former then withdrew and the latter was elected, but resigned after two days. Josephi again took office, but relinquished the leadership to take a trip to California. He returned on the steamer *Golden Gate*; on July 7, 1862, a terrible fire destroyed the vessel, and Josephi was among the victims who perished. The congregation sorrowfully awaited the arrival of his remains, and on March 13, 1863, held public obsequies for him, which were well attended by the community and in particular by the trustees of B'nai Jeshurun.

In October, 1862, Barnett L. Solomon was elected president. With his assumption of office a new spirit began to prevail in the congregation. He was elected without opposition year after year and the trustees, too, began to serve for longer terms. The congregational affairs were settled with less debate. The discussion over moving to a new site was settled on November 20, of the same year,

when the congregation voted to sell the synagogue and move uptown. A committee appointed to seek a new site reported on April 8, 1863, in favor of taking a lease on lots on the north side of 34th Street, between 6th and 7th Avenues. The congregation voted to do so as soon as they had raised the sum of $16,000.

By the beginning of June the sum needed had been raised and the congregation prepared to lease the property. In the meantime B'nai Jeshurun congregation, which also desired to move uptown, had closed a deal with the owners for the same lots which Shaaray Tefila had been seeking and prepared to build its new synagogue there. Thereupon, on June 7, they wrote to the latter congregation, proposing a consolidation. Shaaray Tefila, however, was outraged that B'nai Jeshurun had gotten ahead of it, and after considering the proposition for two weeks, decisively rejected it.

The congregation then decided, while waiting to find a suitable location, to move to temporary quarters uptown. In 1864 it leased the Armory Building at 36th Street and Broadway, and proceeded to fit it up as a synagogue in time to occupy it in the fall of the year. The consecration took place on September 23. Just before they moved into their new quarters, they revised the by-laws to increase the board of trustees to seven and to create the office of vice-president. George Godfrey was the first to occupy that post; his successor, Arthur L. Levy, served from 1865 to 1875.

3. THE BROADWAY SYNAGOGUE (1864–1869)

The removal of the congregation from the old synagogue on Wooster Street marked the end of the first period of the congregation's history. The older generation, brought up to Orthodoxy, familiar with the language of the prayers and all the ancient customs, had not died out, but it was diminishing in numbers and importance. Their children were less familiar with the "Jüdischkeit" of their parents, and were becoming impatient at the length of the services and with the ancient forms. New members were joining, mostly German Jews or their children, bringing new ideas into congregational life. The Reform Movement, under the leadership of rabbis such as Drs. Einhorn, Gottheil and Kohler, was making great strides, depleting the ranks of Orthodox Jewish congregations. New Jewish institutions were being created, and the synagogue was no longer the focus of all the community interests. Hence, in the years that were to come, Shaaray Tefila was to experience the beginnings of congregational religious education, an increase of congregational functionaries, and a struggle over changes in the ritual that lasted for thirty years.

Early in 1865 the congregation decided that the Hazan needed the services of an Assistant Reader instead of the former voluntary aid which was increasingly difficult to obtain. Five candidates presented themselves, and on February 19, 1865, Rev. Herman Philips was elected at a salary of $1,250 (later $1,800). He proved acceptable to the congregation, except for the fact that he could not chant the portion from the Torah; this problem was set-

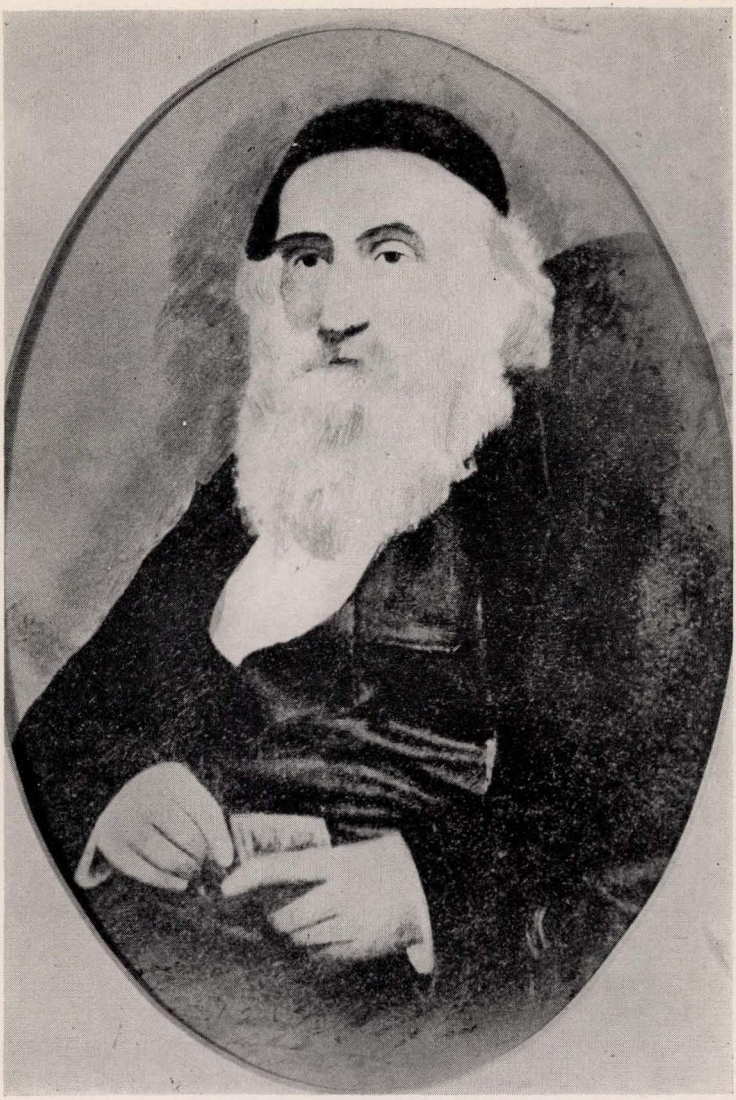
tled a couple of years later by using part of his salary to pay a Baal Kore.

In April of the same year Shaaray Tefila received a signal honor when its Hazan was chosen as one of the two ministers to participate in the memorial services for President Lincoln.

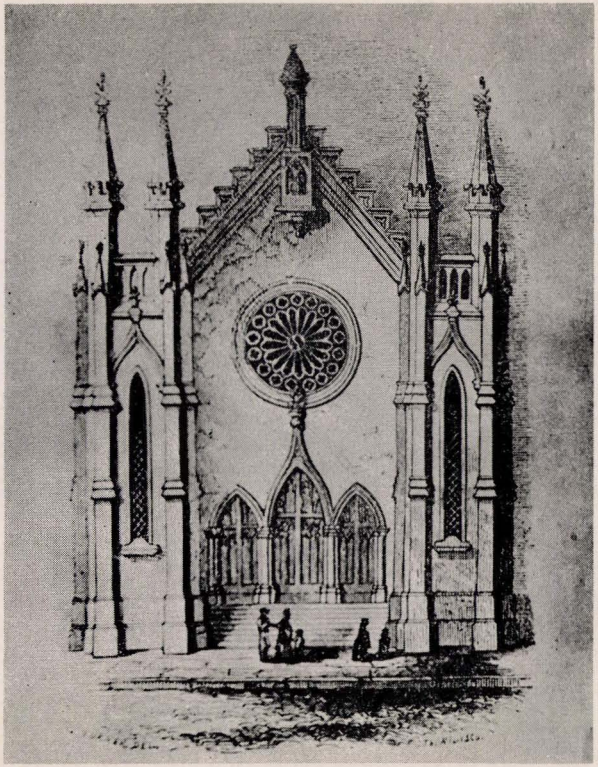
The year 1865 also saw the beginnings of the congregation's religious school, which met on Sundays and one weekday. The first session was held on October 15. For the first year it was under the supervision of Rev. Isaacs; then it was reorganized and Mrs. Fanny (Aaron N.) Cohen became its principal. There was a register of 140 children, necessitating the services of eleven teachers, all of whom served voluntarily.

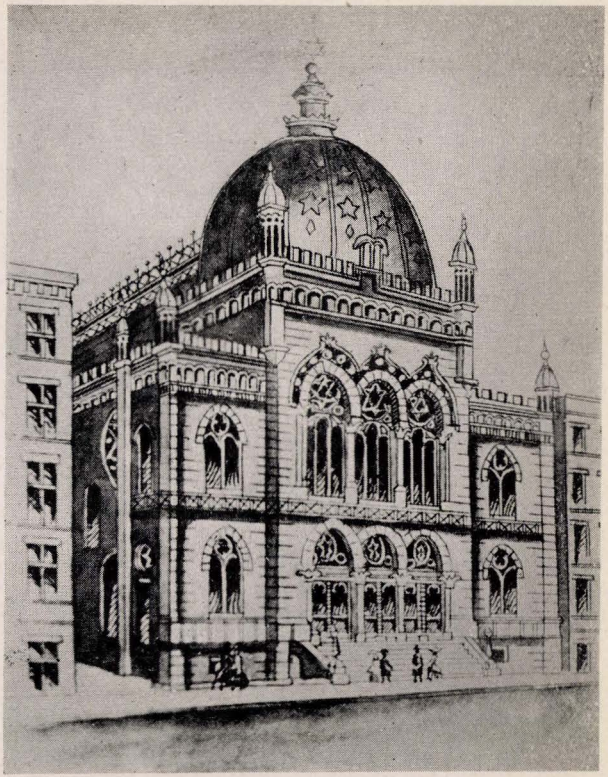
In the following year the first move to change the ritual of the congregation was made. On December 30, a committee of six was appointed, including the Hazan, to consider what changes in the ritual, if any, might be needed. It was two years, however, before the committee was ready to report. When Maimonides College was founded by Rev. Isaac Leeser in 1867, the congregation showed its interest by establishing a scholarship there; Ignatz Klein, an inmate of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, was its first and only beneficiary.

In fact, the chief concern of the congregation at this time was the erection of a new synagogue. After months of search, a committee finally, in November, 1866, reported in favor of buying lots on the north side of 44th Street, 250 feet west of Sixth Avenue. Three weeks later the sum of $67,000 had been raised toward a building fund; in all, about $150,000 were spent for the new synagogue. A building committee was appointed, consisting of the trustees and six members of the congregation: John



JOHN I. HART
First President





THE SYNAGOGUES ON WOOSTER STREET AND FORTY-FOURTH STREET

M. Davies; John D. Phillips; Lawrence Myers; Benjamin I. Hart; Rafael Keiler; Emanuel Bamberger. The architect chosen was Henry Fernbach, who had just designed Temple Emanu-El at 43rd Street and Fifth Avenue. The building had a seating capacity of 400. Since the building faced south, the architect was in favor of putting the ark on the north wall of the building, which would have made the work of building simpler; but after a prolonged discussion and several shifts of opinion, the congregation decided to retain the traditional orientation, so that the worshippers could still face east. The cornerstone of the new edifice was laid on April 2, 1868, and a little over a year later, on May 11, 1869, the completed synagogue was formally consecrated.

The keys of the synagogue were presented to the president by Leopold Cohn, as chairman of the building committee. In accordance with Jewish tradition, seven circuits were made bearing the Torahs, at each of which an appropriate prayer or psalm was recited. Professor Edward Woolf composed special music, and Rev. Isaacs delivered the consecration address.

In the meantime, on December 27, 1868, the committee on ritual made its report. It suggested a number of minor changes, all in the nature of making the services somewhat more decorous. Thus mourners were to remain in their seats instead of coming forward to recite the Kaddish. The congregation was to pray silently and follow the Hazan in his reading; no one was to enter or leave during the reading of the Torah and during the sermon. The prayer for the government was to be said in English; a sermon was to be given on every Sabbath and festivals; and each service was to close with a benediction in English. The other proposals reduced the number of Piyutim, or

liturgical pieces, and provided for a more decorous rendering of the prayers. The congregation adopted all these recommendations, rejecting but one other, which attempted to regulate the Bar Mitzvah service.

During this short period of the congregation's history, most of the former trustees continued to function. The new names that appear are those of Simon Sternberger, Emanuel Bamberger and Leopold Cohn.

4. THE 44TH STREET SYNAGOGUE (1869–1894)

The new building of the congregation was justly regarded as one of the most imposing edifices of the city. Its massive, swelling dome, surmounted by a six-pointed star, its minarets, its broad ascending staircase, and its high windows, as viewed from the street, imparted a feeling of strength and solidity. The chief feature of the interior was the Ark, a massive structure of walnut and oak wood, richly carved, inlaid and gilded, and reaching high toward the ceiling. The arrangements of the building were still Orthodox; the Almemar was placed in the center, surrounded by benches for the choir, and the auditorium was still reserved for men and the gallery for women. In all there were about 400 seats, nearly double the capacity of the Wooster Street Synagogue.

The first business of the congregation on acquiring its new synagogue was the arrangement of seats for its members. As far as possible they were given locations which corresponded to those which they had had in the Wooster Street Synagogue. A sale of seats was also held, which realized about $80,000.

The congregation began, too, to take up seriously the matter of religious education. In October, 1869, they elected their first board of education: E. Morrison, S. Rothschild, Jr., Ellis Joseph, Louis Levenson and Henry Sidenberg. After some discussion, the sum of $500 was appropriated for the annual needs of the school.

A more pressing problem was that of the congregational finances. There was a mortgage of $75,000 on the new building. The budget of the congregation had risen

to more than $30,000 and the income from the members more than once fell short of it. The congregation's functionaries included its rabbi, Isaacs, its reader, Phillips, and an assistant reader, E. M. Myers; it employed a paid choir, a sexton and a secretary. A special committee on finances reported at a meeting on January 30, 1870:

> "That in the opinion of the committee the congregation imperatively needs an increase in membership; the efforts at reform elsewhere introduced demand of us, as an orthodox congregation desiring to maintain Orthodoxy, to make to our present service the addition of another able and eloquent lecturer who can maintain and advocate the service and the faith so long and steadily carried out in our congregation."

This suggestion was not immediately acted upon. Instead the congregation managed to balance its budget by levying an extra assessment upon its seatholders. In 1871 it received an increase in funds by making a consolidation agreement with the Beth-El congregation. Beth-El had been organized in 1853; it was at that time worshipping at 248-250 West 33rd Street and had a membership of 56. Nearly all of its membership joined Shaaray Tefila in a body; its reader, Rev. H. Saft, became the assistant reader of the congregation in place of E. M. Myers, who had resigned.

In the meantime, Myer S. Isaacs. after a term of nearly thirteen years, resigned as clerk of the congregation because of the pressure of other duties. He was succeeded by his brother, Isaac S. Isaacs, who held the office for about ten years. In 1872 the Shammas, Isaac Bildersee, died, and was succeeded by his son, Barnett Bildersee.

By 1873 the need for an additional rabbi became increasingly evident to the congregation. Rev. Samuel M.

Isaacs was growing old; the burdens of the congregation became exceedingly heavy. He offered to resign more than once, but the congregation thought too highly of him to permit him to retire. However, they felt that he needed assistance in his work, and in the summer of 1873 Lawrence Myers and Benjamin J. Hart went to England to seek an "able and eloquent rabbi" as proposed three years before. The Chief Rabbi recommended to them the name of Rabbi Frederick de Sola Mendes.

Dr. Mendes had been born in 1850, at Montego Bay, Jamaica, British West Indies. His father, Abraham Pereira Mendes, was a noted rabbi who served in Jamaica, England, and at the old Jewish congregation in Newport, Rhode Island. Frederick Mendes had been educated at the Northwick College for Jewish studies which his father had founded, and completed his secular education at London University and various institutions in Germany. He was at that time a preacher at the New Synagogue, Great St. Helen's, London.

Lawrence Myers visited this synagogue on Yom Kippur of 1873, and was so impressed with the sermon that he asked Dr. Mendes to meet with him and Benjamin I. Hart. The result was that Dr. Mendes was invited, at the congregation's expense, to come and deliver two lectures. The congregation was pleased with his eloquence and appointed a committee, including its rabbi, to pass upon the qualifications of Dr. Mendes as assistant preacher. Their recommendation was favorable, and on January 4, 1874 he was unanimously elected assistant rabbi. His sermons commanded respectful attention, and the attendance at worship began to show improvement.

Despite the new interest created by the arrival of Dr. Mendes, the finances of the congregation were still in a

woeful state. The chief cause seems to have been the depression that followed the panic of 1873; the members, hard hit by the decline in their businesses, were slow in the payment of their dues; the amount of the offerings steadily declined, and membership suffered through resignations. Again Rev. Isaacs undertook to help out the congregation, and in a sincere and moving letter written in January, 1876, professed his willingness to retire if the congregation would provide that he be not left dependent in his declining years.

The congregation refused this offer, and Rev. Isaacs still continued active for another year until his final retirement in January, 1877. The financial problem was solved in another and more novel fashion. The congregation decided to hold a mammoth fair at Masonic Temple toward the end of the year. Over $8,000 were realized in this venture, and the congregation was able to balance its budget. Moreover, many members were inspired to cancel the bonds of the congregation which they were holding, and the congregation was enabled to reduce its mortgage by $10,000.

In the meantime Shaaray Tefila was still engaged in modernizing its ritual. On March 12, 1876, the committee submitted further recommendations, reducing the amount of chanting and shortening the services by omitting many of the Piyutim; the service as a whole, however, remained Orthodox. A little later the Bar Mitzvah boys were permitted to give a short prayer in English before the En Kelohenu. On December 16, 1877, the congregation voted to abolish the office of reader and to combine the offices of Shammas and Baal Kore; this ended the ministry of Phillips and led to the resignation of Barnett Bildersee, who was unable to read from the Torah. His

successor was Rev. M. A. Schreiber, who remained for only a year, when he was succeeded by Rev. Charles Seiniger.

When Isaacs retired in 1877, Dr. Frederick de Sola Mendes became the acknowledged religious leader of the congregation. The two men were of different temperaments; Isaacs had been a fiery champion of the old ways, while Mendes was more inclined to consider the needs of the newer generation, and to proceed by steps in the reformation of the services. In April of the same year the ritual committee made still more elaborate proposals for changes in the ritual. The chanting of many of the prayers was replaced by a simple reading, and nearly all of the Piyutim were omitted. The names of those who were called up to the Torah were no longer to be announced by the Baal Kore; instead there was a call by number: "Let the third, fourth, or fifth person, etc., arise." The reason for this change was that a former reader had been accustomed to supplement his mentionings of the names by a nod and a pointing forefinger, which was regarded by the congregation as indecorous. The Haftarah was henceforth to be read in English, and the Musaf service was shortened and simplified.

The year 1878 saw the passing of two figures who had played a large part in the history of the congregation. Barnett L. Solomon, the Parnass, relinquished his office under pressure of age, after having served for sixteen years. He was succeeded by Benjamin I. Hart. On May 20 of the same year Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs died, after a service of more than thirty years with the congregation; his widow was voted an annual stipend of a thousand dollars.

Benjamin I. Hart served as president until 1880, when

he was succeeded by E. M. Angel. The latter was succeeded in turn by David Davies in 1888, who remained in office until 1891, when he relinquished it to Solomon B. Solomon, the son of Barnett L. Solomon. During this entire period the chief concerns of the congregation were the problems of finances and the ritual. In fact, the two were closely connected; for the proponents of changes were constantly urging that it was necessary to attract new members by modernizing the services.

Prior to 1878 the trustees had occasionally met the congregation's money needs by advancing money from their own purses against future collections. Barnett L. Solomon, who ruled the Board of Trustees lovingly but firmly, had always felt that the welfare of the congregation was the personal responsibility of the Board and himself. When faced by a deficit, he would smile blandly all around the Board and say, "Well, gentlemen, I suppose we will have to put our hands in our pockets again"; and he never failed to meet with a response.

On December 29, 1878, however, the Board was forced to appeal to the congregation to meet a deficit of about $3,000. More than $1,800 was raised then and there and the officers were soon able to report that due to the liberality of the membership the future of the congregation was bright. In 1879 there is mention of a Ladies Dramatic Association which gave a performance and raised the sum of $1,200. In 1880 a still more successful fair was held at the Metropolitan House, and more than $18,000 was raised. The trustees watched carefully over the congregational funds; they managed to reduce the expenses of the congregation sufficiently to be able to have a small surplus, even though the salary of the rabbi was increased.

The struggle for Reform persisted, strengthened by

the fact that such congregations as B'nai Jeshurun and Rodeph Sholom had already made innovations. As early as 1878, some of the members had begun an agitation for a changing of the seating arrangements from seats to pews. In November of that year it was decided to confer with Rabbi Mendes as to the advisability of the change. No action was taken at the time, so apparently the idea was dropped. A modern note appeared in the congregational history in 1879, when for the first time the ladies of the congregation were invited to attend a special meeting on January 2, which was to be featured by a lecture by Dr. Mendes. As it happened, the weather on that day was so inclement that it had to be postponed until the 7th, when it passed successfully.

In 1880 the agitation for Reform was renewed, and a number of members signed a request for a meeting to consider necessary changes in the services. A committee was chosen to meet and report; it consisted of Louis Friedlander, chairman; Joseph C. Levi, secretary; Abraham Levy; Julius Sands; M. Levenson; Sol. Weill; Julian L. Myers; Charles Adler; and Jules A. Menken. They met with Dr. Mendes, who by this time had come to the conclusion that at least some steps in the direction of Reform should be taken. On May 12, the committee made its first report. It stated that the only way to improve the condition of the congregation was to have a substantial reform in the services; accordingly it proposed a change from seats to pews (which meant the end of the separation of men and women) the introduction of an organ, and the creation of an exclusively Jewish choir of male and female voices.

The congregation voted to wait for a month before deciding on these proposals. It met again on June 18, and

proceeded to vote; and as the names of those who voted are explicitly recorded, it can be seen that at this time the older, more conservative part of the membership succumbed to the newer and more radical group. The resolution on the need for reform passed by a vote of 18-10; the change to pews was adopted by a vote of 19-13, and that for an organ and a mixed choir by 21-11. By these votes the congregation definitely abandoned the viewpoint of Orthodox Judaism and took its rank among the Conservative congregations.

The new arrangements were put into effect as promptly as possible. During the same year an organ was installed on a rental basis, and the following year it was purchased at a cost of $3,000. An enlarged choir was engaged, under the direction of the cantor. E. M. Angel made the congregation a sufficient loan to provide for the change from seats to pews, and in the course of this change the Almemar was moved from its central position to one directly in front of the Ark. The seating of men and women together was found by the rabbi to improve the orderliness of the services; for, as he related many years later, husband and wife had seen each other all week and had talked themselves out, so they would sit quietly during the services; while if some of the men or some of the women would meet at the Sabbath services, their eagerness to talk would seriously interfere with the calm necessary for proper worship.

In July, 1880, the congregation met again to consider changes in the ritual. The first proposal, that a part of the services should be read in English, was passed with an amendment that the choice of these portions should be left to Dr. Mendes. The second proposal, that all repetitions of the prayers should be abolished, and the third,

that the portion from the Torah be read, instead of chanted, were also carried. On the other hand, the proposals of the committee for introducing a three-year cycle for the services and for censoring the prayers "so that nothing should be read . . . which we would not dare to put into the hands of our young daughters and sisters" was voted down. The congregation was willing to have the Sabbath service abridged, but was unwilling to do the same for the holiday service. Most striking of all was the adoption of a resolution to do away with all public offerings at the services. This resolution was not put into effect, for the congregation could ill afford the loss of the revenue from offerings; its implementation was left to the discretion of the trustees and was postponed from year to year.

At this point the meeting ran into a constitutional snag. In order to make the resolutions effective, it was necessary to amend the by-laws of the congregation. The first change was accordingly voted on, and received a majority of sixteen votes to twelve; but when it was pointed out that a two-thirds majority was necessary to change the by-laws, the motion had to be reconsidered, and it barely scraped through by a vote of 17-8. After that, the remaining by-laws were rapidly amended with little opposition. During the same year the priestly blessing ("Duchenen") was abolished. In 1881 the confirmation of boys and girls was begun; by that time the congregation was so used to reforms that the innovation was not even contested.

In 1879 the congregation joined the Union of American Hebrew Congregations which had been founded a few years previously by Isaac Mayer Wise. It did not feel that this was a violation of its own Orthodox and later

Conservative principles, for at that time the Union was intended for all American Jewish congregations, irrespective of their beliefs and ritual. Shaaray Tefila remained in the Union until 1884, when it withdrew over a dispute. In the following year a committee chosen to review the dispute recommended that it rejoin, but no action was taken, probably because the congregation did not wish to add to its expenditures.

When the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York was founded in 1886 as a Conservative rabbinical seminary, the congregation gave it its hearty support. It appointed Dr. Mendes, its rabbi, as its representative to the Seminary Association, and while at first it was cautious about assuming pecuniary responsibilities it voted a subvention of $100 in 1887. In the same year the president of the congregation proudly pointed out that Shaaray Tefila had the only religious school in New York City to supply the Seminary with students. The Seminary was the object of the congregation's attention for several years, but gradually it came to be regarded as too conservative for a congregation that was again beginning to consider reforms in its services.

On May 24, 1889, the congregation met to consider a new series of proposals of the ritual committee in reference to the reading of the Torah. The chief discussion was on the question of the amount to be read on each Sabbath. It was felt that it would take too long to read the entire portion; but whereas the committee favored choosing a selection from each portion, the congregation decided on a triennial cycle of reading which Dr. Mendes was empowered to draw up. The number of persons called up to the Torah was reduced to three, but might be increased on some special occasion; the traditional Haf-

tarahs were replaced by Biblical passages selected by the rabbi; the blessing for the coming month, as well as a portion of the Adoration, were henceforth to be read in English.

New organizations now began to enter the congregational life. A Young Folk's Association was formed in 1889, and in the following year Dr. Mendes founded the Shaaray Tefila Sisterhood of Personal Service, which from that time on directed the religious and philanthropic endeavors of the ladies of the synagogue. In the same year the rabbi founded the Shaaray Tefila Journal, a monthly publication supported by subscription and donations by individuals of the congregation.

The congregation now became increasingly aware of the importance of moving to a new location. The drift of the Jewish population northward had become so marked that the 44th Street Synagogue, which had been in a favorable spot twenty years before, was now too far away for many worshippers. Again the congregation began to notice a decline in attendance and a loss in membership; the attendance in the religious school fell to half its former size. The finances of the congregation were encountering great difficulties; only part of the salary of $5,000 set for the rabbi could be definitely paid, and it was gradually reduced to about $4,200. With the strictest economy, the budget could not be met, and the congregation faced the danger of dissolution.

By 1891 the need for removal to a better location was so apparent that on November 11 the congregation definitely authorized the sale of the old synagogue and the choice of a new location; the new area of its activity was to be west of Central Park, between 72nd and 96th Sts., where at that time there were no large synagogues. David

Davies, Louis Levenson and Julius Sands were appointed a committee to select a suitable site. In 1892 the president was urging the congregation to speed the removal in order to bring back to the congregation "its old days of glory." In 1893 lots were purchased on the south side of 82nd Street, 150 feet east of Amsterdam Avenue; the architect chosen for the new structure was Arnold W. Brunner, a grandson of Barnett L. Solomon, and a great-grandson of John I. Hart. In the meantime, in May, 1892, the daily Minyan was discontinued, except on such occasions when it was especially desired by members for Yahrzeit. A second mortgage of $5,000 was added to the congregation's indebtedness; a branch religious school was established uptown at the Hotel Endicott with an initial enrollment of 50 children. The old edifice was vacated on April 22, 1893, and from then on until the completion of the new synagogue the congregation worshipped at Carnegie Hall.

On October 5, 1893, the cornerstone of the new edifice was laid. The participants in the ceremony were Dr. Kaufmann Kohler of Temple Beth-El, Dr. Gustave Gottheil of Temple Emanu-El, Dr. Mendes, Myer S. Isaacs and the Honorable Adolph L. Sanger. The cornerstone itself was laid by the venerable Barnett L. Solomon, father of President Solomon B. Solomon; his presence was the more notable as it was under his own presidency that the first removal of the congregation had taken place. Prominent among those present were the building committee, which consisted of the trustees and the following members: Joseph C. Levi, Leopold Gershel, Siegmund T. Meyer, Asher L. Phillips, Isaac S. Isaacs, Albert L. Cohn and the rabbi.

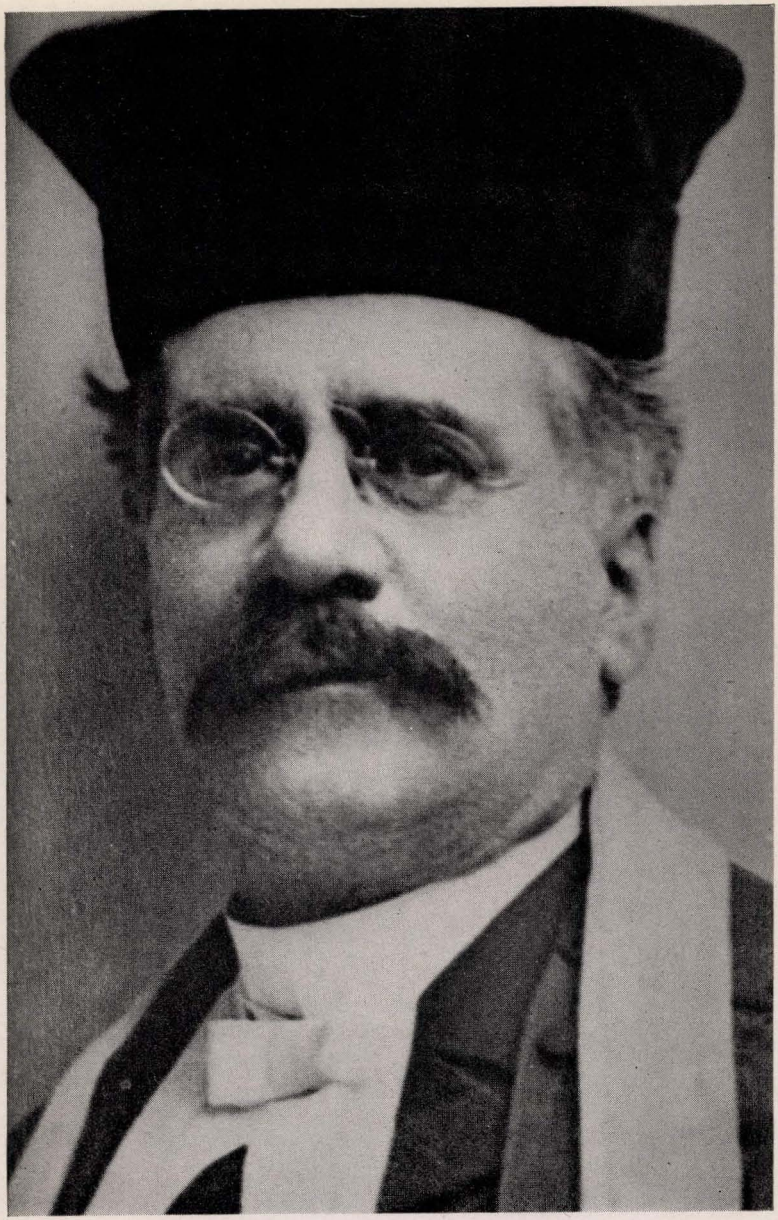
While the building was in progress, the president

suggested that the congregation further amend its ritual in order to attract the new element that lived near the proposed location. The committee again met to consider changes, and on March 25, 1894, Shaaray Tefila made sweeping changes in its services. The "callings up" to the Torah were definitely ended; henceforth only a Bar Mitzvah boy would be called to pronounce the benedictions. With this the system of offerings was definitely ended, though provision was made for donations on behalf of departed relatives at the services on Yom Kippur. The wearing of the Tallith, or prayer-shawl, was no longer compulsory, and was left to individual option. The number of scrolls of the Torah to be taken out was left to the discretion of the president and the rabbi. Except for the eve of Passover, the time of the evening services was changed to 8 P.M. The services on the second day of the festivals were not abolished, but were to be held in the Assembly Hall rather than in the main synagogue. All these changes called for a new prayerbook, and for the time the congregation had special rituals printed for its own use.

On April 13, 1894, the dedication of the new synagogue took place. Barnett L. Solomon again participated in the ceremony. The children of the religious school brought flowers and palms to lay upon the altar; beautiful little Beatrice Lewisohn carried the keys to the new edifice and presented them to the president. Dr. Gustave Gottheil preached the consecration sermon, and Dr. Mendes the consecration address.

During this period in the congregation history the office of secretary had been filled by Joseph A. Levy, who functioned until 1880; Sol. J. Levy, who remained for three months, and resigned because he was leaving town;

and Barnett Bildersee, who remained until his death in 1908. The vice-presidents, after 1875, were Benjamin I. Hart (1875-1876), Adolph Levy (1876-1883), David Davies (1883-1885), Barah Seligman (1885-1890), Julius Sands (1891), David Davies again (1891-1892) and Barah Seligman again (1892-94). The other new trustees during this period were H. Sidenberg, Jules A. Menken, Jacob S. Roeder, Leopold Gershel, A. S. Kaliski, William Reitlinger, A. H. Allen, Louis Levenson, Joseph S. Hart, William Vogel, Albert L. Cohn, Asher L. Phillips, Arthur S. Levy, Raphael Lewisohn, Isaac K. Cohn, Philip Kleeberg, Bernard Cohen and Charles Lewis.



REV. DR. F. DE SOLA MENDES



REV. DR. NATHAN STERN



RABBI HYMAN J. SCHACHTEL



REV. DR. BERNARD J. BAMBERGER

Other Rabbis of the Congregation

5. YEARS OF GROWTH (1894–1923)

Shaaray Tefila had now reached a permanent home; the years of its wanderings with the shift of the Jewish population were over. In its new location, on the West Side, it had become the chief synagogue, so that soon it was familiarly known as the West End Synagogue. From this time on there is no further suggestion of removal, but rather of growth and of development to meet the changes of the times.

While the exterior of the new building presented a great contrast to the 44th Street Synagogue, the interior was kept as much alike as possible. The beautiful Ark, the perpetual light, and most of the interior fittings were carefully transferred from the old building; the chief addition was a number of stained glass windows, which in course of time became memorials to departed members. The seating capacity of the floor and its gallery had reached 925; there was an Assembly Hall with a stage, and various rooms for classes and meetings. In constructing the edifice, the congregation had not raised a building fund, nor made loans, but had used the resources from the sale of its old building and its funds on hand, something unprecedented in synagogue building.

Soon after the removal to the new building the final step towards Reform Judaism was taken. The late Friday evening services were not an immediate success, and it was felt that this might be due to the nature of the ritual. Accordingly, the ritual committee examined the new Union Prayerbook which had been issued by the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1893 and 1895

and had been widely adopted by Reform congregations. While conforming in general to old forms of the prayers, it was felt to be somewhat too advanced; accordingly fourteen pages in Hebrew and English were added to it, and in this form it was recommended by the committee, which at that time consisted of Louis Levenson, Sol. B. Solomon, Joseph C. Levi, Isaac S. Isaacs, Arthur S. Levy and the rabbi. Public worship in the Temple, they said, must be of a nature attractive to our new members and our own young people; there must be a short Hebrew ritual, more English and responses and more simple music. The congregation agreed with the report, and on December 22, 1895, the Union Prayerbook was unanimously adopted by the congregation.

There remained, however, one more change before the transformation was complete. Rev. Charles Seiniger, who had been serving the congregation as Reader for the last eighteen years, was a representative of the old time Hazan (cantor). His rendition of the service had become unsatisfactory to many of the members, and eventually the board of trustees concurred with this view. They decided to seek for a new reader, and to put the matter before the congregation, which had just been empowered to elect a reader in place of the trustees. Their choice fell on Rev. Solomon Rappaport, then cantor of Temple Beth Elohim in Brooklyn. Seiniger, however, had his supporters, and his name was also placed in nomination. The result was one of the closest elections; Rappaport won by a single vote, 29 to 28. The choice was never regretted by the congregation. The services and choir were completely altered, and the change brought about a marked increase in attendance and interest at the services. The offices of

reader and sexton were now divorced, and Simon Natkins became Shammas of the congregation.

With the adoption of the Union Prayerbook and the modernization of the music, Shaaray Tefila's services were but little more conservative than that of other Reform Jewish congregations. In the coming years they came closer to the ritual of the latter through small but steady changes. The amount of English in the services increased, and worship on the second days of the holidays disappeared. The wearing of hats, no longer entirely compulsory, became optional and finally disappeared; only the rabbis and cantor retained the traditional cap and Tallith while officiating at the services, while the officers on the platform wore hats until 1937.

Louis Levenson succeeded Sol B. Solomon as president in 1895, and after two years was succeeded by Isaac S. Isaacs, who served until his death at the end of 1906. Both presidents and trustees, during this period, wrestled seriously with problems of finance. Though the removal to a new location had brought back many old members and had attracted new ones, increasing the total membership from 105 to 166 in two years, the revenues of the congregation were far from satisfactory. The results of the depression of 1893 were still apparent, and congregational collections were slow. Again and again the trustees sought to reduce expenses; they trudged from door to door to win new members for the congregation. Again there were fund-raising affairs; in 1896 a theatre benefit raised more than $1,500; in 1899 a fair at Tuxedo Hall cleared more than $5,000, enough to lift the second mortgage. However, the old mortgage of about $75,000 remained, and the congregation had a floating indebtedness from year to year. In 1897 the members went so far as to

pass a resolution to abolish the paid choir and substitute volunteers, as well as to take up a collection during the services. The first resolution, however, was never carried out; the trustees felt that the beauty of the services must be retained, and in the end they found ways and means to keep the choir.

Ultimately, in 1900, the tide began to turn. Prosperity began to return to the country and to the congregation. The membership began to rise, year after year; it was 240 in 1901, 300 in 1905, 380 in 1913, and 500 by 1916. Before the end of Isaacs' term of office, the floating debt had been liquidated, and the president had been hailed as the one who had rescued the congregation from financial distress. His successor, Louis I. Haber, initiated the plan of setting aside some of the congregation's revenue each year as a sinking fund to pay off the mortgage.

On October 26, 1895, almost fifty years after the first recorded meeting of the religious association from which the congregation sprang, Dr. Mendes delivered a special sermon commemorative of the 50th anniversary of the congregation. A more formal ceremony took place in March, 1896, in which the participants were Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, at that time rabbi of the parent congregation B'nai Jeshurun, and Henry Morrison. In 1902 the congregation observed the silver anniversary of Dr. Mendes, with addresses by Rabbi Maurice H. Harris, Isaac S. Isaacs, Mrs. S. Henry Dessau, Mrs. Joseph C. Levi, Rev. Solomon Rappaport and the rabbi himself. Two years later, in 1904, Dr. Mendes was elected rabbi for life.

In 1906 Rev. Solomon Rappaport died, and in 1907 the congregation chose as his successor Rev. Max Grauman, who was distinguished not only as a singer, but also

as a composer of synagogue music. The congregation suffered another loss in February, 1908, in the death of its clerk, Barnett Bildersee; he was succeeded by his son, Isaac Bildersee. In the same year the time of the congregational annual meeting was changed from December to October, thus combining it with the former annual meeting for the election of officers.

The prosperity of the congregation continued during the administration of Louis I. Haber and that of his successor, Morris A. Magner, elected in 1909. But it was not accomplished easily or automatically. It meant arduous work by president and trustees, watching over expenditures, bringing in new members, and even going out in a bitterly cold winter day to have the mortgage renewed. It was achieved by steady efforts on the part of the membership to raise additional revenue. In 1908 the mortgage was reduced to $70,000, largely through contributions of members and a fair given by the children of the religious school. In 1909 the ladies of the congregation raised some $1,100 to install electric lights in the synagogue, and this was accomplished at a cost of $1,900. The work done by the ladies was in fact so conspicuous that at the congregational meeting of that year the proposal was made that the ladies present be allowed to vote; when the president ruled that they were visitors and could not vote, he was sustained by a majority of only 40 to 39.

During this same meeting an event occurred which caused a considerable stir in the congregation. Nominations were being made for trustees; one of the names proposed was ruled out by the president on the ground that the nominee, although a seatholder, was not an elector according to the rules of the congregation. The nomina-

tion was withdrawn, but the ruling led to a bitter discussion which was only halted by appeals for harmony on the part of various leading members. It was felt, however, that it was unfair to deprive supporters of the congregation of the right to vote, and a few years later the annual notices of the congregational meetings contained the statement that it was the view of the trustees that all who contributed to the support of the congregation were to be regarded as members. Eventually, in 1917, the by-laws were revised, and all distinctions between members were swept away. In the meantime, in November, 1911, the trustees had made a further concession to the membership in providing that the standing committees of the congregation should be no longer composed exclusively of trustees, but should have in addition two members from the congregation at large. At the same time a special advisory committee was formed; it consisted of about fifteen members of the congregation, who were to consider all the needs of the Temple and make recommendations from time to time to the trustees.

With the growth of membership in these years the Temple, which at the beginning had appeared amply commodious, began to seem small. In 1912 new rows were added to the auditorium to provide 44 new seats; other arrangements in 1915 and 1916 placed 82 additional seats in the gallery and 55 in the auditorium. It became necessary to limit attendance on the fall holidays to the membership, which at that time was straining the capacity of the edifice. The enlargement of the school necessitated the instalment of rolling doors in the Assembly Hall as a means of creating new classrooms.

In 1914 the congregation celebrated the fortieth year of Dr. Mendes' services by giving him a special service

and a substantial purse. In June of the same year the sexton, Simon Natkins, died, and was succeeded by Charles Rosenthal, the present incumbent.

By 1915 the congregation began seriously to consider the need of acquiring another rabbi to assist Dr. Mendes, who was now well along in years. It took some time to persuade the congregation's rabbi of the need of an assistant, but once his consent was obtained, the trustees proceeded rapidly. Their choice fell on Dr. Nathan Stern, and it was promptly ratified at a meeting of the congregation in June. When a member asked why several candidates had not been presented, he received the reply that Shaaray Tefila had, in the cases of both Rev. Isaacs and Dr. Mendes, considered only a single candidate for the rabbinical office.

Nathan Stern was the first rabbi of the congregation to have an entirely American background. He had been born in New York City in 1878, had received his Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1901, and had studied both at the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Hebrew Union College, receiving his rabbinical diploma from the latter institution in 1904. He had served as rabbi at Wabash, Ind., Trenton, N. J., and Providence, R. I., where he had also been instructor in Hebrew and Biblical literature at Brown University. He assumed his duties at Shaaray Tefila in the fall of 1915, and was made associate rabbi the following year. His strong personality made him a leading figure in the New York rabbinate. Within the congregation he took charge of the religious school; he revived the Young Folks' League in 1919 and helped form the Mothers' Association in 1920.

On February 12, 1916, the congregation celebrated its 70th anniversary with a special service. The invocation

was delivered by Dr. Joseph Silverman of Temple Emanu-El and the benediction by Rabbi Maurice H. Harris of Temple Israel. Dr. Stern gave the oration of the day and there were addresses by various individuals representing the congregation: Morris Magner, the president; Mrs. Aaron N. Cohen, for the Ladies Benevolent Society; Mrs. Joseph C. Levi, for the "old guard"; Mrs. Max L. Levenson, for the Sisterhood; Falk Younker, for the Young Men's Hebrew Association; Sol. B. Solomon, the oldest trustee and beloved "Uncle Sol" of the congregation; Master Julian S. Levy, a descendant of John I. Hart, Barnett L. Solomon and Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs, representing the fifth generation of membership.

In 1920 Dr. Mendes reached the age of seventy, and retired after forty-six years of service; Dr. Stern, accordingly became rabbi of the congregation. In April of the following year, Isaac Bildersee resigned as secretary and was succeeded by the present clerk, Leon A. Rains. A new position of honorary secretary was created; the first to bear this title was Dr. Joseph Blum.

As Shaaray Tefila looked forward to its 75th anniversary, which was planned for 1921, it could look back on a score of years of steady accomplishment. Its financial position was secure; its mortgage had been reduced from $75,000 to $50,000; its income was ample to cover its expenditures and it possessed an ample backlog of savings. It was able to pay its rabbis handsome salaries, and to call to its service excellent singers and teachers. Its organizations were all active and flourishing; its membership was united and harmonious; the descendants of the older families and the newer arrivals of the past twenty years had blended into a unified congregation.

The 75th anniversary itself occupied three days, from February 11 to 13, 1921. On the first day, which was Friday, services were opened with an invocation by Rabbi Rudolph Grossman, of Rodeph Sholom Temple. The services were conducted by Cantor Grauman, and a hymn, "Our Beth-El," written by Dr. Mendes, was sung by the congregation. Addresses were delivered by Dr. Stern, by Rabbi Leo N. Franklin, president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and by Rabbi Jacob Kohn, as representative of the United Synagogue. The final benediction was given by Rabbi Maurice H. Harris.

On the following day, at the Sabbath morning service, the invocation was delivered by Rabbi Clifton Harby Levy, president of the New York Board of Ministers. After the services and hymn, the same as on the previous evening, an address was given by Dr. Mendes. Next on the schedule was a speech by Julian S. Levy; but as he was ill, he was replaced as representative of the fifth generation by his brother, Edgar A. Levy. The sermon of the day was given by Dr. Samuel Schulman, president of the Association of Reform Rabbis, and the benediction by Dr. Israel Goldstein, of B'nai Jeshurun.

The final day of the celebration, the 13th, was given over to the Religious School. Its chief feature was a pageant, "Bearers of Light," written by Dr. Stern and enacted by the children. Among the speakers was Rabbi Richard M. Stern, of New Rochelle, himself a graduate of the school.

The enthusiasm engendered by the 75th anniversary was so great that it inspired many of the members with

the hope of raising a sufficient sum to pay the mortgage that still remained upon the Temple. A number of contributions were made, but they fell a bare $3,000 short of the goal. The trustees, however, secretly decided in June, 1922, to make up the remainder of the sum from congregational funds on deposit, and the congregational meeting in October of that year was signalized by a dinner and followed by a ceremony of the burning of the mortgage. After more than sixty years of struggle, Shaaray Tefila was finally free of debt.

In 1921 the congregation rejoined the Union of American Hebrew Congregations after over thirty-five years of separation and from that time on its representatives began to take a part in the affairs of American Reform Jewry. In 1923 it rounded out its associations by forming a Temple Brotherhood, which later changed its name to the Men's Club.

During this period of the congregation's growth, it was served as vice president by Raphael Lewisohn (1894-1895), Arthur S. Levy (1895-1898), Louis I. Haber (1898-1907), Percival S. Menken (1907-1908), Charles Levinson (1908-1910), Daniel Katz (1910-1918) and William C. Popper (1918-1924). The other new trustees during this period were Drs. Joseph G. Wallach and John I. Hart, Marc Aronson, Tobias Lesser, Charles Sidenberg, Ignatius L. Lersner, Aaron Buchsbaum, George G. Benjamin, Falk Younker, Lewis M. Isaacs, Nathan Hirsch, Emanuel N. Campe, Frederick Moeller, William I. Levy, Felix Mirsch, Louis Firetag, Moses Crystal, Jacob Axelrod, Samuel Raisler, Martin Strauss, Joseph Sinsheimer, Edward Born, Dr. Joseph Blum, Moise L. Erstein, Fred D. Grotta, Simon Gottschall, J. Clarence Davies and Hugo Oppenheim.

6. YEARS OF MATURITY (1924–1945)

The Shaaray Tefila of 1924 presented a striking contrast to the beginnings of the congregation nearly eighty years before. Instead of a handful of members, there were hundreds; instead of a humble lodging on the second floor of a stable, there was a magnificent shrine. The earlier members had been tied together by mutual acquaintanceship and close kinship; the membership of 1924 had, in addition, a wealth of organizations that bound the members together for philanthropic, educational and social purposes. During this time and in the years to come a very important part of the congregation lay in its social side. An entertainment committee, which had become one of the standing committees of the Temple, provided annual dances, dinners, parties and dramatic performances at which the members gathered; distinguished lecturers were invited to speak, and open forums gave the opportunity for the expression of lay opinion. Only in one respect was the congregation lacking: in attendance at the weekly services. Only at the high holidays was the Temple completely filled. This condition, however, was equally the case in other synagogues, and was symptomatic of the general lack of interest in worship. Otherwise, however, the Temple was strong and flourishing; despite the fact that it was no longer the only West Side synagogue and had several rivals, it maintained its membership, as new adherents joined it to replace those taken away by death or removal. The building was free from debt and there were ample savings. This inherent strength was to serve Shaaray Tefila well in

meeting the difficulties that it was to encounter in the coming years.

Within the period from 1924 to 1945 the congregation took still further steps to widen the participation of the membership in the work of the congregation. In 1928 a synagogue council was created consisting of the rabbi, the president and two trustees as well as two representatives from each of the congregational organizations; this was to make recommendations to the trustees for the good and welfare of the congregation. In the following year a woman, Mrs. Isabella Crystal, was for the first time elected to the Board, and from that time on there has always been at least one woman trustee. At the same time President Harry N. Wessel, under whose able leadership, since 1929, the congregation has attained its pinnacle of financial success and harmonious cooperation, appealed to the membership, asking for volunteers to serve on committees; a nominating committee, instructed to nominate officers a month in advance of the annual meeting, so that members could make additional nominations, was brought into being. The size of the congregational committees and of the board of trustees grew, bringing more and more individuals into the administration of the congregation's affairs; but in all this period there is no record of any contest for office.

The chief concern of the congregation from 1924 was the expansion of its facilities so that it might render greater service to the community. The first need was for an additional cemetery, since the old burial ground was fast becoming filled. As early as 1922 the congregation had attempted to purchase a tract of land in Westchester County; but numerous difficulties intervened, and it was only in 1927, after prolonged and difficult negotiations,

that the congregation secured the ownership of a six acre tract at Valhalla, north of White Plains, which is named Mt. Eden. After a formal consecration in September, 1929, the congregation spent a number of years in clearing, grading and beautifying the grounds, and in obtaining the use of a chapel and administration building, and it was not until 1937 that Mt. Eden Cemetery was made finally available for use. Harry N. Wessel, as chairman of the cemetery committee and later as president, had largely been responsible for steering the congregation through the difficulties of acquiring and beautifying the new burial place; in recognition of this service he was presented, in 1935, with an elliptical plot in the cemetery, known as "The Garden."

Another great need was the expansion of the synagogue's facilities for education and recreation. The old Assembly Hall and its adjoining rooms were by this time entirely inadequate to provide for all the needs of the school and the congregation's organizations. In 1926 and 1928, the congregation purchased three plots to the west of the synagogue, with the idea that upon this area a suitable synagogue house might be erected. In the meantime the house immediately next to the synagogue was fitted up to serve as a meeting place for the Temple's youth organizations and its Boy and Girl Scout Troops.

As the years passed by, several of the prominent figures in the congregation made way for successors. In 1924 "Uncle Sol" Solomon, because of pressure of advanced years, resigned from the board of trustees after over forty years of service. Dr. Mendes, the rabbi emeritus, after having lived to see the congregation celebrate the golden jubilee of his services in 1923 and of his marriage in 1927, died in December of the latter year, almost 54

years after he first came to the congregation. Cantor Grauman became increasingly ill and feeble after 1928 and the congregation was forced to employ an assistant cantor, especially at the fall holidays. In November, 1933, he was succeeded by Siegfried Philip, the present cantor, and in the following month Cantor Grauman passed away.

In 1929 Morris A. Magner, who had served as president for twenty years, the longest term in the congregation's history, retired from the presidency; he remained on the board of trustees, and was made honorary president the same year. His successor was Harry N. Wessel, who had been vice president since 1924. J. Clarence Davies was then elected vice president; he served until his death in 1934, when he was succeeded by Isaac E. Rittenberg, the present incumbent.

Shaaray Tefila now passed through another period of financial difficulty. The depression that began in 1929 affected it as severely as it did religious institutions throughout the country. Within two years, instead of there being a full synagogue, nearly one third of the seats were unsold, with a loss of $11,000 in income. At first the congregation's strong financial position enabled it to meet the deficit by drawing upon its reserve funds, which had been built up under the astute guidance of its faithful treasurer, Martin Strauss. In fact, in 1931, when it became apparent that Dr. Stern was growing older and was feeling the burdens of his office, the congregation readily agreed to add to its ministers an assistant rabbi. Their choice fell on Rabbi Hyman Judah Schachtel.

Hyman Judah Schachtel was born in London, in 1907, and was brought to the United States at the age of 7. He studied at the Hebrew Union College and had just

been ordained. He immediately assumed charge of the religious school and participated in the services; and his engaging manner and oratorical ability soon made him popular in the congregation.

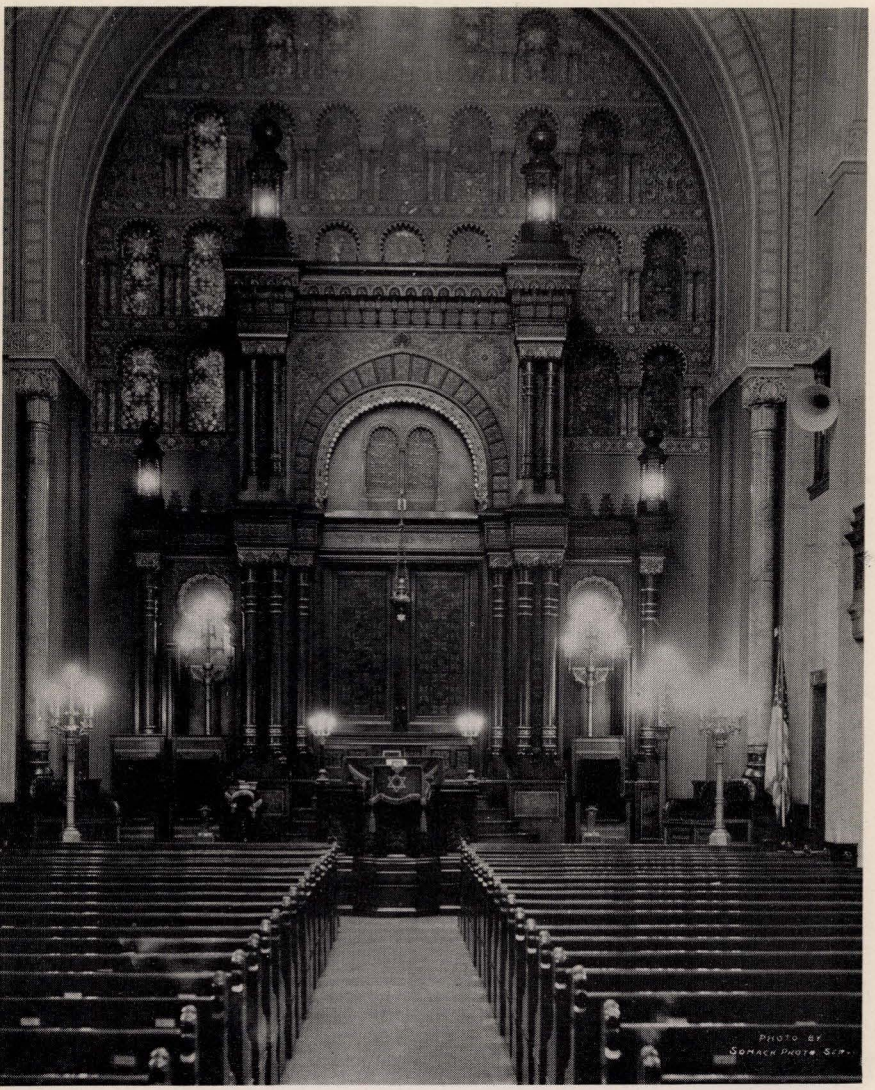
Despite the advent of Rabbi Schachtel and the excellence of the congregation's activities, the membership continued to fall off as more and more members withdrew. The low point was reached in 1933, when 453 seats out of 935 remained unsold. In 1934 an intensive membership campaign, headed by Isaac Rittenberg, brought about a moderate improvement, and this continued in the following years. However, the congregation was forced to reduce its budget by cutting the salaries of its rabbis, cantors and teachers. On the other hand, it looked forward to the time when the opening of its new cemetery would furnish it with an additional source of revenue; even in the years of depression it gathered a fund for the projected synagogue home, although it might take years before the final goal was achieved.

In 1935 Shaaray Tefila celebrated its 90th anniversary in a four day celebration lasting from February 14 to 17th. A handsome booklet was issued containing a history of the congregation by Dr. Stern. The program began on Thursday, the 14th, with a dramatic pageant, written by Rabbi Schachtel, on the theme of Israel, the Eternal People. At the Friday evening service on the next day, the invocation was given by Dr. Louis I. Newman of Rodeph Sholom and the benediction by Dr. Israel Goldstein of B'nai Jeshurun; addresses were given by Harry N. Wessel, Dr. Stern, Dr. Samuel Goldenson of Temple Emanu-El, President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and Hon. Joseph M. Proskauer. On Saturday morning, February 16, the speakers were Rabbi

Schachtel and Dr. Stephen S. Wise of the Free Synagogue. The closing day of the observance had three distinct features. In the morning there took place the special anniversary program of the religious school, with the presentation of gifts on the part of the various classes. In the afternoon Dr. Stern gave the broadcast on the Church of the Air hour of station WABC, his topic being "Sanity in a World of Strife." That evening, the congregation held a reception and dinner at the Waldorf-Astoria, at which the speakers were Walter E. Ernst, chairman of the anniversary celebration committee, Harry N. Wessel, the two rabbis, and Hon. Charles H. Tuttle, and Judge Irving Lehman. The only shadow on the joy of the congregation was the sudden death of Martin Strauss, for many years treasurer of the congregation and a pillar of strength in all its labors.

In October of the same year Rabbi Schachtel was made the associate to Dr. Stern, and was called upon to assume a larger part of the work of the congregation. In November, 1936, Simon Gottschall was made honorary secretary, while Daniel Katz was made honorary trustee for life.

A few months later Shaaray Tefila was called upon to face an experience that tested all the strength of the congregation. March 27, 1937, was the first day of Passover. Early that morning two fires were discovered in the rooms near the Assembly Hall; these were small and easily extinguished. But about 1 P.M., after the worshippers had left the edifice, a new fire of much greater intensity broke out. Starting in the cabinet directly beneath the Ark, it raged with fury; before it was checked it had completely destroyed the Ark, the pulpit and the entire south wall of the building, and had burned its way along the auditorium and down into the Assembly Hall.



INTERIOR OF THE 82ND STREET SYNAGOGUE BEFORE THE FIRE OF 1937



INTERIOR OF 82ND STREET SYNAGOGUE AFTER THE RESTORATION

An investigation was ordered by Fire Chief Brophy and the culprit was soon detected. Alexander Kinderman, who had been janitor of the synagogue for almost twenty-four years and who had always been a devoted servant of the congregation, confessed that it was he that had set the three fires. Since Kinderman had a German name, there were many who jumped to the conclusion that he had come under the influence of anti-Semitic doctrines, and that his act was similar to the synagogue desecrations that took place about that time in Germany. It can be authoritatively stated here that such was not the case. Kinderman had no connections whatsoever with any anti-Jewish groups; he was rather a man of solitary life, whose mind had become affected in the course of years. The fire at Shaaray Tefila was not the work of anti-Semitic plotting; it was the sudden and unconsidered act of the disordered mind of a pyromaniac.

The congregation at first faced the news of the conflagration with a sense of terrible loss. Gone was the beautiful Ark that had graced both 44th and 82nd Street synagogues. Gone was the pulpit from which so many eloquent sermons had resounded. Gone were eighteen Torahs, some of which were especially cherished for their long association with the shrine. The home of the congregation was gutted and ravaged, hardly more than a shell of its former self. But soon messages of condolence and offers of help came from the other Jewish synagogues. On the very day of the fire Judge Irving Lehman, president of Congregation Emanu-El, telephoned Harry N. Wessel to offer the use of Temple Beth-El for services, and this offer was gratefully accepted. Other similar offers were also received; of these the congregation accepted that of the use of the building of the Free Sons of Israel,

at 93rd Street, for the sessions of its religious school. The congregation soon settled in these temporary homes, and its work continued unabated. The burned Torahs were reverently interred at Mt. Eden cemetery on June 6, 1937, with both rabbis and cantors officiating, and the congregation turned to the work of reconstruction. The interest of the membership did not abate, and the size of the congregation actually increased.

A favorable settlement was reached with the fire insurance adjusters, largely through the efforts of Simon Gottschall. The sum paid in damages would have been sufficient to have restored the synagogue to its former state. But both trustees and congregation felt that even more should be done, and they grasped at the opportunity of bringing about the many year old dream of the congregation: the creation of a synagogue house. The congregation possessed a fund which had been subscribed for that purpose, amounting to $58,000; this was augmented by an appeal made by the president in the summer, to which 42 members responded to give more than $4,000. S. Brian Baylinson was commissioned as architect of the reconstruction of the Temple and Schwartz and Gross as architects of the adjacent new Synagogue House. Jacob Schlesinger, a member of the congregation, was awarded the main contract, while those for special separate items were given to a number of firms. The building committee consisted of Robert K. Raisler, chairman, Daniel Katz, Harry N. Wessel, Fabian Crystal, Carl Oestreicher and Frank Reh.

By November of 1937 the work of reconstruction had been completed. The entire south wall of the Temple had been rebuilt, and its upper half was ornamented by a beautiful rose glass window, the largest in the country,

bearing the symbols of the twelve tribes of Israel. A new Ark had been built, of Moorish design, with columns that extended across the platform. A smaller pulpit replaced the old one, and the pews and other fittings of the auditorium were completely replaced and modernized. A number of changes had been made in the rooms within the synagogue in order to make them more sightly; a complete new heating plant, electrical system, perpetual light and set of candelabra had been installed; an elevator now enabled the worshippers to pass easily from floor to floor. The completed synagogue house contained a rabbi's study, a library, and meeting and class rooms for the need of the school and the organizations. The entire cost of the reconstruction was about $130,000, of which half came from the insurance settlement, and half from accumulated and current contributions by the members.

The rededication services of the synagogue were held from December 17 to 19, 1937, and consisted of Friday and Saturday evening services, a dinner dance at the Biltmore Hotel and a special session of the religious school. Its participants included Dr. Stern and Rabbi Schachtel, Harry N. Wessel, Judge Irving Lehman, Dr. Stephen S. Wise, Mrs. Max L. Levenson, Roger Williams Straus, Rabbi William H. Fineshriber, Hon. Stanley M. Isaacs, Dr. Samuel Goldenson and Rabbi Gustave Falk of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

The years from 1938 to 1945 have been ones of slow but steady progress for Shaaray Tefila. The membership held its own or increased slightly until 1943, when there was a sharp increase in the number of seats sold, which continued in the following years. In 1938 the congregation introduced free services for the fall holidays in the Assembly Hall, to which the services upstairs were

brought by means of loud speakers; in the same year a special committee was formed to aid the refugees who were coming in increased numbers from Europe. In December of that year Sunday Forums were instituted; they were conducted by Rabbi Schachtel and dealt with topics of current interest.

The religious school of the congregation had been flourishing continuously since its organization in 1865. In its earlier years there was a separate branch devoted to the study of Hebrew, which gradually disappeared due to the lack of interest of the children in this subject. The superintendents and principals of the school, in addition to the rabbis of the congregation, have included Mrs. Aaron N. Cohen, Mrs. Weill, Percival S. Mencken, M. O. Ezekiel, Ferdinand I. Haber, Julia Weill, Isidore Goldman, Frank Reh, Leo Shpall, Nellie Reichert and Nathan Dorison. Prior to the school year 1911-1912 the teachers served voluntarily, and for many years all of them were graduates of the school itself. Particularly outstanding work was done for the school by Frank Reh, principal from 1930 to 1933, and later chairman of the religious school committee, and by Miss Nellie Reichert, for many years a teacher, and principal from 1936 to 1939. In 1940 the religious school was chosen by the Jewish Education Committee of New York, in conjunction with the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, to serve as a model school for Reform Jewish congregations. From 1940 to 1944 the Committee reorganized the work of the second to seventh grades, introducing a number of new methods, and instituting an additional weekday session, which was attended by many of the children. A unique feature of the school is the college class organized in 1942 under the leadership

of Frank Reh for graduates of the high school classes who wished to continue their association. It meets each Sunday for a forum on current issues and problems.

On October 18, 1940, the congregation celebrated the 25th anniversary of Dr. Stern's incumbency, with Dr. Samuel H. Goldenson delivering the chief tribute. It was the third time in the history of the congregation that its rabbi had served it for a quarter of a century. Dr. Stern's health was failing, however, and just before Yom Kippur of 1941 he was so seriously stricken that from that time on he only served at brief intervals. Rabbi Schachtel carried the burdens of the congregation alone, and the Friday evening services were advanced to 5:45 P.M. to relieve him from the necessity of preaching too often. In 1942 Stern and Schachtel were made co-rabbis, and the former became rabbi emeritus in the following year. He never returned to the pulpit, passing away in 1944. His extensive private library was left as a bequest to the congregation.

During this period the congregation created a new office, that of second vice president, and elected as its first incumbent Louis S. Lebenthal.

On November 1, 1943, Rabbi Schachtel resigned to accept a call to Houston, Texas. The congregation was served by guest speakers and interim rabbis until April 1, 1944, when it welcomed to its service its present rabbi, Dr. Bernard J. Bamberger.

Bernard J. Bamberger was born in Baltimore, Md., in 1904. He had studied at Johns Hopkins University and the Hebrew Union College, being ordained in 1926 and receiving his D.D. degree in 1929. He had served as rabbi at Lafayette, Ind., and Albany, N. Y., and had gained a well-deserved reputation as rabbi there. Upon

his coming the late Friday evening services were resumed, and the work of the congregation proceeded with fresh vigor. On April 25, 1945, the old cemetery of Beth-El Congregation, which had been acquired with the consolidation of 1871, was reconveyed to Congregation Emanu-El, from whom it had been originally acquired by Beth-El.

Shaaray Tefila entered upon its centennial year with a strong and flourishing congregation. It possessed a sound financial status, active organizations, a hard-working board of trustees, and an inspiring and energetic rabbi.

During the period from 1924 to 1945 the board of trustees contained the following new names who served for a number of years: Maurice Cohn; Isabella (Mrs. Moses) Crystal; Arthur D. Mendes; Joel Alexander; Charles Levinson (made honorary trustee in 1941); Emil Buschhoff; Lillie (Mrs. Morris A.) Buchsbaum; Leo T. Levy; Walter E. Ernst and Moses Cohen. Lewis M. Isaacs was honorary trustee until his death in 1945, after serving for thirty-nine years.

The present officers of Shaaray Tefila consist of the following: Harry N. Wessel, president and chairman, ex-officio, of the council committee; Isaac E. Rittenberg, first vice president, and chairman of the choir and ritual committees; Louis S. Lebenthal, second vice president and chairman of the membership committee; Carl Oestreicher, treasurer and chairman of the house and buildings committee; Robert K. Raisler, secretary; Irving Zucker, chairman of the cemetery committee; Mrs. Maurice Cohn, chairman of the entertainment committee; Henry L. Schenk, chairman of the finance committee; Benjamin E. Marks, chairman of the nominating committee; Louis X. Garfunkel, chairman of the publicity and forum committee; Frank Reh, chairman of the religious school com-

mittee; Henry E. Hafer, chairman of the ushers committee; George W. Drucker; Stanley M. Isaacs; Gordon S. P. Kleeberg; Henry L. Rosenstein; Louis A. Novins; Louis Price.

7. THE ORGANIZATIONS OF THE CONGREGATION

A most important part of the work of the congregation has been the activities of the various organizations created for its women, men and young folks, which took upon themselves the philanthropic, educational and social responsibilities both of the synagogue and of the community.

The first of these was the *Ladies' Benevolent Society (Hevrat Nashim Hesed VeEmet)*, formed by the women of B'nai Jeshurun in 1843, under the leadership of Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs, who was for years honorary secretary. The first of its leaders, who bore the title of Directress, was Mrs. John M. Davies. The by-laws adopted required that all members be seat-holders in the synagogue, but permitted charter members from other congregations to remain. When the organizers of Shaaray Tefila seceded from B'nai Jeshurun, the Ladies' Benevolent Society went with them, and in October, 1845 changed the wording of the by-laws to conform with this change; however, its membership was kept open for ladies of both congregations. The funds of the organization, at that time about $400 but rising in course of years to $2,900, were deposited with the trustees of Shaaray Tefila. After a few years Mrs. Davies resigned, apparently because the Directress was expected to perform the washing of the dead for the society and she felt herself unqualified to do so; she eventually resumed her office when permitted to designate a substitute for these duties. Except for a short period from 1850 to 1851, when Mrs. Joachimsen was presiding officer, Mrs. Davies held office until 1857, when she was

succeeded by Mrs. Louis Levy. Among the activities enumerated in the minutes of the society are those of helping the needy with fuel and provisions, the distribution of Matzoth during Passover and contributions to Jewish institutions. In addition they prepared shrouds for the use of their members, visited their sick and in many instances buried the dead. They raised money by means of dances ("reunions"), money-raising fairs and dramatic performances. The subsequent directresses of the society were Mrs. P. A. Meyers, Mrs. L. Lavenberg, Mrs. Henry Morrison, Mrs. John M. Davies, Mrs. Aaron N. Cohen and Mrs. William G. Popper. From 1875 to 1879 the Society was affiliated with the United Hebrew Charities, and later it joined the Federation of Philanthropic Societies. From 1890, the membership was no longer limited to the ladies of Shaaray Tefila.

The first men's organization was the *Mutual Benefit and Burial Society of Congregation Gates of Prayer,* which was organized on June 18, 1851 with John I. Hart as president; his successors were Isaac Coleman (1855), H. Davison (1857) and Harris Solomon (1881). Its functions were similar to those of other similar organizations in other congregations; they visited the sick and provided for the burial of the dead, but did not engage in general philanthropic or social activities. In return for the dues the society paid sick benefits and "Shivah money" to such of its members as applied for it; in many cases members returned the "Shivah money" to the society and received a letter of thanks. There was also a charity fund, which was used to provide shrouds and burial expenses for those who were not members of the society. Though most of the members were affiliated with Shaaray Tefila, others were freely admitted. About 1870 the Society felt

the need of having a burial ground of its own, apparently for members not affiliated with any congregation. They approached Shaaray Tefila, who replied that their limited facilities made the granting of such a request impossible. After an unsuccessful attempt to enter negotiations with another congregation, the Society finally purchased a lot in Washington Cemetery, in Brooklyn and has maintained its separate identity down to the present time.

The *Shaaray Tefila Sisterhood for Personal Service* was the creation of Dr. Mendes, under whose leadership it was organized in April, 1890. It was patterned after a similar organization at Temple Emanu-El which had started a year before. Its primary purposes were philanthropic and it was originally organized into four groups: 1) to visit sick and needy cases referred by the United Hebrew Charities; 2) to maintain a free kindergarten which met daily at the 44th Street Synagogue; 3) to conduct a free Sunday school uptown; 4) to conduct a sewing class for girls. A working girl's section was also planned. The United Hebrew charities thereupon assigned the Sisterhood the territory between the Bowery, Bleecker Street, Fifth Avenue, the Hudson River and Harlem. At an early date the members began to sew for the poor. The United Hebrew charities allotted funds for the relief work, but the Sisterhood also raised funds for these and other purposes by such methods as bazaars, entertainments and the publication of a cookbook which went through two editions.

Dr. Mendes was chairman of the Sisterhood from 1895, and was succeeded by Mrs. Isaac Phillips, Mrs. Joseph G. Wallach, Mrs. Sol. B. Solomon and Mrs. Louis I. Haber. In 1902 Mrs. Lizzie (Max L.) Levenson, who

had been the original secretary, took the presidency, and remained in office for 28 years; she then became honorary president, until her death in 1944. Her successors were Mrs. Abram L. Bretzfelder, Mrs. Maurice Cohn, Mrs. Harry N. Wessel, Mrs. Emil Buschhoff, and Mrs. Charles Libman.

The social service work of the sisterhood called for a great deal of personal visitation and investigation which was done by volunteers, as well as by a Miss Nauheim, who was hired by the organization. The Sisterhood made frequent donations to various philanthropies and aided them in raising funds. In 1918 the Lizzie Levenson Child Caring Fund was created from the income of the Sisterhood's Emergency Fund, and this was augmented by numerous donations, including those in the charity boxes of the Temple. From 1921 to 1924 a home for the wards of the fund was maintained at Union Hill, N. J.

From 1917 to 1928 the Sisterhood was a member of the Federation for the Support of the Jewish Philanthropic Societies of New York, but it preferred to return to the work of aiding the synagogue which had been prohibited by the Federation rules. The sewing which was a feature of Sisterhood activity from the very first has been continued, and meetings for that purpose are held every Monday, summer and winter. During the First and Second World Wars this sewing was partly converted into such Red Cross work as bandage making. One special group, headed for years by Minna Shire, concentrated on making aprons and dresses for sale, the proceeds going to the Sisterhood's beneficiaries. Substantial work was done for the synagogue; funds were raised, the annual Sukkahs were decorated, the Ark and Torah covers were kept in order, and Hanukah and Purim dinners were given. In

1919 the Sisterhood presented a substantial kitchen to the synagogue. In 1928 it began to issue the synagogue monthly bulletin, the Messenger, edited since its establishment up to the present time by Mrs. Katherine Levaur, assisted by Mrs. Carrie Bretzfelder and Mrs. Milton J. Vogel.

In 1921 the Sisterhood joined the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, and raised nearly $3,000 for the first great project of the latter, the Hebrew Union College dormitory. In the following year it joined the New York State Federation of Temple Sisterhoods. A bequest in the will of Florence Davies led in 1944 to the creation of the Florence Davies Foundation for charitable and religious purposes. Among the other funds maintained by the Sisterhood are the Carrie Bretzfelder Coin Bag, the Florence Wilzin Coffee Fund, the Maria Davies Social Service Fund, the Annie Strauss Student Aid Fund, the Lizzie Levenson Fund for the Blind, the Altar Guild, and the Succah Fund.

The Junior Section of the Sisterhood was organized in January, 1916, through the initiative and under the leadership of Mrs. Joseph Blum. The first president was Miss Hortense Levy; subsequent presidents have been Miss Honey Kraemer and Miss Esther Marks. The Junior Section undertook several welfare projects, paralleling the Sisterhood philanthropic interests. It maintains its own sewing group which meets weekly. The president of the Junior Section is a member of the Sisterhood board, and the two groups cooperate.

Just as the Ladies Benevolent Society was the work of Rev. Isaacs, and the Sisterhood of Dr. Mendes, the *Mothers Association* was the work of Dr. Stern, in 1920. At that time the Sisterhood, being associated with Federa-

tion, was no longer engaged in raising funds for the synagogue; he therefore proposed a group which should concentrate on synagogue service, and especially on religious education in the synagogue and home, as well as an intensification of the religious spirit. Mrs. Simon Gottschall who was the first recording secretary of the Association (as she had previously been of the Sisterhood) was one of the leading spirits; but the outstanding figure in the new organization was Mrs. Martin Strauss, who served as president for 18 years.

The early programs of the Mothers Association were largely built around religious school activities, and frequently made use of the talents of the children in the school and of their teachers. Holy day and Sabbath observance were stressed. By means of a system of Class Mothers (one parent for each class in the school) a close contact between the organization and the various homes was established. The Mothers Association of course provided for entertainment and refreshment on Sunday school occasions.

The Mothers Association was the first to assume formal responsibility for the maintenance of the youth activities that had been going on in more or less sporadic fashion within the congregation, and to which many of its workers, especially women, had contributed their support. In time the Association engaged a paid youth leader to direct such activities within the congregation.

Several funds were established by the Association, notably the Altar Guild (to provide flowers for the synagogue altar) and the Annie Strauss Student Aid Fund. As time went on, the Association tended to enlarge its activities, and to assume greater interest in charitable and

communal services; meantime the Sisterhood, no longer affiliated in any way with Federation, had resumed its interest in serving the synagogue. There was thus considerable overlapping and duplication. In 1938, under the presidency of Mrs. Emil Buschhoff, who had succeeded Mrs. Strauss in the previous year, extended negotiations led to a merger of the Mothers Association with the Sisterhood, which took over all the responsibilities of the Class Mothers group, the youth director, and the funds that had been established.

The *Shaaray Tefila Brotherhood* was the creation of Dr. Joseph Blum, a much loved congregation figure, who in December, 1922 addressed a letter to the trustees asking their approval for such an organization to "encourage and promote spiritual, intellectual, social and ethical advancement, and to awaken the Jewish spirit . . . to enlist the interest of the younger men . . . to foster fellowship and association . . . to conduct an open forum for the free expression of thoughts on matters of current event, particularly concerning and interesting the Jew." The approval of the Board being granted, Dr. Blum proceeded to organize the Shaaray Tefila Brotherhood, the first regular meeting of which was held January 29, 1923.

Dr. Blum was the first president. His successors have been David N. Mosessohn, Bernard Lichtenberg, Louis W. Harlem, Dr. Charles S. Bernheimer, Samuel W. Solins, Albert Mannheimer, Julius M. Eisendrath, Henry E. Hafer, Abraham Broido, Victor M. Goldberg, and the present incumbent, Louis A. Novins. Leon A. Rains acted as secretary until 1934; he was succeeded for brief periods by Irving Schachtel and Lawrence Maier, while Louis J. Weber has been secretary since 1938.

In 1930 the Brotherhood joined the National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods. In 1934 its name was changed to the *Men's Club*, in order to suggest a more informal type of organization.

The organization has conducted many meetings of the forum type suggested in Dr. Blum's original proposal, and dealing with various current problems. A substantial proportion of these programs have been devoted to Jewish themes. The serious program was frequently supplemented by lighter entertainment; there were also purely social affairs, including many Father and Son nights. The Men's Club joined with the Sisterhood in sponsoring impressive observances in the synagogue for Armistice Day, and in conducting a congregational Seder on the eve of the second day of Passover. From time to time Brotherhood Services were conducted by members of the group.

At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1941, the Men's Club arranged for a series of affairs for service men prior to the establishment of more adequate recreational facilities for them. At present it is publishing a bulletin for the men and women of the congregation who are in uniform, and has set up a committee for assistance to veterans, which has been designated as the representative of the synagogue in the Committee for coordinating Services for Jewish Veterans.

The youth groups of the congregation have arisen out of the Religious School, which has functioned continuously since its organization in 1865. A strong feeling of attachment was engendered in the pupils, and out of this such groups arose. Like most youth organizations of synagogues, they lacked continuity and stability, since their members remained in them but for a few years, and

the whole group might pass in a single year from success or disintegration or vice versa just because an active group of members went off to college, or because of the personality of the adult leader.

The earliest report of youth groups in Shaaray Tefila is that of a Young Folks' Association, founded in 1889, but it seems to have had only a brief existence. There was an Alumni Association a year later, and in December, 1890, a new Young Folks' Association, with Falk Younker as president. This group had a checkered career and disappeared about 1893, when the congregation moved from 44th Street. It was renewed in the 82nd Street Synagogue, with the same president, and apparently continued for several years, though no definite records are available.

When Dr. Stern came to the congregation in 1915, one of the things to which he especially devoted his attention was the field of youth activity. Troops of Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts were formed in 1917. The Young Folks League, consisting of girls of 18 and above and boys of 20 and above, was reconstituted in 1919. Valuable assistance was rendered by Mrs. Samuel Raisler and later by Mrs. Aaron Levaur in the direction of this group. Around 1920 Mrs. Levaur organized a younger set known as the Sub-Debs. A Junior League also flourished for a short time.

The Mothers Association naturally took a special interest in youth work. In 1929 they sponsored a performance of the Mikado by the Religious School, coached by Morton I. Rosenthal of the faculty; he and Frank Reh were particularly interested in keeping the adolescents in touch with the congregation. The result was the establishment of the Philo Club for students in the high school department. Largely through the efforts of the Mothers



HARRY N .WESSEL

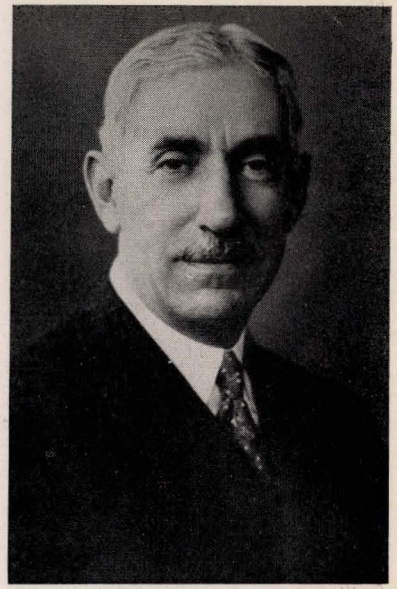
President



MAX GRAUMAN



SOLOMON RAPPAPORT



SIEGFRIED PHILIP

Cantors of the Congregations

Association, with assistance from the trustees and the other organizations, the building next to the Temple was made into a makeshift synagogue house, and was used by Philo, the high school, and Boy and Girl Scout Groups in 1930. In the summer of 1932 a group of 35 to 50 boys and girls met there regularly for recreation on Tuesday and Thursday evenings.

In the meantime the Young Folks' League had been reconstituted, and it received much attention from both Dr. Stern and Rabbi Schachtel. In 1934 a third group, intermediate in age, was established as the Mendes Society. The Mothers Association was interested in all these groups, gave parties for them, and eventually paid Mr. Rosenthal to act as professional leader. Mrs. Charles Libman and Mrs. Louis Garfunkel were particularly active in this work, which was taken over by the Sisterhood in 1938. At present Mrs. Morris Bower is sisterhood chairman of the committee on youth activities.

During the 1930's youth activity was at its height. In 1933 the Reform Congregations of New York City established an Institute for Youth Leadership, of which Dr. Stern was chairman and leading spirit. This institute remained in existence until the War forced its discontinuance, and did an outstanding service in providing young people in the organizations with Jewish knowledge and with skills for leadership. In this institute the Shaaray Tefila youth groups were prominently represented.

At the period of greatest expansion in 1940, the Temple had four youth groups, classified according to age level; the Young Folks League, the Mendes Society, the Rosenthal Society (named for the much loved youth director who died in 1938) and Philo. The four groups were known as the Martin Strauss youth groups of the West

End Synagogue. Their programs were both social and cultural; dramatics proved particularly appealing. The groups participated in a number of youth services in the synagogue, sharing in the ritual and delivering the addresses. They frequently contributed to the philanthropic work of the women's organizations and had some welfare projects of their own. Among the outstanding leaders among the young people themselves during this period were Martin (Micky) Hirschfeld, Jane and Milton Wessel, Robert Joseph, Sanford Maier and Edward G. Carroll. During this time also, the youngsters moved from one society to the next as they grew up.

The outbreak of the War in 1941 greatly hampered youth work in Shaaray Tefila as it did elsewhere. Nevertheless it continued, and there was an encouraging revival in 1943, when Harold Wagenheim became youth adviser. At present there are two groups, the Martin Strauss Society and the Nathan Stern Young Folks League. The Martin Strauss Society is open to students in the high school and college classes. The Sunday morning sessions therefore provide a cultural program, and the society's activities are chiefly recreational. It has, however, utilized its parties and dances to raise money for such causes as the Red Cross, and it was the first Temple affiliate to present the synagogue with a gift for the centenary. Members of the group range in age from about 15 to 18.

The Nathan Stern Young Folks League first assumed the name of the rabbi in 1934, but dropped it at his own request, to restore it after his death in 1945. It is made up of young men and women over 18. It has cultural meetings, and in addition to its own social affairs, has conducted a number of dances for men in the armed services. Its president is George Cantor. Necessarily

limited in membership for the present, it is planning for expansion after the War.

The first youth service for several years, sponsored by the two societies and the college class, was held April 13, 1944. The services assumed an unexpectedly solemn nature because of the sudden passing away of President Franklin D. Roosevelt the day previous. Dr. Bamberger in his sermon paid tribute to the president as a friend of youth and a model for them to follow.

Both Martin Strauss and Nathan Stern groups are affiliated with the National Federation of Temple Youth.

8. THE CONGREGATION AND THE COMMUNITY

The history of the congregation's hundred years would not be complete without a record of some of the contributions of the members of Shaaray Tefila to the larger community. In the early part of its history, especially, when the demands of the growing Jewish community created new problems, they joined with the members of other congregations in creating new organizations and institutions; in the latter part of the century, the work of individual members exerted a potent influence both near and far.

One of the most significant contributions was in the field of Anglo-Jewish journalism. By 1855 the New York Jewish community had grown to such an extent that its members were no longer willing to follow the lead of the Philadelphia community, which up to that time, under the directorship of Isaac Leeser, was predominant in the East. They were unwilling to depend upon the latter's *Occident* for information on Jewish affairs; they felt it was wrong that Cincinnati and even far off San Francisco possessed flourishing Jewish periodicals, while New York had only one decaying weekly. Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs was keenly aware of this situation and in 1857 established the *Jewish Messenger* to fill the communal need. In it he not only gave news of events both home and abroad, but also published learned dissertations; he staunchly combatted the rising movement of Reform Judaism and also gave expressions to the political opinions which he carefully eschewed in his discourses from the pulpit. He was

an ardent advocate of the current anti-slavery movement and championed it so boldly that he lost many of his subscribers from the South; whereupon he wrote: "We want subscribers, for without them we cannot publish a paper, and Judaism needs an organ; but we want much more truth and loyalty, and for that we are ready, if we must, to sacrifice all other considerations." Many of the articles in the *Messenger*, which was published as a weekly, were written by the founder's gifted sons, Myer S. and Isaac S. Isaacs. After his death, in 1878, a third son, Rabbi Abram S. Isaacs, became editor of the paper, continuing until it was merged with the *American Hebrew* in 1903.

The *American Hebrew* itself was the creation of Dr. Mendes, who was aided, when he founded it in 1879, by Philip Cowen, a member of Shaaray Tefila, by Benjamin I. Hart, then president of the congregation, and also by David A. de Lima. They gathered together seven other noted Jewish leaders who, with Dr. Mendes and Cowen, constituted the editorial board; for over thirty years they modestly concealed their identity, and it was not until 1927 that their secret was revealed. When Mendes retired from the chief editorship in 1885, he was succeeded by Philip Cowen, who was editor-publisher until 1906. When Nehemiah Mosessohn moved his *Jewish Tribune* from Portland to New York in 1909, he immediately joined Shaaray Tefila and became an active member.

The congregation made similar contributions in the field of Jewish literature. Dr. Mendes wrote *A Hebrew's Reply to the Missionaries*, translated the life of Manasseh ben Israel, composed several books for children, including a brief Jewish history and a home prayerbook, and was a contributor to the *Jewish Encyclopedia* and

the *Menorah Monthly* of the B'nai B'rith. Adele Bildersee, a granddaughter of an early Shammas of the congregation, wrote *Jewish Post-Biblical History Through Great Personalities,* and later on, during the period when she was principal of the religious school of Temple Beth-El, *The Bible Story in Bible Words,* a six volume work published by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Rabbi Abram S. Isaacs also wrote a number of Jewish books for both adults and children, but this was after he had ceased to be connected with the congregation.

Another field in which Shaaray Tefila members took a large part was in the creation of the earliest social and philanthropic institutions of New York Jewry. When the first Jewish settlers came to New Amsterdam in 1654, they had promised that they would always take care of the poor among them; and this promise was kept after New Amsterdam had become New York. At first the work of providing for the poor, caring for the sick and burying the dead, and even of furnishing Jewish children with an education, was carried on through the single congregation of the community, Shearith Israel. But as the community grew and congregations multiplied, the responsibility for such welfare work was too great for any one congregation; separate institutions arose, in which great-hearted Jewish leaders from all congregations had their share.

Shaaray Tefila's part in this work may be said to begin even before its existence as an independent congregation, since its charter members included many who had been prominent in social work and who continued their activities while in its fold. As far back as 1820 John I. Hart, a future president, and Rowland Davies, of a family

which played a large part in the congregation's history, visited a poor Jewish veteran of the War of Independence as he lay critically ill in the City Hospital. They raised a fund for him, the surplus of which became the original fund of the Hebrew Benevolent Society two years later. At the same time they and other members of B'nai Jeshurun congregation, to which they then belonged, formed the Hebrew Mutual Benefit Society; and after the split that created Shaaray Tefila, the members of both congregations continued to play a prominent part in the Society's affairs. Among the names of those who figure as its leaders are those of Morland Micholl, George Godfrey, John M. Davies, Louis A. Simmons, Aaron S. Solomon, Isaac K. Cohn, A. Godfrey, Barnett Bildersee, Isaac Bildersee, S. Henry Dessau, Leon A. Rains and Lewis J. Isaacs. Since 1887 every secretary of the organization has been also secretary or clerk of Shaaray Tefila.

The Hebrew Benevolent Society, formed in 1822, merged in 1859 with the German Hebrew Benevolent Society, founded in 1845; in 1870 it became the Hebrew Benevolent and Orphan Asylum Society and in 1906 the Hebrew Orphan Asylum. John I. Hart was on the first board of the Society, and other Shaaray Tefila names found among its leaders are those of Morland Micholl, Benjamin I. Hart, Isaac Haber, Joseph Aden, Lewis J. Phillips, Siegmund T. Meyer and Simon Sternberger. Benjamin I. Hart was president from 1862 to 1865. It was during his incumbency that the Society erected its first orphans' home, at Third Avenue and 77th Street, established a resident home for girls above the age of 13 and infant children, on 86th Street, and rented a frame building for the teaching of shoemaking, typesetting and printing to its proteges; he was also instrumental in

obtaining from the city a substantial donation and permission for the orphans to attend the public schools.

The movement for creating a separate Jewish Hospital had, in addition to the usual Jewish desire to care for their own sick, the additional compulsion of the feeling that it was necessary to have a place where the Jewish dietary laws would be maintained. It was therefore of particular interest to an Orthodox congregation such as Shaaray Tefila. Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs was particularly instrumental in the creation of the first such institution, the Jews' Hospital (later Mount Sinai) in 1853, and of the twelve names mentioned in its incorporation, six were from Shaaray Tefila; the rabbi, John I. Hart, then president of the congregation, John M. Davies, John D. Phillips, Louis Levy and Lawrence Myers.

Rev. Isaacs was also a large factor in creating the Hebrew Free Schools in 1864 and the United Hebrew Charities in 1873. Members of the congregation took part in both. Among the organizers of the Free Schools were the president of the congregation, Barnett L. Solomon, and the following: Myer S. Isaacs, Siegmund T. Meyer, Hezekiah Kohn, Lewis J. Phillips and David Davies. Isaac S. Isaacs, son of the rabbi, and later president of Shaaray Tefila, was secretary of the United Hebrew Charities for almost twenty-seven years before his death; numerous members of Shaaray Tefila were among its supporters, as they were of its successor, the Federation for the Support of the Jewish Philanthropic Societies.

Shaaray Tefila played a very important part in the creation of the first Young Men's Hebrew Association, which arose in 1874 to answer the social and educational needs of the younger generation in New York Jewry. The suggestion for such an organization was first broached



ISAAC RITTENBERG



LOUIS S. LEBENTHAL

Officers of the Congregation

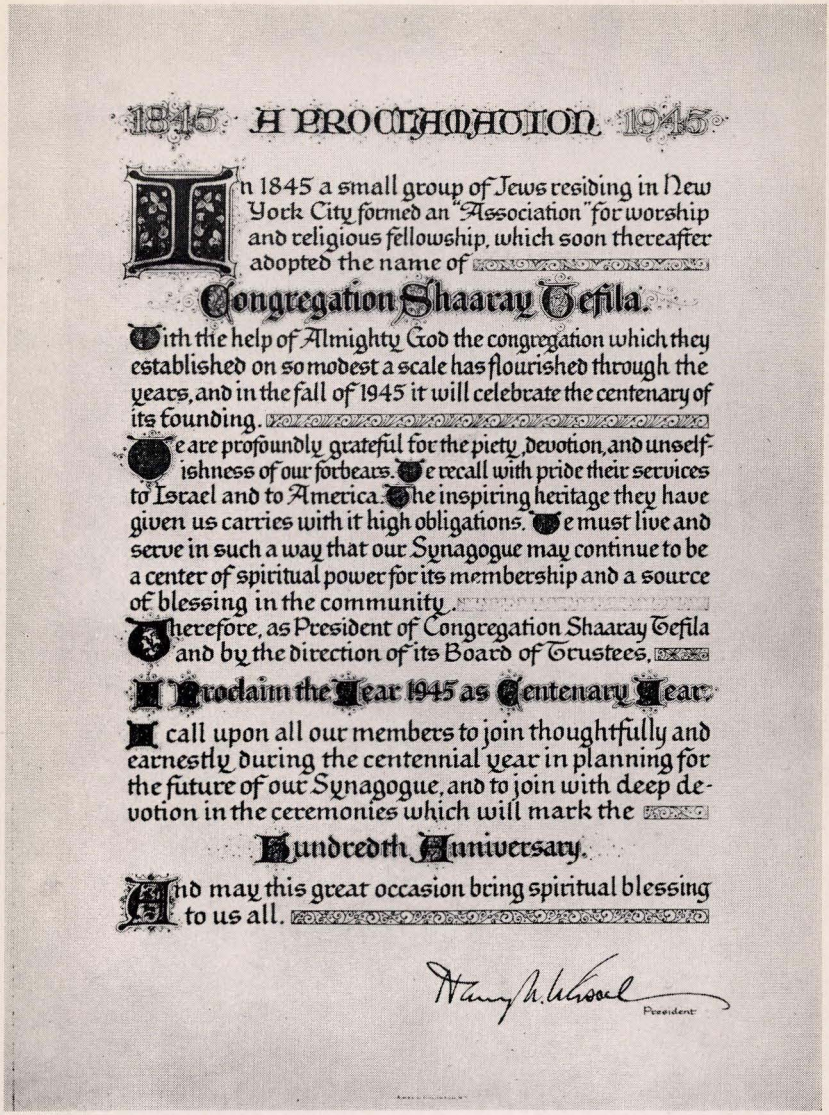


CARL OESTREICHER



ROBERT K. RAISLER

Officers of the Congregation



PROCLAMATION OF THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY

at a celebration held on March 10 of that year at the home of Sol. B. Solomon; the plan was matured at a meeting held twelve days later at the home of another member, Dr. Simon Newton Leo. Of the ten original members, five were from Shaaray Tefila, the others being Dr. Mendes, Myer S. Isaacs and Isaac S. Isaacs; Dr. Leo was the first vice president and Mr. Solomon the first treasurer. After this earlier Association had ceased to exist, it was two other members of the congregation, Falk Younker and Percival S. Menken, who were largely instrumental in creating a new Young Men's Hebrew Association, in 1896. Among those who have been most active in the latter association were Meyer S. Isaacs, Isaac S. Isaacs, Dr. Mendes, Simon Gottschall, Louis I. Haber, Moses Crystal, Louis J. Chamansky and Fabian M. Crystal.

A number of members participated in the organization of the Montefiore Home (later Montefiore Hospital) in 1884, notably Dr. Mendes and Myer S. Isaacs, Dr. Simon Baruch, who was called from Georgia to become chairman of the medical board of the home, and who contributed greatly to medical knowledge through his work there, joined the congregation after his arrival in New York, and was a member until his death. He was largely responsible for developing what was first intended as a home for incurables into a hospital which successfully treated and cured the victims of chronic diseases.

Myer S. Isaacs was also a founder of the Educational Alliance, created in 1889 to minister to the needs of the children of the rapidly increasing flood of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe; William C. Popper, a vice president of the congregation, was for over twenty-five years one of its most active directors. Stanley M. Isaacs,

son of Myer S. Isaacs, served as its president. Members of the congregation were also active in the establishment of the Jewish agricultural colonies; the names of Leopold Gershel, Leonard Lewisohn, Dr. Mendes and Myer S. Isaacs appear among the supporters of the Alliance colony near Vineland, N. J., in 1882; the last-named was active in the Baron de Hirsch Fund, created in 1891, and in the establishment of Woodbine in the same year.

In addition to these joint efforts, there were a number of cases where individuals of the congregation played a prominent part in Jewish communal endeavor. Dr. Mendes, for instance, was instrumental in bringing about the election of his younger brother, Dr. Henry Pereira Mendes, as rabbi of Shearith Israel in 1877. Thus the city beheld the spectacle of two brothers, one serving an Orthodox and the other a Reform congregation, and working together to aid numerous organizations that embraced both groups of New York Jewry. They were among the founders of the New York Board of Jewish Ministers in 1882. Lizzie (Mrs. Max L.) Levenson was an organizer and president of the Federation of Jewish Women's Organizations, active in the Sisterhood movement, prominent in Council of Jewish Women, and the chairman of the committee of the latter which built the synagogue on Welfare Island. Mrs. Aaron N. Cohen was a founder and leader of the Young Women's Hebrew Association. Harry N. Wessel was prominent in the work of the federation of New York Reform synagogues, and two members of the congregation, Charles S. Bernheimer (a president of the Men's Club) and Joseph C. Hyman, were prominent social workers. Simon Gottschall was active in the Jewish Welfare Board, serving as chairman of its finance committee in the First World War.

There is a close connection between the membership of Shaaray Tefila and True Craftman's Lodge No. 651 of the Masonic fraternity. The first master of the lodge was Jacob P. Solomon, in 1867; others who have taken a prominent part in its activities include Joseph C. Levi, the first man raised in that lodge nearly 80 years ago, Joseph A. Levy, Leopold Wallach, Morris A. Magner, Sim M. Lion, Henry S. Lion, Gordon S. P. Kleeberg, most of whom rank among its past masters.

In the past sixty years many members of the congregation have made important contributions in the field of public service. The oustanding figure among them is that of Bernard M. Baruch, chairman of the War Industries Board in the First World War, and representative and adviser of the United States Government on countless occasions; he came to Shaaray Tefila through his father, Dr. Simon Baruch, and was a member of the second confirmation class of the congregation. Stanley M. Isaacs has been active in the Republican Party and served as borough president of Manhattan from 1937 to 1941. His readiness to sacrifice his chances of reelection by refusal to dismiss a loyal employee who was a Communist showed the same inflexible upholding of standards as was displayed by his grandfather, Rev. Samuel M. Isaacs. He also played a notable part in the recent noble gesture of the Council of Jewish Women in turning over their settlement house in the Bronx to non-Jewish neighborhood organizations. Myer S. Isaacs served as judge of the Marine Court and was an organizer of the Citizens' Union in 1897. Saul S. Streit, former legislator, and Dudley F. Sicher are also judges.

In the field of education, Adele Bildersee is dean of women at Brooklyn College, and her brother Isaac Bilder-

see is a noted school principal. Frank Reh, in addition to serving as principal, has written textbooks on science and astronomy. In the field of medicine, Dr. John I. Hart was an outstanding dental practitioner, Dr. Simon Baruch, in addition to his work at Montefiore Hospital, contributed to the knowledge of operative technique and the development of hydrotherapy, while Dr. Sigmund A. Agatson is a noted eye specialist. In music, Cantor Max Grauman composed two sets of musical services for the synagogue; Lewis M. Isaacs wrote numerous songs, including many settings for hymns in both old and new Union Hymnals; William Schuman, noted modern composer who has just been appointed head of the Juilliard School, was confirmed in Shaaray Tefila and active in its Young Folks' League. Maurice Grau and Heinrich Conried were successively directors of the Metropolitan Opera House. In the field of drama, there have been the playwrights Philip Moeller and Moritz A. Jagendorf, while Edith Julia Rich (Mrs. Lewis M. Isaacs) is editor of magazines dealing with the theatrical art. William Fox and Carl Laemmle have been prominent in the motion pictures industry. In the field of letters, there are Dr. Mendes, a contributor to magazines and reference works, Gordon S. P. Kleeberg, author of *The Origin of the Republican Party,* Louis S. Lebenthal, writer of brochures on banking and bonds, and the poetess Edna G. Groskin. Dr. Bamberger has written *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period,* was a department editor in the *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia,* to which he contributed such articles as "Jeremiah," "Repentance" and "Spirit of the Law," and has contributed frequently to learned periodicals. Jacob W. Greenberg is known as an editor and publisher. Florence N. Levy won recognition for her services in the field of art, and the memory

of J. Clarence Davies is perpetuated in the splendid collection of New Yorkiana which he gathered and presented to the Museum of the City of New York. Leon A. Rains has been prominent in the work of the New York Cemeteries Association, serving for many years as chairman of their legislative committee; he recently secured the passage of seven laws, clarifying and rectifying the state legislation pertaining to interments.

The contribution of Shaaray Tefila members to the defense of the United States in war goes back, apparently, to the Civil War. Detailed records are lacking, as none were preserved by the congregation; but it is safe to assume, from family recollections and the names of those known to have served, that at least some of the 2,000 New York Jews who served came from Shaaray Tefila. During the First World War, more exact records were kept; three men of the congregation were killed on the field of battle, and seventy-five saw service; the women of the congregation, headed by Rebecca Younker (Mrs. Simon) Gottschall, established the Park Avenue Canteen at 39th Street and Park Avenue. In the Second World War 164 members from Shaaray Tefila's families served in the armed forces; five gold stars are on the Congregation's Service Flag. 1st Lt. Martin M. Strauss, 1st Lt. Alfred Hano, Jr., St. Sgt. Murray D. Strauss, Pvt. Frederick M. Buschhoff, and Pfc. Morton H. Steinthal made the supreme sacrifice.

Like all other congregations in New York City, Shaaray Tefila rendered its aid in such activities as the American Women's Voluntary Services, the sale of War Bonds, the entertainment of soldiers, and the work of civilian defence. It was particularly outstanding in its services to the Red Cross for which it received a citation

from the latter's Disaster Relief Service "in appreciation of services faithfully performed during the war years, 1942-1945." Still more striking was the blood bank for which Mrs. Harry N. Wessel served as Captain, while Mrs. Gertrude Elswit of the Temple office, rendered valuable service in maintaining a steady series of blood donors. The Congregation is especially proud of the unique distinction, in its receipt of the Red Cross Blood Donor Award "for outstanding leadership in the task of maintaining the supply of life saving blood plasma to the armed forces overseas."

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Original Sources.

Minute Books of the Congregation, 1846 to the present.

Minute Books of the Trustees, 1857 to the present.

Minute Books of the organizations of the Congregation, such as the Ladies Benevolent Society, the Hebrew Mutual Benefit Society, the Sisterhood, the Mothers' Association and the Men's Club.

Minute Books of the Joint Committee of B'nai Jeshurun and Shaaray Tefila for the conduct of Beth Olom cemetery.

B. Congregational Publications.

Shaaray Tefila Journal, 1890 to 1899.

The Messenger, 1928 to the present.

Scrapbooks of congregational notices, bulletins and programs.

C. Special Studies.

Moshe Goldblum, A Religious History of the West End Synagogue (thesis, in manuscript).

Nathan Stern, Historical Review of Congregation Shaaray Tefila (1935).

D. Histories and Articles.

Israel Goldstein, A Century of Judaism in New York (1930).

Jewish Encyclopedia and Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, articles on New York and various individuals.

E. Periodical Literature.

The Occident, 1843-1868.

The Jewish Messenger, 1858-1903.

The American Hebrew, 1879 to date.

The Jewish Tribune, 1908-1932.

Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, 1893 to date. Files of the New York daily newspapers.

F. Histories of New York Jewish Organizations.

Retrospect of the Hebrew Mutual Benefit Society, 1820-1935.

The Hebrew Orphan Asylum of the City of New York, 1822-1922.

Montefiore Hospital, 1884-1934, a Brief History.

History of the Young Men's Hebrew Association of New York City.

G. Legal Authorities.

1 Denio, pp. 388-400 (N. Y. Common Law Reports)