

Knesseth Israel Synagogue

History Project - 1891 - 2011

From its founding as the Hebrew Mutual Assistance Association on February 15, 1891 to the Knesseth Israel Synagogue that we know today, there have been countless people who worked tireless hours on behalf of the synagogue and Jewish community of this area. They cannot all be recognized as fully as they deserve but what they accomplished lives on in the memories of their families and community and in the work they left behind.

1856 - Nathan Littauer, the first Jewish settler arrives in Gloversville with his bride, the former Harriet Sporborg of Albany. After several years of importing finished leather gloves and lambskins for glove linings, Mr. Littauer establishes a glove factory in the building where he had his dry goods store (92 S. Main Street). It was an immediate success and the need for glove workers travels to Jewish communities in Europe.

1859 - Lucius Littauer, the first Jewish baby is born in Gloversville. Lucius goes on to become a US Representative from the area (serving for 10 years), a friend to Theodore Roosevelt and a benefactor of the Jewish community and the community at large (Littauer Hospital, a swimming pool and park among others).

Some of the 'famous' Jews of Gloversville include the Schine family of movie house and hotel fame and Samuel Goldwyn of Paramount Pictures and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (Sam Goldfish when he was a glove cutter in Gloversville). Some of the early Jewish businessmen are Louis Myers, Albert Klein, Seymour & Henry Lebenheim, Charles Adler and Gustav LeVor - prominent in the glove industry; Barney Galinsky and Mr. Applebaum with general & clothing stores in Gloversville and Johnstown.

As the leather and glove industry flourishes in the area, Jewish immigrants skilled in the leather trades come in greater numbers and, in turn, help the industry grow.

1884 - 19 Jewish families form the Fulton County Hebrew Cemetery Association and buy land on what is now Clyde Street. Anne Steidel (1884-1886) is the oldest grave marker in the cemetery with Charles Glantz (1818-1889) the first adult to be buried there.

1889 - The first religious services are held at the home of Isaac Myers. Mr. Myers became an active member of the synagogue.

1890 - Jewish families settle in Johnstown. Abram Harrison, owner of dry goods store, becomes the first (and only?) Jewish Mayor of Johnstown in 1912.

1891 - The Jewish immigrant workers outnumber the original settlers, and 36 new families join cemetery association to form the Hebrew Mutual Assistance Association (dues were 25 cents/month). A hall is rented at 55 S. Main Street and regular and holiday services are conducted by Abram Zuckerwar (appointed the first religious leader of the congregation in 1894 - he continued to serve as spiritual leader until his death in 1937).

1898 - The combined Fulton County Hebrew Cemetery Association and the Hebrew Mutual Assistance Association raises \$2,000 to buy a plot of land at East Fulton Street for a synagogue.

1905 - November 25, 1905: Ground breaking ceremony for the synagogue are held

The Morning Herald (December 26, 1905)

"The constant growth of the Hebrew population of Gloversville has necessitated a permanent place of worship and, with a view of erecting a temple; a building site was purchased by the society in 1898 for the sum of \$2,000, which was cleared of indebtedness in 1905. In the same year, plans were made for the erection of a suitable temple. Ground was broken on the 25th day of November of the same year. At this time, all intended ceremonies such as usually mark the beginning of such projects, and which had been suggested and intended in connection with the breaking of grounds for the temple, were dispensed with because of the news which had reached this country of the terrible massacres of the Hebrews in the Russian Empire which it was reported that 15,000 Jews were slain and mutilated and more were wounded and destitute."

1906 - September 17th: The dedication KIS's new home takes place in the Sanctuary of the new synagogue to an overflowing crowd.

The Morning Herald (September 18)'s article concluded with

"The dedication of the temple marks a new epoch in the life of the Hebrew residents of this city and vicinity, and too much credit cannot be bestowed upon those who have given liberally of their time and means in making the erection of the temple possible."

The pogroms and persecution of Jews in Russia & Poland brings an increase of Jewish immigration to the area (see The Morning Herald article of Dec 12, 1905 above) and establishment of organizations to help them - including: The Brith Abraham, the Brith Sholom, Free Sons of Judea, The Fulton County Relief Society, Hebrew Ladies Aid Society, the Workman's Circle, Sons of Benjamin, Council of Jewish Woman, Fulton County Hebrew Aid Association, Jewish Chautauqua Society, Jewish Socialist-Territorialism Labor Party.

The early synagogue years are filled with social and cultural events including speakers, travelers, dances, plays, shows, parties, anniversary celebrations and Bar Mitzvahs.

1918 - The synagogue is known widely as Knesseth Israel but the name is officially adopted on March 12th, 1918. At that time, the following membership is recorded.

President - Jacob Meltzer Secretary - Morris Kletcher		
David Adelman	Isdore Heiman	H. Perlman
Wolf Adelman	Abram Harrison	Morris Pozefsky
Solomon Alderman	Wolf Horowitz	Max Pozefsky
M. Borenstein	M. Kartch	M. Philipsohn
Joseph Bachner	Louis Kaplan	Isaac Pozefsky
H.I. Berger	H. Kauffman	Lazarus Rubin
H. Bruner	Louis Karsh	Joseph Rockovitz
M. Berliner	F. Kalbfeld	Harry Rockovitz
Abraham Cashinsky	Samuel Lipshon	H. Robb
Isaac Cohen	Harris Lazarus	Nathan Rosenbaum
David Citronberg	Jacob Lazarus	Morris Rogowitz
Joseph Cohen	J. Leibglid	John Sosonsky
N. Dworkin	R. Mendleshon	Meyer Shaffer
Morris Feldman	A. Mironer	Abram Schwartz
A. Forman	L. Meyer	Thomas Shpritzer
Abram Finn	J. Morein	H. Schwartz
S. Finkel	Morris Myzal	Albert Sack
Abe Ferber	Max Myzal	Philip Sackheim
H. Feinberg	A. Maybaum	M. Schwartz
A. Gordon	Sam Madora	Simon Stein
Ancel Grossman	P. Mason	A. Senator
Harry Galinsky	N. Mintz	Louis Segal
H. Goldin	L. Millerbach	S. Sack
Sam Garfinkle	L. Machaelowitz	Louis Thorne
I. Hansen	Mat Noznov	W. Wolnek
	Joseph Nelkin	M. Young
	S. Neivert	Rev. Abraham Zuckerwar

Knesseth Israel starts its life as an Orthodox synagogue - women are excluded from membership and administration duties, are not counted in the minyan and

cannot not receive an aliyah or sit with men during services. As the above list shows, only men were considered members of the synagogue.

Services in the synagogue are conducted entirely in Hebrew and until February 1937, meetings are conducted and recorded in Yiddish.

1929 - From "The Glove Cities- Amsterdam Jewish Year Book of 1929 - 5690"

"Gloversville boasts one of the most enterprising Orthodox synagogues for a city of its size of any in Eastern New York State in the Knesseth Israel Congregation, which was founded over a quarter of a century ago and has over 115 members participating in religious and educational activities. The community has been generous in its support of the synagogue and congregational work has led to the establishment of a strong bond of relationships between the Jews of Gloversville and Johnstown. During the recent New Year services, the synagogue was crowded to capacity.

The congregation is under the leadership of Max Pozefsky, President of the Synagogue. The other officers are: Joseph Rockovitz, VP; Gus Werthman, Secretary and J. Zaleon, Treasurer ... trustees are: M. Cohen, A. Grossman, Ilk Pozefsky, A. Green and M. Myzal."

1928 - The Women's Auxiliary of the JCC is formed in April 1928 with 28 members. They have 2 main functions - to aid the JCC and to "represent Jewish women in general civic projects and activities". In 1938 they publish a successful cookbook "Gloversville Hostess Cookbook" in its 5th edition by 1963.

1936 - Gloversville Chapter of Hadassah is formed with 50 members. The Chapter is still active and runs a very successful Craft Fair on the Sunday before Thanksgiving which is a wonderful fundraiser for Hadassah and an anticipated event for the general community.

1937 - The Knesseth Israel community is saddened by the passing of their first religious leader, Rev. Zuckerwar. The mortgage on the building is paid off and meetings are held with the Jewish Community Center to discuss a community Hebrew School.

1938 - A resolution is passed during the congregation meeting to protest the German treatment of the Jews in Europe and a telegram to this effect sent to President Roosevelt. A Memorial Service honoring Rev. Zuckerwar is held and a bronze tablet recognizing his service is placed in vestibule. The suggestion of changing to Conservative services is brought up for the first time and tabled.

1939 - A trial Friday evening Conservative service takes place with Rabbi Michalson of Peekskill, officiating. About 90 people attend and the service is deemed a success but is not repeated although interest and discussions continue.

1941-1945 - War years and many of Gloversville young men serve. Thoughts of changing the service are deemed inappropriate.

1946 - Gloversville Lodge B'nai Brith #1620 is granted its charter in April 1946 and assumes the role of men's clubs for the JCC and synagogue.

1949 - Discussion about Conservative services end in a resolution calling for a 'trial period of 1 year for fully Conservative services' passed on October 1949. In November, Rabbi Wasser becomes the first Rabbi/Teacher (rather than Reverend)

1951 - Daily minyan services begin; the first Brotherhood Service are held in the Sanctuary; a choir is organized; ushers are first used during the High Holiday services; the vestry is renovated; a kitchen is built; special events fund-raising is instituted; a part-time secretary is hired; a study of a new constitution incorporating the Conservative movement is authorized; a house at 21 Prospect Avenue is purchased for the Rabbi.

November 18, 1951 - Knesseth Israel celebrates its 60th anniversary with special services and a program of liturgical, folk music (including Yiddish & Israeli songs).

1950's - KIS becomes affiliated with the United Synagogues of America, and the first written rules and regulations governing cemetery procedure are prepared. Rabbi Samuel Schafler participates in the Gloversville High School Baccalaureate Services for the first time; thereafter Knesseth Israel members & religious leaders participate in more interfaith services.

1956 - A new constitution officially changing the services from Orthodox to Conservative is formally approved on October 29, 1956. Besides the change to Conservative services, the Constitution ends male-only membership and institutes family membership; establishes a Board of Directors and Officers consisting of 33 men and women to be responsible for the religious, financial and physical affairs of the synagogue.

Through the 1950's it becomes obvious that the synagogue building is too small for the growing congregation and Board of Directors discusses renovation of the existing synagogue or building a new one.

1961 - In January, the Board of Directors unanimously passes the creation of a New Building Fund Campaign with Jack Shulman as Chair. Mrs. Martha Schine

starts the campaign off with a pledge of \$2,500 in memory of her husband, Louis W. Schine. By year's end, \$190,000 of the \$250,000 projected cost is pledged.

In April of 1961, J. Myer and Hildegard Schine donate their Hippodrome Theater property at the corner of East Fulton & Fremont Street for the site of the new synagogue building.

The Leader Herald (April 26, 1961)

Mrs. Schine Donates Hipp (to be razed) as New Knesseth Israel Synagogue Site

A new Knesseth Israel Synagogue will be constructed at the site of the Hippodrome Theater.

The synagogue's Board of Directors has accepted the theater and adjacent property as a gift from Mrs. J. Myer Schine. ... The gift from Mrs. Schine includes the theater at 34 E. Fulton Street and houses at 36 (rear) and 38 E. Fulton Street. All will be razed.

Mr. Schulman (chairman of the building fund drive) reported that synagogue building drive committee is completing plans to purchase the property next door, owned by Louis Nicholson. This includes the Nicholson Candy Store and insurance office and large home in the rear.

There will be limited parking next to the new synagogue. No large parking lot is planned because of the new municipal lots being constructed nearby on Fremont Street.

Although plans are indefinite, the present synagogue between Elk & Market Streets on East Fulton is expected to be torn down and the land retained for future disposal.

In acknowledging the gift from Mrs. Schine, Schulman recalled that the original property on which the present synagogue now stands was owned by Mrs. Schine's grandparents and the property on which the present Jewish Community Center was built was owned by the Schines.

1962 - Purchase of the buildings around the site is completed; Edgar Tafel of NY, a protégé of Frank Lloyd Wright, is hired and the first plans for the building are submitted; final plans for the new synagogue are approved at the June 1962 meeting and demolition of the old buildings begins.

September 10, 1962 - Ground-breaking services for the new synagogue building is held on a cloudy Monday morning with 75 members in attendance, most of who take turns at turning the earth.

The excitement of the new building didn't dampen the sadness of leaving the old one. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services of 1962 are poignant for the congregation as they realize they are the last High Holy Days in the old building. Sermons and messages from the pulpit refer to memories of the more than 50 years of KIS in that building and hopes for the future of the congregation in the new one.

November 11, 1962 - Cornerstone Services for the new Knesseth Israel Synagogue building take place. Records and documents are deposited into vaults at the new building site by

- Lazarus Rubin & Joseph Rockovitz, charter members of the synagogue;
- Harry Starr, representing the Littauer Foundation;
- Past Presidents Dr. Joseph Berg and Max Leiser;
- Building committee members: Jesse Cash, Bob Ekstein, Merwin Greene, Leon Harris, Jules Higier, Louis Rubin, Donald Schine, J. Myer Schine, Isadore Willner, Solomon Wise, Isaac Zaleon, Jacob Zuckerwar and Richard Zuckerwar.

The cornerstone from the old building is moved to the new building site.

Construction on the building continues even though the winter is one of the worst in 30 years.

1963 - The building is dedicated in a special ceremony on September 8, 1963.

The Dedication Ceremony includes "Service of Departure" from the old synagogue with a responsive reading starting:

"We pay tribute to this House of God; it afforded infinite happiness and joy to those who worshipped here"

... And ends with the words -

"As we leave this Synagogue, we pledge ourselves to serve the new with a spirit of consecration."

The Torahs and ritual objects are removed from the old synagogue, the Menorah, the eternal light and the lights in the sanctuary are ceremoniously extinguished. The Torahs & ritual objects are then marched in a procession to the new synagogue

The doors to the new synagogue and the sanctuary within the new synagogue are ceremoniously opened, the lights are kindled and the Torahs brought into the synagogue and placed in the Ark.

The congregation of Knesseth Israel has a new home.

The Dedication book created for the occasion ends its 'History Recitation' with the words:

".. We are proud of our accomplishments, our local history and our eternal heritage"

1964 - The George J. Dorfman School of Jewish Education opens and begins teaching children in September.

1965 - A library, under the auspices of Esther Tasner, is created. Francine Levine sets up a history of KIS - scrapbooks containing pictures and information outlining Knesseth Israel's history is still available at the Library.

1971 - Andrea Vlock becomes the first Bat Mitzvah girl to read from the Torah during Saturday morning services.

1974 - Rabbi Milton Fierstein comes to KIS and adds new programs including Bible Class and Lunch & Learn, short term courses in Hebrew and Shalom Aleichem groups.

A Cultural Committee is formed between the synagogue & the Jewish Community Center - bringing many cultural events to the congregation and community.

1976 - A special meeting is called by the president Jay Spinak to discuss equal rights for women in the Synagogue. The proposition "That women be counted toward minyans and given full participation in the services including aliyahs" is passed 98 to 10. Shortly thereafter, Mrs. Estelle Blatt becomes the first woman to have an aliyah at her son Warren's Bar Mitzvah.

1980's - A gift from Jules Higier allows the synagogue to retire the existing mortgage. Marian Finkle becomes the first woman to serve as President of the Congregation.

Friday Night Family Services start. Special Sabbath Dinners for Hebrew School students start, Jewish Community Council is reactivated to oversee combined Jewish events like Israel Independence Day, Holocaust Observance, Chanukah Banquet and to help in relocating families of Russian Jews to the area.

The small chapel is remodeled & redecorated with a generous gift from Mr. & Mrs. Ross Higier in memory of their parents, Edna & Jules Higier and Martha & Louis Schine.

1982 - SPAC (Saratoga Performing Arts) Benefit starts under leadership of Amy Coplon, Ruth Basuk, Selma Schulman and Jack Schulman. This annual event continues and is a major fund raiser for the synagogue.

1983 - Sabbath Morning Children's Service is formed

1985 - First High Holy Day Appeal

1988 - Extra land is purchased to increase the size of the cemetery.

1990 - KIS approaches its 100th anniversary and a committee chaired by Cheryl Horowitz plans a gala event.

1991 - July 6th the Centennial Anniversary Weekend that includes special Sabbath services on Friday evening & Saturday morning and a Reception at the synagogue on Saturday evening. The weekend is a smashing success

1997 - Rabbi Martin Gordon comes to KIS and is welcomed for his learning, gentle humor and warmth. He leads the congregation for 13 years.

2010 - The congregation is saddened by the passing of Rabbi Gordon on June 4, 2010

2011 - Knesseth Israel celebrates its 120th anniversary with a History Project to collect stories from present and past congregants.

A committee is set up to design and install a fitting memorial in Rabbi Gordon's memory.

Knesseth Israel looks back on its long and varied history and also forward into the 21st century. A Rabbi Search committee is formed.

A new website, www.knesethisrael.net is launched.

August 2011 - Rabbi Rose Durbin, our first woman Rabbi joins Knesseth Israel Synagogue as our spiritual leader.

April 2013 - Rabbi Rose & Rabbi Matt Durbin welcome a second daughter, Maya to their and the KIS family.

September 2014, Shlichat Tsibbur - Suzanne Schermerhorn officially becomes the Slichat Tsibbur of Knesseth Israel Synagogue. Shlichat Tsibbur (female form

of Shaliach) means messenger of a congregation and prayer leader in the Synagogue