

Ohev Sholom Was Formed by...

By Dorothy Buzek, The Herald Advertiser, Sunday, March 11, 1951

Editor's Note: This is another in a series of historical sketches of Huntington churches.



Seventy-one years ago – in 1880 – Samuel Gideon, a prominent citizen of early Huntington, organized the Almonia Social Club here. Seven years later, Ohev Sholom Congregation was formed by members of this club and the first Jewish religious school in Huntington was established.

Mr. Gideon was the father of the late David Gideon, publisher of The Herald-Dispatch, and the grandfather of William D. Birke, present publisher of the newspaper. Mr. Birke now is secretary of Ohev Sholom congregation, which, since 1926, has held its religious services in the beautiful Ohev Sholom Temple at the corner of Tenth avenue and Tenth Street.

The charter membership of Ohev Sholom Congregation consisted of Samuel Gideon, who was the first president and continued in that office until his death in 1923; Joseph Levy, vice-president; Edward Meyerson, secretary; Leon Sternberger, treasurer; Emmanuel Biern, Lois

Lefkowitz, Lee Kahn, Lester Kellner, Jacob Ziegler, Jacob Friedman, Benjamin Wolf, Mike Broh, Julius Broh, Victor Greene and Moses Berkheim.

Of these charter members, only one – Edward Meyerson, now of Charlotte, NC, is known to be still living.

In 1889, Ohev Sholom Congregation, as a distinct and separate organization from the Almonia Club, obtained a charter as a religious body, and a campaign was begun to raise funds for the purchase of ground on which to erect a temple for the small but active congregation.

Some members of the temple gave the date of organization as 1887; others date the beginning as 1889, when the charter was obtained. An inscription in the present temple gives the earlier date.

In 1891, a lot was purchased at the northeast corner of Fifth Avenue and Tenth Street for \$1200. Soon thereafter, the rear half was sold. At this time, the congregation adopted the Reform Jewish ritual, which ever since has been the form of worship of the congregation.

With a site paid for and a small surplus on hand, a movement was next inaugurated for funds with which to erect a temple. Construction began late in 1891 and the following year the first permanent home of Ohev Sholom Congregation was completed and dedicated by Rabbi Isaac M. Wise, pioneer of Reform Judaism in the United States.

From 1892 to 1915, the congregation was unable to afford a rabbi, but, nevertheless, religious services were conducted on the Sabbath. [Illegible, fold in page]...more or less regularly from 1908 to 1913.

During this time, the Temple Sabbath School was continued as a regular activity of the congregation under the sponsorship and direction of the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society, which later became Temple Sisterhood. The Benevolent Society was organized in 1887, the same year that the congregation was organized by the members of the Almonia Club. Mrs. Betty Wolf was the first president of the ladies' organization. Mrs. Wolf was the mother of Alex and Rose Wolf (Mrs. L.A. Pollock), both of whom now live in California.

Huntington grew rapidly in the early 1900's and about 1916 there was an influx of newcomers to the city, whereupon it soon became apparent that Ohev Sholom had outgrown its first home.

On November 1, 1919?, the purchase of a lot on which the present Temple stands was negotiated, and plans were formulated for the erection of a new temple. A drive for funds was started by Dez C. Schonthal, who succeeded Mr. Gideon as president of the congregation in 1924. The campaign was carried forward by Mr. Schonthal, Samuel Samson, Julius Broh, and others.

Samuel Gideon died in 1923, and with his death came the realization that, unless immediate action was taken, some of the other original founders of the congregation would also fail to live to see a new and more commodious temple.

The campaign for funds was revived and intensively carried on, and, on July 15, 1924, the old temple was sold for \$63,300, and construction of the present temple began in 1925.

The present building was completed and dedicated on June 11, 1926, by Rabbi David Phillipson, president of the Hebrew Union College, assisted by Rabbi Abraham Feinstein, then rabbi of Ohev Sholom, now rabbi of Mispah Temple, Chattanooga, Tenn. Also assisting were Rabbis Abba Hillel Silver and Samuel S. Meyerberg, who had served the congregation while they were students at Hebrew Union College at Cincinnati. They are two of a number of men who came here as students and later became very prominent rabbis.

A feature of the dedication in 1926 was an address by Joseph Schonthal, father of Dez C. Schonthal, donor of the pulpit, and a generous contributor to the building fund.

Emmanuel Biern, one of the leading charter members of the congregation, died shortly after the construction of the present temple began in 1925. Mr. Biern was the father of Dr. Oscar B. Biern, present chairman of the board of trustees of Ohev Sholom Congregation, and the late Samuel Biern, widely known Huntington attorney, who died September 7, 1948.

On September 15, 1948, the board of trustees of the congregation at a regular meeting passed a resolution in memory of Samuel Biern. The special resolutions committee included Bernard Sclove, chairman; Dez C. Schonthal, Bert O. Landau, Aaron Cohen, and Stanley S. Gold.

The resolution contains a statement of Mr. Biern's life, aspirations, and accomplishments, as well as impressions of his character and personality.

It says of him that "at the time of his death, he was undoubtedly the most prominent and widely known member of Huntington Jewry. In his time, he was a successful lawyer and counselor, an acknowledged political leader, a capable public official, and a forceful figure in the civic and welfare life of the community."

On September 19, 1948, a service in memoriam was held at the temple for Mr. Biern. The Rev. Edward M. Blum, then rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church here, gave the invocation; the service was by Rabbi Eugene Hibshman, rabbi of the temple; the memorial by Herbert Fitzpatrick; and Rabbi Abraham Feinstein; the adoration by Rabbi Jacob M. Danziger of B'nai Israel Synagogue, and the benediction by Rabbi Hibshman.

Ohev Sholom Temple was declared free of debt and rededicated on September 17, 1943. Rabbi Lawrence A. Block was then rabbi of the congregation. Among others participating, in the order of reconsecration services, were Dr. Harry E. Mueller, organist and choir director; Aaron C. Cohen, then president of Ohev Sholom Congregation; Rabbi Jacob M. Danziger; Mrs. Ralph Masinter, then president of the Temple Sisterhood; Samuel Samson, who extended greetings from former rabbis and members of Ohev Shalom Congregation, Mrs. Max Glick, who was in

charge of lighting of Sabbath candles, and Dr. Oscar B. Biern, who spoke in appreciation of the service of Dr. Mueller.

At the rededication service, the processional of the Scrolls of the Law was carried by Joseph S. Fields, Edward Meyerson, and Max Glick. The burning of the mortgage and presentation [missing text due to fold] Schonthal, then chairman of the board of trustees; the rededication prayer by Rabbi Abraham Feinstein; the rededication address by Dr. Solomon B. Freehof of Rodef Shalom Temple, Pittsburgh, PA; the adoration, special prayer for departed founders and Kaddish by Rabbi Feinstein and the benediction by Dr. Freehof. The music was by Dr. Mueller and the choir.

A prayer for the new year by Rabbi Block at the time the temple was rededicated said, in part:

“Happy we are that our Temple debt is paid, and, for the first time, our Congregation will be able to see its way clear in the New Year. Happy we are that our House of Worship is no longer in the hands of creditors, but belongs once more to our God and our people. Happy we are that our fathers’ faith in us has been vindicated and that we who once almost lost the Temple have been privileged to live to see its rededication. For all this, we have much cause to rejoice and be grateful at the beginning of this newest of years.”

A history of Ohev Sholom Temple would be incomplete without special mention of Dr. Mueller, retired head of the music department at Marshall College, who served as organist and choir director at the temple for 24 years prior to his retirement last year. As an expression of appreciation of his long and faithful service, the congregation has made him organist and choir director emeritus.

During the years he was in charge of music at the temple, Dr. Mueller brought there groups of singers from the Marshall College Madrigal Club, who learned many of the Jewish services which they sang reverently and beautifully at Friday evening services.

Dr. Mueller has been succeeded by Ms. Faye Lowry, who is continuing in her predecessor’s footsteps. Groups of Marshall College singers still sing for regular services. On special feast days, a quartet composed of four of Huntington’s most accomplished singers provides the music.

Early records of the temple are somewhat incomplete, but several long-time members of the congregation when questioned were of the opinion that Rabbi Abraham Feinstein was the first regular rabbi of Ohev Sholom Temple. He served from 1920 until 1932. Among others who have served the congregation are Rabbi Samuel D. Soskin, Rabbi Ralph Blumenthal, Rabbi Lawrence A. Block, and the present rabbi, Eugene Hibshman.

In the early days and in some instances between the departure of one rabbi and the arrival of his successor, students from the Hebrew Union College at Cincinnati, the theological seminary, conducted services at the temple.

Rabbi Block came to Huntington in 1941 to succeed Rabbi Blumenthal, who had resigned to enter military service as a chaplain in World War II. He resigned in 1948 to accept a call to Beth Sholom Temple in Santa Ana, California. Since then, Rabbi Block has moved to a temple in Santa Monica.

Rabbi Hibshman came here in 1948? from Temple Israel in Paducah, Kentucky, where he had been for two years. He had previously served congregations at Altoona and Uniontown, PA, Leavenworth, Kansas, and [missing due to fold in column 3]

During World War II, he was civilian chaplain at military installations in the Kansas City and Colorado Springs areas, and was also chaplain at the US penitentiary at Leavenworth.

Rabbi Hibshman was formally installed as rabbi of the congregation here September 21, 1948?. Since coming to Huntington, he has taken an active part in the religious and civic life of the community. Rabbi Hibshman is a member of the Huntington Ministerial Association of the Rotary Club, and a member of the board of directors of the Huntington Mental Health Association.

He and his wife and 17-months-old son, Jonathan Williams, resident at 1538 Terrace Drive. Mrs. Hibshman is active in the Temple Sisterhood and in other women's organizations in Huntington.

The present membership of Ohev Sholom Temple is 165 families. In accordance with Jewish custom, only heads of families are counted, thus a large family will count as only one member, the same as a single person with no family counts as one member.

The most recent physical improvement to the temple was the building of Sunday school rooms in the remodeled Temple Community Center. This was a project of the Temple Sisterhood, which group was responsible for financing of it. The project consisting of seven rooms and a small stage was dedicated last [missing due to fold, column 3].

At present 72 children are enrolled in the Sunday school. These are all children under 15 years of age.

The school begins with the nursery school for four year olds and goes through the ninth grade, which is the 11th year. This ninth grade class is called the Confirmation Class.

The present class includes seven boys and girls who will be confirmed in June. They are: Carol Hayes, Carolyn Cohen, Marjorie Schradski, Robert Saltz, Charles M. Broh, Martin Levy, and Stephen Jacobson.

Men who have served as president of Ohev Sholom Congregation include Samuel Gideon, Dez C. Schonthal, Sol J. Hyman, Julius Broh, Dr. I. I. Hirschman, Samuel Samson, A.B. Hyman, I. Ben Romer, A.H. Frankel, Dr. Oscar B. Biern, Stanley S. Gold, Aaron C. Cohen, Harry Glick, David Fox, Lawrence Glick, Leon Fishman, and the present president, E. Henry Broh, Huntington attorney.

Other 1950-51 officers are Luke Polan Jr., vice-president; William D. Birke, secretary; and Morris Kunts, treasurer. Dr. Oscar B. Biern is chairman of the board of trustees, and trustees are M.D. Angel, Leon Fishman, David Fox Sr., Harry A. Glick, Mrs. I.S. Hyman, Simon B. Mazo, Samuel Samson Jr., and Mrs. Victor D. Wormier. Mrs. Wormier is president of the Temple Sisterhood this year.

Other temple organizations include the Temple Brotherhood, the Young People's Group, and a Bible class conducted by Dr. Joseph Krinsky.

Thirty-five members or sons of members of the congregation served with the armed forces during World War II and a regular feature of services at the temple during the war was the offering of prayers for those in the nation's service.

Three of these men gave their lives for the cause of freedom [missing line due to fold in paper], Sergeant Raymond Schoenbaum, and Captain Teddy Solof.

One of the most beautiful physical features of Ohev Sholom Temple is the large oval window in the front of the building, known as the "rose window." It was given in memory of Samuel Gideon and Emmanuel Biern, the two men who played such an important part in the founding of the congregation.

There is a reddish or rose glow from the window. In the center is a scroll and sections or rays emanating from the center depict signs of the various tribes of Israel. The rays are a yellowish red surrounded by green stars. In the center there is a six-pointed star, the Star of Israel. The window symbolizes Israel united and dedicated to God.

The temple also has six other windows depicting scenes from the Old Testament and 10 windows on the side, each with a picture of a different prophet.

Ohev Sholom Temple is associated with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, which is the national organization of Reform Jewish Congregations.

Rabbi Hibshman explained that Reform or liberal or Progressive Judaism, as it is variously called today, was established upon the premise that change in Jewish practice was both necessary and possible, and many modifications of traditional Jewish forms and practices have come into widespread usage. This kind of Judaism seeks to express the ideals of [missing due to fold] and in a form that is acceptable to the mind and spirit of modern man.

The program of rededication in 1943 contained a page entitled "A Tribute to Women of Valor – Ohev Sholom Temple Sisterhood." It said, in part:

"Service has been a long tradition with the Jewish women of Huntington. It starts back in 1887 when the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society was founded with 13 members...It begins in a larger way with the transformation of this group into the Temple Sisterhood, which occurred when West Virginia organized its State Federation and became part of the national Reform

organization. It continued with the building, the dedication, and preservation of the original Temple and grew to even greater magnitude with the building of the new Temple.

“In fact, without the women of the Sisterhood, there could have been no new Temple. It was their determination, sacrifice, and perseverance which inspired the men folk and was largely responsible for making it possible. They even bought and paid for the beautiful organ which enriches our service to this day. It was their loyalty and zeal which helped keep the Temple doors open during the lean years and the dark days. It was their fidelity which saw to it that the Religious School was kept going and that children were confirmed in the days when there were no rabbis in Huntington. It was their patriotism which did canteen work, Red Cross work, and sold liberty bonds during the first World War and which carries on the same splendid example today. It was their love for the Temple and all for which it stands which has prompted them, whenever the emergency rose, to give of their treasury liberally and gladly.”

The original members of the Hebrew Benevolent Society included: Mrs. Sam Oppenheimer, Mrs. Samuel Glavon[?], Mrs. Lester Kelner, Mrs. Fannie Moses Broh, Mrs. Lee Weil, Mrs. Sam Fox, Mrs. Antoinette Schoenfeld, Mrs. Ike Lefkowitz, Mrs. Lester Pollock, Mrs. Alex Wolf, Mrs. Ed Myerson, Mrs. Emmanuel Biern, and three others listed only as Mrs. Levy, Mrs. Harrison, and Mrs. Sternberger. Of this group, only Mrs. Pollock is still living.

Charter members of the present Temple Sisterhood, which grew out of the Benevolent Society, include Mrs. Eph Broh, Mrs. Harry Glick, Mrs. Max Glick, Mrs. Aline Hirschman, Mrs. Dez Schoenthal, Mrs. Rosa Oppenheimer Reich, Mrs. A. Solof, Mrs. Sam Abrahams, Mrs. Sol Burke, Mrs. Moses Cohen, Mrs. Blanche Gideon, Mrs. Morris Fisher, Mrs. Isador Hyman, Mrs. Harry Mason, Mrs. Bertha Miriam Polan, Mrs. Sarah Ginsburg Samson, Mrs. Albert Scholssberg, Mrs. J. Fields, and Mrs. Honey Weil.

Throughout the years it has been in existence, Ohev Sholom Congregation has maintained especially friendly relations with other religious groups in the city and has done its share to contribute to the betterment of Huntington. In 1935, when a disastrous fire destroyed Johnson Memorial Methodist Church, Ohev Sholom Congregation was quick to offer the use of the temple to the temporarily homeless Methodist congregation. The offer was gratefully accepted and while their church was being rebuilt, the Johnson Memorial people held services at the temple. This was an example of the spirit of the neighborliness which has always characterized the Ohev Sholom Congregation.