

A HISTORY OF HEBREW TABERNACLE

A HISTORY OF

**THE HEBREW TABERNACLE CONGREGATION
OF WASHINGTON HEIGHTS**

A German-Jewish Community in New York City

With An Introduction by Rabbi Robert L. Lehman, D. Min., D.D.

THANK YOU

Many individuals have contributed toward making this project possible, not the least of which were those who helped with their financial contributions. They gave “in honor” as well as “in memory” of individuals and causes they held dear. We appreciate their gifts and thank them in the name of the congregation.

R.L.L.

IN MEMORY OF

MY DEAR ONES by Mrs. Anna Bondy

TESSY & MAX BUCHDAHL

by their loved ones, Mr. and Mrs. Ernst Grumbacher

HERBERT KANN by his wife, Mrs. Lore Kann

FRED MEYERHOFF by his wife, Mrs. Rose Meyerhoff

ILSE SCHLOSS by her husband, Mr. Kurt J. Schloss

JULIUS STERN by his wife, Mrs. Bella Stern

ROBERT WOLEMERINGER by his wife, Mrs. Friedel Wollmeringer

IN HONOR OF

AMY, DEBORAH & JOSHUA BAUML

by their grandmother, Mrs. Elsa Bauml

the CONGREGATION by Mrs. Gerda Dittman,

Mr. & Mrs. Paul Ganzman, Ms. Bertha Kuba, Mr. & Mrs. Nathan Maier,

Mrs. Emma Michel, Mrs. Ada Speyer (deceased 1984),

Mrs. Joan Wickert

MICHELLE GLASER and STEVEN GLASER by their
grandmother, Mrs. Anna Bondy

RAQUEL and RUSSELL PFEFFER by their grandparents,
Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph Oppenheimer

HANNA ROTHSTEIN by her friend, Mrs. Stephanie Goldmann
and by two donors who wish to remain anonymous

INTRODUCTION

Several factors were instrumental in the writing of this history of our congregation. All of them, in one way or another, highlighted the fact that this generation, which had made our Hebrew Tabernacle a force to be reckoned with in Liberal Judaism, was advancing in years. With the encouragement of our present and immediate past presidents: MR. PAUL A. KOHLMANN and MR. ERNEST HARTOG, as well as the present and immediate past treasurers: MRS. GERTRUDE MAIER and MR. RICHARD FEIST, we felt obligated to set on paper the spirit and events which contributed to give this special group of Jews a new, vibrant spiritual home, one which appreciated their needs and could cater to their religious feelings. The Hebrew Tabernacle Congregation has served New York Jewry for over seventy-five years; for the past forty-five years, it has been a source of strength, solace and peace to those who fled the Holocaust and came to America as immigrants.

Some of the factors which focused on a need for a written history are easily identified: first, Cantor Henry Ehrenberg who had served our congregation for thirty-five years, chose to retire in 1977. It was a traumatic event for the congregational family and the loss was deeply felt by all. In addition to the leadership qualities now lost, and the beautiful voice no longer to be heard in song and prayer, there was the psychological aspect to be considered: if our Cantor had chosen to retire, what of the congregant himself? He too was getting on in years; a new generation was growing up to succeed him. It was for this group of retirees, of Senior Citizens, who were always active members but had now chosen to step to the sidelines, that this History was to be written.

The second vital incident was the observance in 1978 of the fortieth anniversary of Kristallnacht; this was coupled in our congregation with the publication of a book, "Reflections on the Holocaust", written by Rosalyn Manowitz. The stories published in this volume focused on the issue that this was, indeed, a unique generation which had a particular story to tell. It ought not go unnoticed.

But there was a third event which highlighted the need to bring together the basic facts of our Temple's existence: the seventy-fifth anniversary celebration of our congregation in 1982. In connection with

this observance, the congregation issued a special Journal within which was contained an outline of our history. Much of this work was based on readings and personal interviews with leading personalities of the congregational family; the article was written by a committee which included Mrs. Joan Taub, Mr. John Frolich, Mrs. Rosalyn Manowitz, Cantor Fred Herman and myself. In conjunction with the seventy-fifth anniversary, this writer also prepared a slide presentation of the congregation's history, based in great measure on the original books of minutes of our Board of Trustees. Special emphasis was given to the first five years of the Tabernacle's existence, 1906-1911. This material also drew on an unpublished manuscript by a son of the congregation, Rabbi Peter H. Grumbacher, which he wrote for a course at Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio. Again, the point was obvious to all: the fragments of history now extant ought to be brought together in a major work which would make our congregants proud of their heritage and assure them their place in history, both as individuals and as a religious community.

These were the basic motivations. In addition, we felt it ought to be noted that a congregation such as ours, which had in its three-quarter century of existence given six of its young men to the American rabbinate, ought to be remembered in greater measure than just fragments of data scattered around the country. The six rabbis, five of whom are still alive and actively engaged in congregational work, are: Rabbis Gustav Buchdahl of Baltimore, Md., Murray Blackman of New Orleans, La., Jay Brickman of Milwaukee, Wi., Peter H. Grumbacher of Wilmington, De., and this writer. The sixth, Rabbi Myron Weingarten, died in 1955.

Perhaps a personal note would lead to an understanding of our congregation. I have been a rabbi for more than thirty years, twenty-nine of those in service to the Hebrew Tabernacle. I recall this episode, which relates to our place in history and which occurred forty-five years ago, as if it were yesterday. My parents and I wanted a Synagogue where my Bar Mitzvah might properly be celebrated; we sought a spiritual home rather than a place of opulence. Of course, as recent refugees, the funds for a Bar Mitzvah, even the basic instruction, were non-existent. The officials of the congregation struck the following agreement with my parents: the Bar Mitzvah would be "free" with the understanding that one day soon,

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when the family could afford it, we would join the Temple as members. Both sides kept to that agreement as did other families in the same situation. What was most significant was the idea that all manner of people: rich and poor, American born and emigrees, the average and influential, could come to our Temple and be greeted for what they were rather than for what they had. This is a policy still followed at our Temple: all who are in need may come to our door and be welcome; no person has ever been refused the services of our congregation for lack of funds. The poor, the hungry, the needy have found here a receptive spirit to the needs and pain that afflict them. Countless programs have been conducted at our Temple over the years which have served this constituency; be they Jewish or not, it made no difference. We helped to rebuild cemeteries in Europe, we presented one of our Torah scrolls to the Israeli Army, we brought over to these shores a Vietnamese boat family, we participate in city wide programs for the hungry and needy, we gave aid to the refugees of our own people who fled Russia and Ethiopia. With our history, we know of their need for freedom. As a congregation, we stand ready to serve those who come to our door in genuine search. The task of the Jew is not to save the world but to save one fellow human being!

The plight of our own generation of Jews, predominantly those who fled the Nazi forces in the late 1930's and early 1940's, was brought home to me in a dissertation which I wrote as part of a doctoral program in conjunction with the Isabella Geriatric Center. Once again, the age factor was brought into focus; our people were not the Senior Citizens of the glossy magazine ads but were in the process of entering the "Homes" in which many were to spend the remainder of their lives. For them, also, this history and its many strands had to be tied together, be written down, be published.

The task of combining the narrative, the minutes and fragments of this project was worked on by both John H. Frolich and Joan Taub. Mrs. Taub also did the final editing. But, the extent of our history required the services of a professional historian and, as a consequence, in 1984 the task was given to Ms. Evelyn Ehrlich.

This History represents her work: she was ably assisted, in the typing of many of the Minutes and revisions, by Mrs. Gretel Wolff. We of the official family are grateful to all who in some way participated in this

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venture; because of their help and the support of countless others, this congregation endures. It will continue to be a source for good and for strength in our community.

The likes of this generation shall not so easily pass our way again.

Robert L. Lehman, D. Min., D.D. Rabbi

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CHANUKAH

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It is my pleasure to thank the Officers and Members of the Hebrew Tabernacle Congregation who have made this publication possible. My special gratitude belongs to those who gave graciously of their time and shared with me their memories of the temple.

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I am indebted to my students from the Open Mind Group, through whom I have gained a personal understanding of the German Jewish experience in America, and to the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe, Inc., for granting me access to their Archives.

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Credit is due to the American Jewish Archives at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati for procuring copies of the pertinent records.

Last but not least, I wish to express my gratitude to the congregation of the Hebrew Tabernacle who, in entrusting me with such a task, have given me an opportunity to deepen my knowledge of American Jewish history in general, and German Jews in particular.

E.E.

JEWISH HARLEM

When, on May 8th in 1906, the trustees of the Hebrew Tabernacle Association met in the apartment of Dr. Edward Lissman at 133 West 113th Street to discuss the incorporation procedure of their organization, the Hebrew Tabernacle had already been in existence for almost eight months. Its founders, the Reverend Dr. Lissman and Mr. Adolph Schwarzbaum had opened a Sunday School in the early fall of 1905, “for within the environs of East and West Harlem, thousands of Hebrew children are left to wander aimlessly about the streets without any instruction in Jewish ethics.”¹

Harlem, today a symbol of urban decay, neglect, poverty and crime, was at the turn of the century a desirable neighborhood in which to live. Within its boundaries it harbored many ethnic groups, which, although sharing certain neighborhoods, had yet basically staked out their own areas of settlement. The Irish and Germans populated the mixed tenement, brownstone and apartment house section west of Lexington Avenue, while a “Little Italy” developed in the tenement section bordered by the Harlem river and Third Avenue between 105th and 120th Streets. In this area, around Jefferson Park, there exists still today an Italian enclave which nourishes due to its communal spirit and an exceptional ability to protect itself. Last but no least, East European Jews in ever-increasing numbers left the Lower East Side, where they had first settled upon coming to the “Golden Land”, and moved uptown in search for more pleasant surroundings with more humane living quarters and better educational facilities for their children.

Various factors contributed to make Harlem, until the 1880’s an area with an almost suburban character, the natural choice for those immigrants trying to move up the ladder of Americanization and material advancement. In the late 1890’s a feverish building activity started. It was caused partly by the expectation of improved rapid transit facilities that were to make Central Harlem more accessible to downtown, a partly by the demand of a growing number of well-to-do members of the immigrant community who could afford to leave their congested quarters on the Lower East Side.

A housing shortage on the Lower East Side and the unabated stream of Jewish immigrants pouring into the country forced even less well-heeled immigrants to search for new neighborhoods. The expansion of the transit net opened up whole new areas, formerly inaccessible to the sweatshop worker. The rapid mass transportation system enabled him to choose living accommodations further away from his work place.

Ultimately, tens of thousands of immigrant Jewish families relocated from the Lower East Side to Brownsville, Williamsburg, and Harlem. By 1910, Harlem was the home of the second largest concentration of immigrant East European Jews in the United States.²

Since German Jews had come earlier in the century to the United States, they were already in the 1880's in the economic position to make the move uptown. In the first decade of the twentieth century we find in Harlem a conglomeration of well-established German Jewish families, prestigious American-born Jews, some with a genealogy dating to the pre-Revolutionary War, and East European Jews, both well-to-do and poor.

Often the point has been made that the Jewish people survived the destruction of their homeland and the ensuing dispersion due to the fact that their real homeland, namely the Bible, was portable. An additional factor should be mentioned which contributed a great deal of Jewish survival. Wherever Jews settled throughout the centuries, a highly developed network of communal structures was characteristic. The Lower East Side was no exception. It was a place teeming with charitable organizations, educational and cultural societies, political groups, and religious centers. Once the inhabitants left the ghetto to relocate to various new areas throughout the city, they for the most part took these organizations with them. However, the move was not always successful. Some organizations, while they fulfilled specific needs on the Lower East Side, were out of place in the immigrants' new surroundings. The immigrant had changed. He was no longer the "greenhorn" to whom the American ways had seemed strange. He was well on his way to becoming an American, and to his children, the products of American public schools, stories from the "old country" had indeed become just stories.

At one time the many little *landsmanshaft*-type organizations had

played an important role in the immigrants' lives. They recreated an atmosphere of a type of life as one had known it in Europe. While the immigrant struggled to care for his and his family's daily existence, and lived in a precarious and often violent world, his social and spiritual needs found a mooring in these *landsmanshaftn*. Any downtrodden sweatshop worker could turn into a highly respected individual within the walls of the *landsmanshaft*, which in many cases was organized along economic, urban and rural lines. For the established American Jewish organizations the immigrant was at best the object of charity efforts, at worst an outlandish creature one stayed as far away from as possible. Here, then, the various *landsmanshaftn* achieved the task of supplying the immigrant with the emotional and spiritual support necessary to face the grim realities of everyday life in the new country. Once the immigrant had overcome the first difficulties of adjustment, and even reached the point when he was ready to leave the ghetto, the *landsmanshaftn* in most cases had become superfluous. The move signified a new stage in the life of the former immigrant with new demands, and the old organizations, if they wanted to survive, had to be ready to address these new challenges.

One segment of the transplanted Jewish Community in Harlem strived to build a second ghetto community modeled after Lower East Side ideas and institutions. The majority of the Harlem Jews, however, rejected these, in their eyes, old-world and ghetto values. They were committed to rapid acculturation, to joining the American mainstream. Judaism, which in many cases they equated with the outdated ghetto culture, had become an encumbrance.

The road which led to this juncture had been long. With the dawn of modern times, but especially due to the changes following the French Revolution, the centuries-old Jewish way of life had come to an end. As Europe changed into a modern industrial society based on equality before the law, the existence of particular groups and classes ceased, as they all became citizens of their respective states. In the Jewish case, this translated into the termination of their status as a separate, quasi-independent entity. In exchange for citizenship, Jews were expected to give up their autonomy which until now had permitted them to handle their own affairs in legal, educational and religious matters. This independence during the emancipation period came to be brandished by

critics as having led to the existence of a “state within a state”. In a modern nation state such particularism could not be tolerated. Consequently the once all-encompassing Jewish identity was broken up into national and religious components. A Jew was now the citizen of his respective country; that is, his nationality was French, German, or English. In every respect he was supposed to assimilate to his surroundings, so that he should be indistinguishable from his fellow citizens, excepting his religion which was to be the characteristic marking him a Jew. Needless to say, this was not merely a matter of external pressure forcing Jews to conform. Many Jews welcomed, some even actively participated in furthering these forces which led to the downfall of the old order and, as they idealistically believed, would establish a just and open society for all

At the end of the nineteenth century, in almost all the countries of Western Europe, Jews had acculturated and largely been integrated into the general society. They saw themselves as participants in the historical destinies of their respective countries, and spiritually they had found a new home within European civilization. Judaism, left without the national component and reduced to a mere religion, had to make adjustments. This gave rise to new movements which attempted to creatively meet the challenges.

In the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe developments were not as drastic, due to the fact that until the end of World War I the old social structure, which included vestiges of feudalism, survived. Yet the ideas of enlightenment and equality emanating from France and Germany had reached the educated members of these communities, too. With an accelerating tempo they were beginning to question traditions and a way of life which had assured their ancestors’ survival throughout the past centuries.³ Under these pressures the harmony between internal beliefs and their implementation in daily life slowly eroded. Some Jews turned their backs on the Jewish community, others attempted to bring the outside world into the community and accomplish a creative and fruitful synthesis between the two. The majority, however, continued the way of life of their forefathers, if only outwardly. But the inner convictions had weakened and the foundation was no longer strong enough to support the practice of traditions. Only a hollow shell remained which could disappear if external pressures or convenience demanded it.

In America these trends continued, only at a faster pace due to the special circumstances of the American situation. Here the melting pot ideology, a high-pressured economic system and the open opportunities of a relatively more progressive society left the immigrants almost no alternative to speedy assimilation.

The above, rather schematic survey has provided us with an understanding of the background of the modern Jew. We can now return to the history of the Hebrew Tabernacle. At the turn of the century, community leaders in Harlem became alarmed at the advanced stage of Americanization affecting the young Jewish generation. Living within an environment which rewarded conformity, and lacking their parents' nostalgic attachment to Judaism, this youth was easy prey to whatever trends or ideologies appealed to their imagination. Christian missionaries prowling the streets of Harlem were among the most active trying to win over these disaffected Jewish youngsters and adolescents. The letter sent on October 13, 1905 by Reverend Lissman and Mr. Schwarzbaum to Jewish families living in the vicinity of West and Central Harlem, requesting their support for the recently founded organization and religious school of the Hebrew Tabernacle Association, attests to this observation. "In view of the above (children deprived of a Jewish education) a house of worship and of instruction is absolutely needed whereby for a nominal sum membership can be acquired by parents of slender resources to enable their young to receive a practical conception of our sacred Torah... Kindly come to our aid as a member, because in a short time Christian Missionaries will commence to take up a similar work among Jewish children, and if they do — it will be a sign that we have been criminally neglectful of Israel's guardianship, and you will be numbered as one of the guilty."⁴

A study of Harlem Jewish youth showed that in 1903, 7,500 children received no Jewish instruction whatsoever.⁵ The leaders of both communities, East European and German, were determined to redress the situation, and to find ways and means of directing the process of Americanization along paths more compatible with the needs of a future growing and flourishing Judaism. Under the slogan that acculturation did not require assimilation, they set out to conquer a place for Judaism within the lives of the native-born generation.

It is important to note for the record that in this fight to construct new, enduring forms of Jewish life, each of the three Jewish denominations cooperated.⁶ Various societies and organizations were founded to deal with the problem of educating these youngsters and instill in them a respect and love for Jewish learning. Other organizations were established exclusively for the purpose of satisfying their social needs and to create for them an atmosphere which would facilitate gatherings with distinctly Jewish overtones. The Harlem YMHA, transplanted from Yorkville, the Harlem Young Men's Hebrew Orthodox League and the Harlem Hebrew League, just to mention a few, were all organizations striving to make known the ideals of Judaism to Harlem youth.

In addition, synagogues were founded or reorganized with a style of services more attractive to the congregant who had not grown up in traditional surroundings, who had only a Sunday school knowledge of the Jewish religion, and who generally expected more from services than just a place for communal prayer. Decorum, aesthetics and dignity, these became the catch-phrases even within orthodox synagogues which attempted to leave their *landsmanshaft* flavor behind them and become more modern. In 1902, for example, the Congregation Shomre Emunah was established at 121st Street and Madison Avenue. Its organizers promised services conducted according to "Orthodox ritual in an impressive decorous manner." They pledged to their prospective Americanized constituency that the unsightly noise, commotion and blatant commercialism that attended the immigrant *landsmanshaft* congregation would find no place in the up-to-date Orthodox synagogue. In 1904 another modern congregation, Mount Sinai at 118th Street and Lenox Avenue, was founded along the lines of German traditional Conservative synagogues. It offered an orthodox ritual, mixed seating and a weekly "sermon in the vernacular".⁷ This was the general scene in whose midst the Hebrew Tabernacle was founded.

THE FOUNDING OF THE HEBREW TABERNACLE

The temple's founding fathers, Reverend Lissman and Mr. Schwarzbaum, the Tabernacle's Secretary, belonged to the number of responsible German Jewish leaders who recognized the importance of offering a Jewish education to the Harlem youth. Already by October 1905 the religious school they operated in Riverside Hall at 2106 Seventh Avenue had attracted approximately 150 children and boasted a teaching staff of 20 volunteers. As the year 1905 drew to its close it became necessary to expand. Since the school had grown substantially, and everything was indicative of continued growth in the future, full attention could be given to building up the congregation. For what is a religious school without its house of worship? It can be compared to a plant without soil into which to submerge its roots. Nevertheless, then, as is now often the case, some parents sent their children, once Bar Mitzvah time was at hand, to a conveniently located religious school in the neighborhood without acknowledging any necessity to become part of a congregation themselves.

The organizers started a vigorous advertisement campaign, and on May 8, 1906 the Hebrew Tabernacle Association was incorporated as a religious institution with its quarters at 218 West 130th Street.

From its inception the mode of service had been a mixture of conservative and reform traditions. Wearing head coverings and *tallis* during services followed the conservative custom. The mixed choir and especially the use of an organ, on the other hand, had been among the most fought over issues in the nineteenth century debate regarding synagogue reforms in Germany. After its incorporation the Hebrew Tabernacle continued the conservative-reform type of worship; parts of the ritual were rendered in English as well as in Hebrew. As time went on, the temple increasingly leaned towards the reform side of its spiritual make-up without, however, relinquishing certain conservative overtones. The conservatism seems to have stemmed as much from a religious preference as it reflected the background and status of the synagogue's leading members, almost all of whom were financially well-established

and belonged to the middle and upper middle classes. How else could they have undertaken the founding of their own place of worship without any support from external funds other than their own resources and bank loans? The yearly membership dues of ten dollars certainly were not sufficient to guarantee the temple's upkeep. During financially difficult periods, the continuity of the temple depended on the commitment of some of its wealthier members.

On the practical level, what is involved in founding a temple? In the months following the incorporation the congregants laid the foundations. Once the building was acquired, it needed furnishings. From doormats to the silver *yad*, everything was donated by one member or another. A request was sent to the city authorities to install street lamps, a service which the municipality granted to every church building. Apparently the Hebrew Tabernacle did not convince those in charge that it was eligible for such service for the request was denied. It took two more years, before the Hebrew Tabernacle received its street lamps.

Committees to take charge of the various departments of the temple were founded. A cantor was hired and paid a salary of twenty five dollars a month, with an added one hundred dollars during the High Holidays. For the first High Holidays of the temple's existence the trustees hired the Alhambra Hall in Central Harlem, an indication that they expected a turnout too large to be accommodated in the temple's own quarters. In the preceding months they advertised widely both around Harlem and in local Jewish newspapers, attempting to attract people from the community at large, in the hope that the Holiday services would convince some to join the congregation. To assure the success of these services a choir and an organist were engaged. As yet the Tabernacle could not afford to employ a quartet and an organist at weekly services throughout the year.

In this vein, the first year passed. It was to the trustees' satisfaction, as shown by the appointment of a committee at the May 13 meeting, to inquire into the possibility of purchasing 220 West 130th Street, the building adjacent to the temple. The Building Department at first did not approve the plans. As the Minutes reveal, the city authorities gave the green light only after pressure had been exerted at the right places. With a delay of a year and a half, alteration work began. After having connected the two buildings, the Tabernacle finally possessed quarters

suitable to house its growing congregation.

In view of the expansion, the temple sought various means to raise funds. The Sisterhood, throughout the temple's history its most faithful supporter, sponsored fairs and balls. The basket collection was instituted, a practice reminiscent of Protestant services, and abolished only in 1980. Then there were the Book of Life and the Memorial Tablet, whose inscription prices ran from one hundred dollars for an adult to fifty dollars for a child. Finally, at the end of January 1909, the basic construction work was completed. It took still another year for the congregation to move into the new temple. In April 1910, dedication festivities took place, lasting four days.

This period of time was a watershed in the temple's history. The Hebrew Tabernacle had met successfully the challenges with which it had been confronted during the founding years. It had proved to the Jewish community that it was not just the product of a whimsical idea sprung from the heads of some ambitious individuals, but that it deserved a permanent place in their midst. It now entered the stage during which it could solidify and develop resources which enabled it to live through difficult periods by means of flexibility, inner strength, and conviction. By occupying its own spacious new home, a milestone had been reached. And there were acknowledgements of the temple's achievements from other circles as well. On January 1, 1909 Rabbi Lissman exchanged pulpits with Rabbi Silverman from Temple Emanu-El, that prestigious bastion of American Reform Judaism.

Hard times were not slow in coming. Generally, the temple existed on a very tight budget, and its trustees had to be careful in administering the limited funds. The purchase of 220 West 130th Street and the ensuing alteration costs stretched the temple's financial capacity to the utmost. Not surprisingly, when the time for payment of the first mortgage arrived, the Tabernacle found itself in great monetary straits. As they had done previously, the trustees had rented the Ellsmere Hall for the High Holidays. They now were compelled to sublet these quarters and make do with the space offered to them for free in the Calvary Methodist Episcopal Church, located at 7th Avenue and 129th Street.

At this point, it may be in order to note that relations between the clergy of the various denominations seem to have been cooperative, if

not outright cordial. There was a whole range of interaction, from shared living space and the exchange of pulpits, to co-sponsored programs addressing themselves to the spread of atheism among Harlem's youth. Later, in Father Coughlin's time, they joined hands to combat the rising tide of Anti-Semitism. Their flocks, however, could not always be counted on to join this spirit of ecumenism. In the aforementioned year, for example, that the Hebrew Tabernacle's High Holiday services were held at the Episcopal Church, the Board requested the city to station a police officer for the entire duration of services.

By means of austerity measures and sacrifices on the part of various members, the temple weathered this difficult period. Reverend Lissman and Mr. Schwarzbaum, for instance, relinquished their salary payments for some time. Its finances may have been low, but the number of children enrolled in school surged to new heights. While in 1911 300 children applied for admission, one year later it rose to 500, probably the highest number ever in the history of the Tabernacle. In the following years the enrollment declined, to rise again only in the late 1930's and 1940's, when the temple entered another phase with the arrival of a new immigrant group.

Unfortunately, the number of children attending religious school did not translate itself automatically into rising membership for the congregation. Even the Parents' Association, established in the spring of 1909, and second only to the Sisterhood in its selfless service to the community, could not substantially change the continuously meager outcome of membership drives. All efforts could not make up for certain detrimental situations in which the temple found itself. First of all, the Hebrew Tabernacle was not located in the heart of Jewish Harlem, around Lenox Avenue; rather it occupied the outskirts. This fact contributed to its greater vulnerability in face of population shifts. When poor Blacks in ever greater numbers moved from the South to New York and settled largely in Harlem, the Tabernacle felt the effects long before the synagogues situated in Central Harlem. It was thus forced to deal with the new situation much earlier. And while on the one hand this marginality made for a very tenuous existence, at the same time it produced an alertness and readiness on the part of the Tabernacle leaders to respond to changes, and even to be prepared to relocate if necessary. In contrast, many of the larger synagogues, pampered by being

surrounded by a large Jewish community, delayed action. And although no harm was done in some cases, in others, by the time their trustees reacted, the congregations had dispersed in all directions and the temples did not survive their relocations for long.

Aside from its location, the Hebrew Tabernacle possessed other weaknesses which may have accounted for the temple's membership problems. Founded largely by well-to-do German Jewish families, its character had a certain elitist quality to it. Like the people who created it, the temple exuded an air of solidity and ceremoniousness which at times could degenerate into stiltedness and an exaggerated formalism. For example, the temple was quite often dissatisfied with its cantors. In one case, it was merely a troubled marriage life which caused a cantor's dismissal. The trustees thought it very undignified that the disarray of the cantor's private life should supply the congregation with ever new conversational topics. But more often the cantor's professional performance gave rise to displeasure. One cantor was repeatedly reprimanded for talking to his neighbor while sitting on the *bimah*. Another was found guilty of mispronunciations and attempts to introduce new melodies. One congregant was called to order very harshly as he was observed on numerous occasions trying to bring a package into temple during services. In the leaders' perception these offenses endangered the temple's image of dignity and sobriety.

Yet there existed more serious problems than mere disagreements over external appearances. The main cause for dissatisfaction among members was that the temple was run by an oligarchy. The nucleus of people who had founded the Hebrew Tabernacle retained firm control over all its affairs throughout the years, and kept the reins of leadership in their hands. Complaints fell on deaf ears, and one attempt at staging a palace revolution failed miserably. At the time the issue at stake was considered to be serious, but anyone reading its account in the minutes today cannot help but be amused. Tempers rose to such a degree that even concerns over the temple's public image were ignored. One party accused its opponents of being "foreign dogs," no doubt an allusion to their German past, and hence unfit to preside over a temple. The abused were not slow in retaliating. Congregants reading the *New York Herald* a few days later on January 25, 1914, found to their amazement a vicious, as well as false notice announcing the death of their Rabbi's wife. At this

point matters evidently had gone too far. The congregation abhorred the level to which the dispute had descended. The established leaders successfully vanquished their contenders, who after their defeat either left the community or ceased to be active. The issue was laid to rest, but not forever. It merely became dormant, raising its head periodically at least until the 1930's, when the temple underwent drastic changes. Until then the "Czar", as Mr. Schwarzbaum was called, and Reverend Lissman, until his retirement in the early 1920's, ruled the Hebrew Tabernacle with the aid of a select group of trustees.

When the first World War erupted, the Hebrew Tabernacle participated with other synagogues in the fundraising-drives sponsored by the American Jewish Relief Committee for the benefit of those Jews residing in the war zone. Charity, unfortunately, did not remain the Tabernacle's only involvement in the war. In 1916, after the United States entered the war, the temple became embroiled in its own bitter fight. Some members felt that the German background of many congregants could become an embarrassment, if not a serious liability, for the temple, now that the United States was fighting Germany. Undoubtedly, the fear of being accused of double loyalty was the major cause for this new discord.

In Jewish history the charge was not of recent vintage. Throughout the centuries we come across variations on the basic theme: distrust of a group which leads a self-contained existence, professes a different religion and displays an economic and social profile distinct from its surroundings.⁸ During World War II Jewish immigrants from Germany were classified "enemy aliens" despite their protests that they had entered the United States as victims of German persecution and certainly no longer felt any allegiance to Germany. Today, the explosive situation in the Middle East where United States policies have to steer a tight course between Arab and Israeli interests, is pregnant with the charge of double loyalty. Seen in this light the anxieties of some Hebrew Tabernacle members in 1916 were not surprising. The outcome of the incident is not revealed in the Temple records. To be sure, the demand that "all Germans" withdraw from membership of the Tabernacle was not met, and for good reason. As a letter of that year tells us: "I see by the list of officers and members that nearly all are foreigners and mostly of German descent".⁹

A HISTORY OF HEBREW TABERNACLE

In every other respect the first decade of the temple's existence came to a close without any further major events, except if one considers the installation of a public phone, which the temple received in December of 1914, such an occurrence. Certainly the fee of ten cents per call may well be the only item which remained unchanged throughout most of the temple's history.

Chapter III:

THE MOVE UPTOWN

By 1918 the handwriting on the wall could no longer be ignored. In the first decade of the twentieth century Blacks started to leave the rural American *hinterland*. They flocked to the industrial North, especially to New York City. The war economy only accelerated this process. By 1910, Blacks had established themselves as the predominant group north of 130th Street, west of Park Avenue. In this section more than two thirds of Harlem's circa 22,000 Blacks resided in the area bordered by 118th Street to the South and 144th Street to the North between and Hudson and Harlem rivers. By 1930 we find about 165,000 Blacks living in Harlem.¹⁰

It is important to note that, initially at least, the Blacks' move into the neighborhood did not cause the departure of any ethnic group living there. Harlem was undergoing a population shift, and various inhabitants had moved out of Harlem even before the arrival of Blacks. Overcrowding, high rents and similar factors compelled the economically mobile to seek out neighborhoods more in tune with their middle class aspirations. The exceedingly rapid Jewish exodus from Harlem was part of a general immigrant relocation. The Blacks' decision to settle in the deteriorating neighborhood only hastened the process.

The first Jewish institutions to move out of the district were those located on the periphery of the major Central Harlem settlement, north of 130th Street. Congregation Anshe Emeth of 131st Street and Seventh Avenue led the way in 1917 by merging with a new congregation, Mount Sinai of 181st Street and St. Nicholas Avenue.¹¹ The Hebrew Tabernacle followed three years later.

In 1915 the congregation again made an all-out effort to bring about a change in the ailing membership situation. All members were card-indexed and filed according to location. Members residing on a particular street were asked to go from house to house to recruit new members. Furthermore, letters were issued to the Sisterhood appealing to have the husbands join the congregation. The same procedure was followed by the Parents' Association. All these endeavors came to nothing. On the contrary, the situation was considerably worsened by the fact that the

religious school enrollment had dropped to 170 children. In former years the low membership had been balanced by the large number of children seeking religious instruction, and in that the temple had found its *raison d'être*. Now, with both numbers dropping, the temple had to think seriously about its options.

A move was inevitable, the only question was where to? Two factions arose, each with a different opinion as to where the synagogue should relocate. Reverend Lissman favored going downtown to the area along Riverside Drive, south of 120th Street. Dr. Lissman had had an eye on that particular neighborhood all along. Already in 1913, he informed the Board of Trustees that he had received an offer to purchase a church building located on 108th Street, near Central Park West. The offer was quite tempting, especially since the Church congregation was also willing to buy the Tabernacle's building. At the time the Board did not give its approval. Now the trustees, under the leadership of President Louis Austern, again adopted a view different from Rabbi Lissman's. In their eyes the temple's future lay in Washington Heights, an area in which many Jews had settled in their move uptown. After several complicated congregational intrigues, as each side tried to gain the upper hand, the Austern faction won out. A committee was appointed to look for a suitable new building in the Washington Heights district. As the word spread that the Tabernacle congregation was taking steps to relocate, it was approached with several merger propositions, all by communities already established in Washington Heights. By common consent a merger was not thought to be a viable option, for the Tabernacle was not willing to surrender any of its hallowed traditions. This speaks for the leaders' strong belief that the temple might go through a difficult phase, yet still possessed enough vigor and vitality to seek a future on its own, rather than join forces with another community. An additional factor was supplied by the congregants' sense of individuality and pride in their heritage and traditions.

In September 1919 the trustees received the authority from the congregation to put the temple up for sale. It was bought that same year by the Colored People's Church. In the spring of 1920 the Hebrew Tabernacle vacated the building it had occupied for almost fourteen years. For one month the YMHA of Washington Heights became the temporary home of the congregation, until in May the trustees leased a

building at Broadway and 158th Street for a term of two years. During this period the new temple had to be constructed. To make things even more difficult than they were, in July Reverend Lissman decided to retire. Fortunately the Board found a ready replacement, without having had to engage "trial rabbis" for a longer period, something the community could ill afford at a crucial time like this. On August 1, 1920 Dr. I. Mortimer Bloom was installed as the Rabbi of the Hebrew Tabernacle with a salary of three thousand dollars a year. Reverend Lissman, however, was not the kind of personality who would let go of the reins of leadership so easily. After all, he had founded this congregation and had been its leader in both secular and spiritual matters. He proposed to the Board that he be installed as Rabbi Emeritus for life at three thousand dollars a year. He offered to continue to function as the religious school superintendent, and to occupy the pulpit on a regular basis every second Friday and Saturday.

This proposal would have left the temple with two religious leaders at a time, when it could barely raise the salary for one. In addition to the financial burden, it was out of the question for the congregation to support a scheme in which two rabbis would compete for the pulpit every Sabbath. The Hebrew Tabernacle just was not of the size which permitted the coexistence of two rabbis without friction. Consequently the Board made the counter-proposal of retaining Dr. Lissman's services as superintendent of the school and as an occasional lecturer from the pulpit. Matters dragged on for another year to nobody's satisfaction. Finally, after Reverend Lissman had been informed in unmistakable words by the Board that Dr. Bloom was the synagogue's only acting rabbi, he took matters into his own hands. Since he was not prepared to play second fiddle, and was barred from his leadership position, Dr. Lissman proceeded to create a new congregation. As he informed the Hebrew Tabernacle members in his soliciting letter, he intended to found the Riverside Synagogue in the synagogue in the neighborhood where he had wanted the Hebrew Tabernacle to move in the first place, namely the area of Broadway between 105th and 120th Streets. Needless to say, Reverend Lissman's attempts at further diminishing the Tabernacle's already small membership was not to the Board's liking. The notice informing Reverend Lissman that his affiliation with the Hebrew Tabernacle was no longer in the temple's best interest, and asking for his resignation, was sent out soon thereafter. Rabbi Lissman resigned on

February 26, 1922, after seventeen years of service.

Considering Dr. Lissman's personality the reason why his association with the temple ended on such a disagreeable note is easy to fathom. His strong-willed and authoritarian disposition could not accept the relocation, a matter in which the Board had acted against his wishes. His decision to retire very soon after the uptown-move may have been his way of putting pressure on the Board, attempting to prove to them that the temple could not exist without his leadership. Fortunately for the temple, it turned out that Dr. Lissman had deceived himself. The Hebrew Tabernacle did not stand or fall according to one person's whim. It was built on a more solid foundation.

Meanwhile on April 1, 1921 the temple acquired the title to the lots 605-607 on West 161st Street, between Broadway and Fort Washington Avenue. Two years later the lower level was completed, and on May 18, 1923 the first services were held in the new temple. But it was not until 1927 that the upstairs was finished and the temple could be dedicated. Among those in attendance at the four-day dedication ceremonies were Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, and Royal S. Copeland, U.S. Senator. Once again the Hebrew Tabernacle could call an impressive building its home. The auditorium and the balcony could seat approximately 1,200 people. There were no columns inside, thus permitting an unobstructed view. In the construction of the balcony, it was the first time in America that the cantilever principle was used.¹² The congregation at the time was definitely not large enough to warrant the synagogue's size. Yet when the Board had the plans drawn up, they did so with a view towards the temple's future. And their expectations were justified, for Washington Heights showed a great potential for growth. When Jews started to leave Harlem, the affluent moved south into the area around Central Park and west toward Riverside Drive. The middle class, however, turned to Washington Heights, an attractive and promising neighborhood. In 1923 about 31,000 Jews lived there. In 1930 the number had more than doubled and in the 1940's, with the influx of Jewish refugees from Germany, the number continued to rise.

The Tabernacle immediately addressed itself to the task of enlisting new members. Cards advertising the temple's new quarters were placed in the 137th, 145th, 157th, 168th and 181st Street subway stations, and on

the 125th, 145th and 155th Street “L” stations of the 6th Avenue line. This information gives us a sense of the continuities and discontinuities in the neighborhood. All the above mentioned subway stations are still in existence, yet it is hard to imagine that the same walls which today are covered with movie — cigarette — or liquor advertisements and graffiti, at one point had announcements for synagogue services. The membership drive proved to be successful, for every month the minutes listed new names of people who lived in the vicinity of the temple. Unlike in Harlem, where the Tabernacle was situated at the periphery and many members lived quite a distance away, the temple now evolved into a neighborhood synagogue. The religious school, too, experienced a revival. In 1921, 407 children enrolled in its program.

The Hebrew Tabernacle never neglected the moral obligation of *Tsedakak*. of giving to those in need. Its activities ranged from contributions on a regular basis to various charity organizations in the Metropolitan area, to one-time donations on extraordinary occasions. In 1911, for instance, the March 31 Friday evening basket collection was sent to Mayor Gaynor to help the survivors of the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire. Another time the proceeds of a whist-and-dance party were sent to the Orphan Asylum in Berlin, an indication of the ties some members of the congregation still had with the Jewish community in Germany. As of 1923 the Tabernacle sent a donation to the American Pro-Falasha Committee almost every year. With all the attention given in recent years to the problems of the Ethiopian Jews, it is surprising to see that the issue is not all that new, but that the American Jewish Community already in the first decades of this century extended a helping hand. Then, of course, there was Palestine, a commitment the Hebrew Tabernacle shared with Jewish communities world-wide. Regular contributions were sent to the *Keren Hayessod*. In 1924 the Tabernacle was approached by Louis Marshall, President of Temple Emanu-El, with a request for a donation to the Jewish Theological Seminary Endowment Fund, to which it responded by sending part of a Friday evening collection. These examples from the list of the Tabernacle’s financial contributions demonstrate the extent to which the congregation, in the second decade of this century, had become a part not only of the Jewish community of New York City but of the international scene as well.

While the Tabernacle contributed a small sum to the building fund of the conservative Jewish Theological Seminary, it sought a closer connection with the Reform movement. Already Rabbi Lissman participated in the annual meetings of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Furthermore, after the temple's move uptown, when the congregation was in dire need of money, the Board applied to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations for financial assistance.¹³ Whether this call for help was successful, the minutes do not disclose.

It was not until the late 1930's that the Hebrew Tabernacle, at the time under Rabbi Opher's guidance, became officially affiliated with Reform Judaism. The case of the Tabernacle would suggest that the denominational lines were not as sharply drawn as some historiographical works present it. Here, for instance, we have one synagogue which identified with Reform, yet at the same time retained a certain measure of independence with regard to the mode of its services. A daily orthodox *Minyan* met in the Tabernacle's vestry for more than two decades during the 1950's and 60's. Of course, the Tabernacle's German roots played a role in the synagogue's rather conservative image in some areas.¹⁴ Yet Jeffrey Gurock, in his study of Jewish Harlem, found other examples of synagogues where the lines were blurred and characteristics of the various Jewish denominations existed side by side.¹⁵ Perhaps this observation can be explained by the fact that many of these synagogues were founded by immigrants and thus inherited traditions from the old countries.

The move, which had been a bold and risky undertaking, was successful. The last years in Harlem had shown that there were no other options left than either to move or go under. The community slowly but surely struck roots in the new neighborhood. Every month new names from the Washington Heights area were added to the membership list. A further sign of its well-being was the fact that its various branches not only survived the move intact, but even expanded. The Sisterhood and the Parents' Association continued their tireless efforts for the welfare of the congregation. Some activities they sponsored like fund-raising, benefited the temple instantly. Yet neither did they neglect the temple in its long-term prosperity. Both sought actively to make the Hebrew Tabernacle an integrand member of the Washington Heights community by fostering programs destined to meet its social and educational needs.

These programs, however, pale when compared with the social and cultural affairs of a later period in the temple's history. They mainly exhausted themselves in luncheons and dinners, fairs and whist-and-dance parties. While these activities were very important in establishing the Tabernacle as a social gathering place, they did not constitute the temple's main focus, which lay elsewhere.

Faithful to its founding tradition the Hebrew Tabernacle concentrated its efforts on keeping the young within the fold, and assuring the continuity of the generation chain. Its religious school was very active with an average enrollment of 400 children. Besides the regular Sunday school program, classes preparing for the *Bar Mitzvah* and Confirmation were offered.¹⁶ For a number of years Assistant Cantor Levinson even instructed a small group in advanced Hebrew. Outside the classroom the children, under the temple's supervision, participated in Scout groups, and during the summer, while not sponsoring its own camp, the Tabernacle had access to a camp program. For the needs of the teenagers a Young Folk's League existed, and for those beyond that age an Alumni group was founded. Both of these groups fulfilled an important function within the temple's structure, since they addressed themselves to an age group in a crucial transitional stage. These young adolescents had graduated from the temple's religious programs. However, they were still too young to have formed their own families and hence not yet concerned with their future offspring's religious education. The danger existed, therefore, that these young people, after their own natural association with synagogue life had ceased, would slowly move away from the temple and ultimately be lost to the community. Hence it was vital to the temple's own future to retain their interest in temple affairs and to offer activities which would keep them within the temple.

In Dr. Bloom the Tabernacle had found an able rabbi who supported the temple's commitment to decorum. The minutes are filled with his proposals on how to beautify the services. He laid down rules banishing distractions during services. His efforts in this area reached a high point in the preparations for the Confirmation ceremony in 1927.

He convinced the Board that the children should be confirmed on a Sunday, and to make it more meaningful it should be the Sunday before Shavuoth. As to objections that the choice of a Sunday made the ceremony even more reminiscent of its Christian model, he pointed out

that congregations more conservative than the Tabernacle held their confirmations on Sundays. Dr. Bloom had his way, and he confidently predicted that the Hebrew Tabernacle would have “the most dignified, most impressive, most beautiful Confirmation in the history of the congregation.”¹⁷ The concern over decorum, as we have seen throughout this history, became in modern times one of the focal points in synagogue services. The services themselves, and this still holds true today, emerged as the heart and soul of the Tabernacle.

The power structure within the temple’s hierarchy had changed greatly since Dr. Lissman’s era. The Board was now in full control of the temple, and rabbi, cantor, and officers, as well as the affiliated branches were accountable to it.

Aside from matters directly touching upon its concerns, the outside world did not occupy a prominent place in the temple’s minutes. Its involvement in political or ideological issues of the day seemed to have been limited to financial contributions. Donations were made to various organizations funding Jewish settlements in Palestine. On one occasion a member was given permission to make an appeal from the pulpit to join the Zionist Organization of America. And in 1936, President Austern and members of the Religious School Board complained that there was too much Zionism in the school and not enough Americanism. This summed up the congregation’s response to a question which aroused the passion of Jews world-wide. Any attempts at bringing politics into the four walls of the temple were frowned upon by the Board. Once, for instance, Rabbi Bloom made critical remarks in a sermon about the role Woodrow Wilson and Congress had played during World War I. Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing what the content of Dr. Bloom’s remarks was, since the Board members, in discussing the incident, did not take issue with it. Instead, they outrightly condemned the incident, arguing that a sermon was not the place to raise political matters. On another occasion, in 1933, the Young Folk’s League invited Mr. Jacob Gould Schurman, the candidate for District Attorney, to speak at one of their meetings. An audience of about 150 people was expected. The Board informed the President of the Young Folk’s League in no uncertain terms that no such meeting could take place on the temple’s premises. The meeting was cancelled and the League’s President, in an angry and bitter letter to the Board, resigned.

How can such a zealousness in keeping politics outside the temple's gates be explained? The American tradition which, if not strictly enforced, at least propagated the separation between church and state, may have been a factor. Another explanation may have been the already alluded to fear of being charged with double loyalty. During World War I and during the 1930's, a congregation which counted among its members many of German descent was vulnerable. At the same time, we know of many synagogues, especially those with a predominantly East European membership, where political issues featured largely in lecture and educational programs.

They became embroiled in the issues of the day: the questions of Zionism, Jewish nationalism, and labor politics covering viewpoints from the *Bund* to Jewish anarchists. East European Jews brought with them to America a tradition of ideologies which, with the ongoing process of secularization of society, to a large extent had supplanted the Jewish religion. They consisted of a curious blend of Jewish elements of a cultural and political nature couched in the various ideological terminologies of the time. *Bundism*, for instance, combined its concerns for a vigorous Yiddish culture with an active Socialist program.¹⁸

I would like to propose that German Jews took a different attitude to political involvement for two reasons. In Germany the terms of emancipation reduced Judaism to a religion restricted to home and synagogue, and expected Jews in all other respects to become Germanized. As a result, German Jewry did not develop a secular Jewish culture, but to a large extent restricted its creativity to the religious sphere.¹⁹ Even when the *Centralverein* took up the political and legal battle against anti-Semitism, its leaders were quick to point out that such a fight was in the interest of society at large and did not represent merely a Jewish issue.²⁰

But aside from the status of a religion assigned to Judaism, there may be yet another factor which can account for German Jews' wariness toward involvement in political issues. The historian Fritz Stern, in his study of the underlying mechanisms which permitted the German people to accept Nazism in the face of criminal acts and widespread terror and violence, put forth the thesis of the "unpolitical German."²¹ He observed that Germans were more remote from political reality than other people. "In the nineteenth century, they made a virtue out of the private realm;

the Idealist injunction of self-cultivation, the veneration of art and culture, the special place of the family and of friendships, the often sentimentalized domesticity of German life — all these virtues were remote from concern with public affairs. ‘To a German who had imbued himself with the spirit of Durer, Bach, and Goethe, *vita contemplativa* was the highest form of life.’²² Ordinary politics seldom engaged Germans. Their lives centered around the work place and the home. In their eyes the political realm had an aura of obscenity and immorality about it, and any involvement in political issues was seen as being detrimental to the higher and more noble occupation of self-cultivation. Germany’s defeat in the First World War shattered this idealistic doll-house existence, and Germans began to engage in political activities with a vengeance.

German Jews, in as much as they assimilated to their surroundings, shared this unpolitical stance with their gentile countrymen. Ever since the time of Moses Mendelssohn, German Jews enthusiastically espoused the idea of a humanistic and enlightened society in which people of different backgrounds could exist peacefully side by side, joined by their common humanity and respect for the natural rights of each individual. This dream became crystallized in Lessing’s “Parable of the Three Rings” in his *Nathan the Wise*.

In the second half of the nineteenth century while many Germans turned away from humanitarian ideals to social Darwinist and *voelkish* ideologies, German Jews remained faithful to a heritage which had made it possible for them to become members of the general society in the first place. This attitude represented German Jewry’s greatness as well as its tragedy. Ever since the enlightened liberal ideas of the eighteenth century prepared the ground for Jewish emancipation, the Jewish mainstream was committed to the liberal *Weltanschauung*. For Jews it constituted the very foundation of their existence; for Germans, on the other hand, liberalism was but one wave in an ever flowing stream of ideas. After passing through a liberal phase, Germans moved easily on to other ideologies more in tune with changing economic and social realities.

THE CRUMBLING OF THE FOUNDATIONS: the 1920's

The synagogue's records hardly reflected the tumult and the bustle of the "roaring twenties." It was as if the Hebrew Tabernacle was immune to such manias as the big red scare following the Russian Revolution. Similarly they seemed unaffected by changes inside America, such as the post-war disillusionment, the loosening sexual mores, the movies and Prohibition. Rum ships rolling in the sea outside the twelve-mile limit, beer-carrying trucks being hijacked by bandits, illicit stills turning out alcohol by the carload, speakeasies, and Alphonse Capone, multi-millionaire master of the Chicago bootleggers, driving through the streets in an armor-plated car with bullet-proof windows — all these hardly seemed to share the same planet and same period with the Hebrew Tabernacle.²³ Not that the Tabernacle remained unaffected by the Prohibition. In March 1925 Mr. Levinson, the Assistant Cantor, was appointed to procure and distribute kosher wine for Passover to the members and seatholders of the congregation.²⁴ The list of family heads who had asked for such wine numbered 246. Since kosher wine is hardly the type of alcoholic beverage with which one can start a successful bootlegging business, we can use this figure to estimate the size of the congregation at the time.

The Depression put an end to the gains the Tabernacle had made since its move from Harlem. Financially the temple was far from being secure. On the contrary, in 1926 the new temple had been enlarged under the assumption that the time was right for a further expansion in membership which failed to materialize. Consequently more debts were incurred. The Depression thus merely exacerbated the predicament. Toward the end of 1929 the Finance Committee of the Tabernacle persuaded Rabbi Bloom to appeal for loans to prestigious and wealthy New York Jews. The responses, without exception, were negative, and the temple had no other choice but to fend

for itself. Some of its members made substantial Kol Nidre pledges, some officers gave grants, and the Finance Committee was very circumspect in its financial allocations. Advertisements for services were eliminated. In spite of this, the number of school children was growing, and the Board decided to engage an additional teacher. The religious school now had fifteen classes. Financially, however, the situation did not improve. When the first mortgage of five thousand dollars was due, in December of 1930, the Tabernacle was without funds. Neither was there enough money to pay salaries of the religious school teachers and the choir. Fortunately Rabbi Bloom had an independent income, so that a portion of his salary could be deducted. Finally, in autumn 1931, the situation reached a dead end. The Hebrew Tabernacle Association could no longer survive. Its building was foreclosed and put up for sale by the holder of the third mortgage. A transaction took place, the details of which are not entirely clear from the records. Apparently, as soon as the officers of the Tabernacle realized that the temple's existence was threatened, they reorganized under a different name, the Hebrew Tabernacle of Washington Heights, on September 30, 1931. In the name of that new association they at first arranged to use the old Tabernacle's premises, and later bought the building. With this organizational somersault the survival of the temple was assured, but it proved to be a tenuous existence at best.

Funds were still desperately needed. The year 1932 started with a "Save The Temple" campaign in which 5,000 circulars asking for one dollar contributions were distributed. The return was very meager, indeed, seventy-eight dollars altogether. Not many members of the temple could spare even a dollar.

Not all attention was focused on the financial situation, however. Despite its external problems, the temple continued to meet its obligations toward religious education and the Washington Heights community at large. To further the image of the neighborhood as a desirable area and to attract more middle class people, in 1931 Rabbi Bloom appealed to the Board of Education of the City of New York to erect a public school in this location. Also since Washington Heights was situated at some distance from midtown Manhattan, and, so far, subways supplied the only means of transportation, Rabbi Bloom proposed to the Fifth Avenue Bus Company to develop a route which would connect the

neighborhood with downtown areas. This proposal may have been the inspiration of today's "Number 4" busline. With respect to its work for the youth of Washington Heights, especially during the Depression, the temple co-sponsored various activities with the Community Council of Washington Heights.

It took the Hebrew Tabernacle almost two decades to recover from the plunge of its fortunes in 1929. The finances of the temple remained in a state of chronic illness. In 1932, the Board was informed that attendance at services had dropped. In 1934 the sale of seats for the High Holiday services reached a low point, about 350 seats remained unsold. During the 1930's the temple also suffered personnel problems. At the beginning of 1933, Dr. I. Mortimer Bloom, the Tabernacle's rabbi for the last ten years, got carried away by his desire to increase the temple's membership and worked out an intricate scheme. He lavished undue attention on the girls in religious school, arguing that one day these girls would be brides and that then they would become instrumental in bringing their families to the Tabernacle.²⁵ The Board did not share his view and asked him to resign.

Following Dr. Bloom's resignation, the temple experienced a succession of rabbis. At first, guest rabbis made their weekly appearance, then in 1934, Dr. Aaron Eiseman became rabbi, followed three years later by Rabbi Naphtali Frishberg. The latter, however, did not stay long with the Tabernacle. Since the temple still could not afford to pay a fixed monthly salary, Rabbi Frishberg also taught in public school to augment his income, and eventually turned to teaching altogether. In the summer of 1938 Rabbi Ahron Opher was engaged, and he remained for eight years. In 1946 Jacob Polish became rabbi, to be succeeded ten years later by Dr. Robert L. Lehman.

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

The year 1938 has left its marks in the annals of human history. As the year which witnessed the *Anschluss* and *Kristallnacht*, it showed record numbers of refugees searching desperately for a new home. The tragedy of the mounting flood of people wanting to leave Germany on the one hand, and, on the other, the shrinking number of countries willing to take them, has been recounted in memoirs and studies.²⁶ Since the Hebrew Tabernacle became home to some of these refugees, their story deserves a place in the history of the temple. It is estimated that between 100,000 and 150,000 Jewish immigrants from Germany entered the United States in the period of 1933 to 1945. More than eighty percent arrived before the end of World War II.²⁷ This is one side of the coin. The other side, namely how many people were unable to gain entrance to the United States, is unknown. The Depression, the still lingering high unemployment figures and a spirit of isolationism during the 1930's produced an anti-immigration mood among the public. The government responded by tightening the immigration laws, so that the flow of entering aliens was reduced to a mere trickle. Arguments that either the immigrants would compete with Americans on the already strained job market, or were likely to become public charges, assured that only refugees with sufficient funds or an affidavit were granted entrance.²⁸ The number of possible immigrants was further checked by a quota system. The Austrian and German quota, for instance, allowed 27,370 aliens to enter per year. The only time this number was one hundred percent filled was during the fiscal year of 1939, no doubt influenced by the horrors of *Kristallnacht*.

The international conference in Evian-les-Bains, called by President Roosevelt in the summer of 1938 to discuss the plight of refugees, was no more than a humane gesture and achieved little beyond talk and paperwork. As the situation in Germany for Jews grew more desperate, the more immigration barriers were erected. Attempts to introduce legislation in Congress in 1938/39 to permit 20,000 German Jewish children to enter outside the quota system failed. It was rejected by two thirds of the American people, as evidenced by opinion polls.²⁹ Following Pearl Harbor, America's entry into the Second World War

practically closed the door to Jewish immigration from Germany and Austria.

The anti-alien mood did not exhaust itself in merely restricting immigration. Immigrants already residing in the country were its next victim. Following the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact the paranoia that Nazi and Communist agents were being infiltrated as a “fifth column” into the United States to subvert the country in case of war, led to the Alien Registration Act. It required registration and fingerprinting of all aliens above the age of fourteen. Unnaturalized immigrants from Germany and Austria suffered restrictions, but were at least spared the internment which the Japanese had to undergo in California following Pearl Harbor.

The reaction of American Jewish organizations basically showed the following pattern. They pleaded to have compassion for the persecuted refugees. The little criticism they had to offer with regard to the American refugee policy, they counterbalanced with castigation of the British Palestine policy. They exerted little pressure for a more generous United States immigration program, and on a whole tried to de-emphasize the Jewish aspect of the problem, for fear that the spread of anti-Semitism might endanger their own situation in this country. Since opinion polls showed that the public supported stringent anti-immigration measures, those opting for a more liberal legislation feared that any pressure or any move to put the refugee issue in the limelight would lead to the enactment of even tighter restrictions. Hence they took care not to rock the boat too much, lest it should sink.³⁰

These then were the circumstances under which the German Jewish refugees reached the United States between 1933 and 1940. This immigration wave differed in many respects from the immigrants preceding it. Most significantly, German Jews had not left Germany and come to America for economic reasons. In Germany the majority had belonged to the middle class, or at least lived middle class life styles. While for previous immigrant groups the start at the bottom meant an improvement over their economic situation in their home countries, for German Jews the beginning in the United States was coupled with economic degradation. In Germany they had found employment mainly in three areas: in professional, commercial and skilled work. Upon coming to the United States the German refugee was expected to start from the traditional “bottom”. Thus the first years of resettlement for a

German Jewish refugee family often took the following course. Extended families moved together into a large apartment; often they also sublet to one or two boarders. They all tried to find work as fast as possible: a menial or household job for the women and factory work for the men. Many couples also worked as butler-cook teams. The evenings were reserved for learning English and classes in citizenship. Due to their thrift and industriousness and due to the upward trend of the American economy under the impact of rearmament and renewed world demand for American food and industrial goods, the refugees did not remain at the bottom for long.

Once they had a reasonable command of English, and the stigma of having been categorized an “enemy alien” had subsided, they moved on to more desirable jobs in offices, on various levels of government service; some even tried to become independent. Young couples and in-laws, crowded into one apartment, now could afford their own places. And in many cases, this was also the time when the immigrants graduated in a synagogue from seatholder to membership status. Needless to say, the first years in the new country did not lack their share of pain and hardships. Each immigrant group, whatever point of time or country it be, underwent its own particular kind of tribulations. In the case of the refugees from Germany the tribulations were centered in two areas. With the status-conscious European society and a middle class existence as his background, the immigrant, sent out of Germany with his furniture in a crate and four dollars in his pocket, suffered in his position as a menial worker from a precipitous loss of status. Of course, this observation holds true only for those men and women of middle age or above. The young people, with the help of school, college, and the Armed Forces, found it easier to adjust. Aside from the question of status, the refugee carried within him the special psychological dilemma of his German Jewish past. Having suffered persecution in Germany for being Jewish, and labeled an “enemy alien” in the United States for coming from Germany, the German Jewish immigrant went through a deep crisis. No doubt, the daily struggle for survival, especially during the first years, did not leave him much time to brood over identity questions. Yet the wounds were there, deeply buried within each individual.

The middle class character of the German Jewish immigration group

expressed itself also in the settlement pattern. In contrast to former Jewish immigrants, who started their lives in America in the ghetto districts, these refugees sought out neighborhoods more in tune with their background and lifestyle, such as New York's Jackson Heights, Forest Hills, Kew Gardens and the West Bronx. Of the 70,000 refugees who settled in New York City, about 20,000 moved to Washington Heights.³¹ Situated within a reasonable commuting distance from Manhattan's down- and midtown office jobs, Washington Heights combined the attractions of life in a metropolitan area with the charms of a community-oriented neighborhood. The tree-lined streets, the flowerbeds running along the center of Broadway, its houses, many of them not higher than six stories and built with a white-colored stone, the restfulness of its parks and the cool breeze from the Hudson River on hot summer nights: all these features contributed to make the area a pleasant place in which to live. For the German Jewish immigrants there were additional attractions. In its character the area resembled European cities, an important psychological factor, since these German refugees had not chosen to leave their former abodes, but had been driven away. Furthermore, vacant, large-sized apartments were readily available, enabling them to take in boarders and thus helping them to tide over their most difficult early years. Also these apartments, due to their spaciousness, did not look stunted by the heavy, solid pieces of furniture many of the immigrants had brought with them. That the area was home to a large Jewish community might have been another element which recommended Washington Heights to the eyes of the refugees.

Despite the pre-existing Jewish community, German Jews created their own network of institutions. A dozen large German synagogues were founded in Washington Heights between 1935 and 1949.³² It was not unusual that residents from the same region or town in Germany formed their own communities. German Jews desired religious affiliation for a number of reasons. In Germany all of them had been required by law to belong to a *Gemeinde*.³³ What in Germany may have been a customary association not much reflected upon, became in the United States an affirmation of one's heritage. Like all other immigrants before them, they also needed the closeness and support of their peers. Since German Jews, unlike the East European immigrants on the Lower East Side, were not in the habit of forming organizations with political or socio-cultural directions, they fulfilled these needs within the framework

of religious organizations. These institutions played a multi-faceted role in the immigrants' lives. They provided the refugees with a familiar cultural and religious milieu, and offered them warmth and the support of shared experiences. All of them shared additional characteristics. They possessed an atmosphere which preserved the immigrants' own rites and customs, transplanting the religious services they were used to and allowing them to hear sermons preached in German. Like the many *landsmanshaftn* on the Lower East Side in the last century, these institutions gave the refugee the security he needed to face the process of adjustment and Americanization. The synagogues established by the immigrants created an atmosphere of home. While there among his peers, the emigre could regain his former status and speak the German language without the love-hate undercurrents which would surface when using that language with outsiders. After the daily attempts at coping with the challenges of life in America, the emigre temples offered the comfort of a world with which the refugee was more familiar, and in whose control he had a participating share. Furthermore, the use of the familiar traditions and melodies gave him a sense of continuity in a world which had become submerged in destruction and ruin.³⁴

The 1930s was a crucial time in the Tabernacle's development. The Depression years still cast their shadows, and the temple found itself at a permanent low point. The conjuncture of two factors assured the Hebrew Tabernacle's survival and gave its destiny a new direction: the arrival of the refugees in Washington Heights and the installment of Rabbi Opher in 1938.

Among the approximately thirty congregations founded in New York City by immigrants, the Hebrew Tabernacle assumed a unique position. It gradually turned into an immigrant congregation as more and more refugees filled its ranks. At the same time it was an American temple, which had been founded by German Jews, yet which had over the years acquired a mixed membership of both East European and German Jews. The refugees flocked to this temple. Even those who came from a traditional background, who at first had attended services at an orthodox *shul* in the neighborhood and felt dissatisfied with the lack of decorum there, were attracted to the Hebrew Tabernacle, even in spite of organ music and collection baskets.

The Tabernacle had more inducements with which to attract the

refugee. For one, the Tabernacle called an imposing building its home. It was not the typical immigrant establishment in one room or in the basement of another temple. Its structure was reminiscent of many a liberal temple in German cities. Furthermore, in autumn 1937 Richard Cohn, who had been trained in Germany and who was an emigre himself, became the cantor of the Tabernacle. For German cantors finding employment after their immigration was not an easy task. American temples were used to the East European cantorial style which is recitative, and did not want to employ cantors who sang the melodies of the German cantorial tradition. Since the Tabernacle had German roots, the employment of a German trained cantor was only natural. The melodies which he introduced and rendered in his beautiful voice became one of the main features which made the temple so popular among German Jews. Richard Cohn was succeeded in 1942 by another German immigrant, Henry Ehrenberg, son of a cantor, who had officiated in the *Hauptsynagoge* in Frankfurt a.M., and who served as cantor at the Tabernacle until his retirement, in 1977.

Despite all the elements which could make a German Jew feel at home at the Hebrew Tabernacle, it was still an American institution. The rabbi was not German-born, sermons were held in English and its affairs were managed by a Board of Trustees. For some immigrants eager to adjust to their surroundings, this fusion of German and American characteristics constituted the temple's main attraction. The Tabernacle's openness to the refugees in offering them a spiritual home, was reciprocated by the latter's loyalty and dedication with which they supported the temple. Recent research has shown that the German Jewish population of Washington Heights was more traditionally religious than the refugees as a whole. The newcomers showed a high rate of synagogue affiliation and of synagogue attendance. Most of the synagogues founded by refugees in Washington Heights were Orthodox with the rest being traditional-Conservative. The fact that many of the refugees came from rural and Southern areas in Germany may play a role in explaining this phenomenon.³⁵

The immigrants replenished the Tabernacle's congregation. At a time when they could not yet afford to pay for membership, the auditorium of the synagogue, reserved for members, was sparsely filled during the High Holiday services while the balcony, assigned to seatholders, was

overflowing. Yet this factor in itself could not have restored the temple to its former place within the greater New York Jewish community. During the 1930s, due to the employment of temporary rabbis, the Tabernacle sorely lacked leadership. This state of affairs was changed in 1938 as Rabbi Ahron Opher came to the Hebrew Tabernacle. Born in Israel, a student of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise and intellectually very capable, he put the temple back on solid ground. Owing to his guidance at a financially difficult time, when there was thought of relocating to a rented place, the temple held on to its home.

Most importantly, however, by affiliating the temple with the Reform movement the Tabernacle rejoined the Jewish community at large. Rabbi Opher himself acted as Executive Director of the Synagogue Council of America during 1943 to 1945. This was the time of the Tabernacle's "rebirth," and internally it underwent some changes as well. The growing congregation, an amorphous mass, needed some structuring. Groups were organized providing different ages and interests with a framework. Since the temple was not officially oriented towards Reform, Rabbi Opher introduced the Reform prayerbook, but retained for the High Holiday services the traditional Conservative prayerbook. This arrangement is still being followed today.

The Tabernacle congregation followed closely the developments in Europe. From the time of Hitler's rise to power the rabbi's column in the temple's bulletins reflected the interest of the Tabernacle members in the fate of their Jewish brothers and sisters. Dr. Eiseman's remarks in September 1935 were most astute: ". . . the year just passed has brought no hope to the millions of Jews in Germany and Eastern Europe. Conditions today are worse than ever, it looks as if there were to be no future for our brethren in these lands . . ." On February 14, 1934 the Hebrew Tabernacle sent a telegram to the Foreign Relations Committee in the United States Senate expressing support for Resolution 154. This resolution was addressed to the German government and in very mild language voiced criticism of that government's racist policies.

As more refugees joined the congregation the interest in events in Europe turned into a preoccupation. People were concerned with helping relatives escape from German-occupied Europe and finding havens of refuge for them. After Pearl Harbor, when the United States entered the war, the Tabernacle community joined the American people in

supporting the war effort. Sisterhood members met regularly in the vestry of the temple knitting scarves, gloves and socks for the “boys” at the front. Basket collections were made for the benefit of the Red Cross. Special services celebrating the allied invasion of Europe and a memorial service for President Roosevelt filled the temple to its last seat. At the end of the war, anxieties over the fate of family members and friends left behind in Europe, which had been suppressed for the duration of the war, dominated the immigrant community. As more and more details regarding the destruction of Europe’s Jewry were revealed, people turned to their religious family to seek consolation and support. In this dark and painful time the Hebrew Tabernacle was fortunate in having had Jacob Polish as its rabbi. His warm and outgoing personality coupled with his abilities as an orator helped the congregation pass through the abyss. Later during Rabbi Lehman’s tenure the yearly observance of *Yom Hashoah* and *Kristallnacht* continued the Jewish tradition of *Zachor* (remembrance) of times of affliction, as well as acts of deliverance.

Toward the end of the 1940s, as post-war DPs and refugees from Shanghai, England and other countries had settled and the State of Israel was born, the congregation turned inward once more. The 1950s were another prosperous period for the temple. It was not uncommon that close to 300 people attended Friday night services. As the immigrants eventually became economically more secure, they joined the temple as members, welcomed by President Leo Schwartz, who headed our community from the end of the 1930s until he died in office on October 1, 1951. He was succeeded by Mr. Edward B. Silverman and Mr. Morris A. Engel. The latter served as president for more than a decade. Each of these men underwrote the temple’s tradition of making the refugees feel at home. Almost from the beginning of their affiliation with the Tabernacle, newcomers served the congregation by doing volunteer work or as members of the Board of Trustees. The earliest immigrants to be trustees were Dr. Richard Lewin, Mr. Paul Benjamin and Miss Suzanne Hirsch. The latter two were among the most generous financial supporters of the temple. In 1952 another refugee, Mr. Nathan Maier, became a Vice President later to be Treasurer. This description suggests that the advance of refugees into organizational areas of the temple progressed at a fast pace. The first foreign-born president, Mr. Kurt J. Schloss, was elected in 1967. This late date, however, may have been on account of his predecessor’s excellent performance rather than

discrimination. Yet there were sometimes repressed grumblings charging the refugees with being pushy, haughty and unwilling to Americanize. The immigrants, in turn, gave vent to feelings of frustration that the temple's hierarchy was reserved for old-time members and only well-heeled newcomers. Generally, however, there was little friction between the immigrants and the old members. After services on Friday nights, some socialized, and the Board, in running the temple, saw to it that the needs of both groups were satisfied.

Since most of the members, both men and women, were working during the day, most of the temple's activities took place during weekends and on evenings. As tired as one may have been on a Friday night after a long week of work coupled with the exhausting process of acculturation, that night belonged to the temple. People drew sustenance from the services for the coming week. The socializing afterwards with friends and neighbors over a cup of coffee in some corner restaurant satisfied the need for company and entertainment. The temple's main social activities were the yearly luncheons sponsored by the Sisterhood at the Waldorf Astoria, and the bazaar, a yearly undertaking scheduled between Thanksgiving and *Hanukkah*, in which the whole congregation joined. As of the middle of the 1950s, under the directive of Mr. Ernest W. Stein, a future President, the bazaar became one of the main fund-raising activities of the community. In its heyday it lasted four days, involved about 200 people, and offered a large variety of merchandise, from toys and clothing to furniture and jewelry. Gambling wheels were brought in, people tried their luck at raffles, tasted the food prepared by Tabernacle members and browsed through rows of booths, each displaying more tempting goods than the next. Aside from its financial success, (it could bring in as much as 22,000 dollars) this affair crystallized the temple's new outlook.³⁶ Togetherness and companionship were the center around which the temple revolved.

During these years the temple also invited guest speakers, for example James W. Gerard, Ambassador to Germany, and sponsored musical evenings. Members of the Parents' Association and the Men's Club performed the operetta "Der Vogelhandler" and chamber music was presented by Mr. Alfred Grau, Mr. Otto Seyfert and Mrs. Felice Gould. The Hebrew Tabernacle was featured in four television programs, most prominently in the film *One God*, its services were broadcast, and it

appeared in various books and magazines.

Already in the early 1950s the Board members came to realize that the present location of the Hebrew Tabernacle at 161st Street could not remain the temple's home forever. The population of the area gradually started to change. With economic prosperity, residents moved either further uptown, closer to Fort Tryon Park and the Inwood section of Manhattan, to Riverdale, or even to the suburbs. As apartments were vacated, they were taken over by new ethnic groups. The basic mechanism which had forced the Tabernacle to relocate from Harlem to Washington Heights repeated itself. When these new residents, coming from a different cultural and socio-economic background, started to pour into the area it accelerated the move to new neighborhoods by the former inhabitants of Washington Heights. Already in Rabbi Polish's time, under the Presidency of Mr. Morris A. Engel, the Board started to search for a suitable location further uptown.

Another difficult period in the temple's history set in. Since no agreeable building could be found, the temple did not have the funds to build, and membership numbers continued to decline, the Board decided to relocate its religious school. In the 1960s the Tabernacle opened a branch of its school in a street-level apartment, at 218th Street and Seaman Avenue in Inwood.

Despite the turbulence and difficulties of the 1960s, the Tabernacle was always able to count on its "family" of devoted officers and congregants, tireless in their efforts to reverse the temple's fortunes. The presidents of this troublesome period, namely Mr. Kurt J. Schloss and Mr. Ernest W. Stein, deserve special mentioning. It was not unusual for members, some already living in other sections of Manhattan, or even across the Hudson river in New Jersey, to support different outreach projects, or to come to 161st Street to attend services.

As the level of crime increased, congregants feared vandalism when leaving their cars parked in the street, or were afraid even to walk to the temple's evening activities, the search for new quarters became imperative. In what was seen as nothing short of a miracle, since the temple had reached its most critical point, the search for a building was finally successful. Following the precedent of the religious school branch in Inwood, Rabbi Lehman proposed to establish an Adult Education

program further uptown. When he approached the officers of the Christian Science Church, located at 185th Street and Fort Washington Avenue, to inquire whether some space could be rented there, he was informed that the building was for sale. In 1973 the Hebrew Tabernacle bought the building, and sold the premises at 161st Street to a group of Jehovah's Witnesses. The relocation of the Hebrew Tabernacle to 185th Street could not have been realized without the efforts of its officers at the time, particularly Dr. Max Hamburg (President), Mr. Justin Winter (Vice President and Treasurer) and Mr. Ernest Hartog (first Chairman of the House Committee and later President).

The relocation brought to an end the daily Orthodox *Minyan*, which had been led by Mr. Harry Buchman.

The last services held in the old temple in the beginning of February 1974 were tinged with sadness, as congregants reflected upon the many memories connected with this building, and bid farewell to a place which had been their first spiritual home in the United States. Yet when the Torah scrolls were carried through the icy streets to their new location, expectancy and hope over the commencing of a new cycle replaced the melancholy. And indeed the temple entered a very prosperous phase. Under the guidance of Dr. Robert E. Lehman, rabbi since 1956 and son of refugees who had grown up in the Tabernacle congregation, the community expanded and ventured into new activities. He was aided in this task by the temple's various presidents, Dr. Max Hamburg, Mr. Ernest Hartog and Mr. Paul A. Kohlmann.

In its former stage the congregation had been a close-knit, family-type community. This closeness, while it responded to the refugees' emotional needs, endowed the temple with an aura of self-containment. In the late 1970s and in 1980 members of Temple Beth Am and Temple of the Covenant, both Washington Heights institutions, were integrated into the Hebrew Tabernacle.

The retirement of Cantor Henry Ehrenberg in 1977 marked the end of an era for the temple. During his tenure of 35 years he taught more than 1,000 Bar Mitzvah boys, among them the future Rabbis Gustav Buchdahl and Peter Grumbacher, was Principal of the religious school, and carried on the German cantorial tradition with the well-known melodies of Lewandowski, Sulzer and Naumbourg. He was succeeded by

Cantor Frederick C. Herman, American-born and American-trained, who attempts to widen the musical horizon of the Tabernacle. Owing to his knowledge and talent the congregation was able to hear, for instance, Ernest Bloch's "Sacred Service", Handel's "Judas Maccabaeus", "Israel in Egypt" and Bach's Cantata No. 79.

The creation of new programs was necessitated by an aging membership. In time, the old by far outnumbered the young, as the latter increasingly turned to suburbia, an area more congenial for raising families than the problem-ridden urban neighborhoods. Programs were developed which opened the temple to the community at large, and at the same time brought cultural events to the doorsteps of the people who could no longer travel, or did not feel at ease to use the public transportation system to attend concerts and similar activities downtown. The temple sponsored tours to study the historic sites of the Jewish people in Israel, Spain and other Jewish sites in Europe, as well as in the United States. There were art exhibits and biennial concerts featuring Pinchas Zukerman, David Bar-Illan, and Jerome Hines. In addition, film festivals took place, and the temple invited noteworthy speakers, most recently Elie Wiesel. In commemoration of the 40th anniversary of *Kristallnacht* the congregation funded the publication of *Reflections on the Holocaust*, containing memoirs by congregants.³⁷ Aside from these extraordinary events, an Adult Education Program, the Open Mind, came into existence. It examines topics in history, music, Bible and current events. In addition to which, every Wednesday the Sisterhood offers luncheons, followed by an afternoon of card-games. These events attract hundreds of people weekly.

Some members have created a support system by phone for very old members, checking periodically if help is needed. There are also volunteer programs serving the Isabella Home, a geriatric center in Washington Heights. In addition, Rabbi Lehman and Cantor Herman, in visiting congregants in hospitals and nursing homes, follow the German Jewish tradition of *Seelsorge*.

While the needs of the elderly have become a major factor in the life of the community, the temple is not ignoring the realization that its future rests with the young American-born generation. During the last four years, student rabbis were engaged in order to build up programs attractive to young people.

CONCLUSIONS

This temple was founded by German Jews and from the beginning it struck a sensitive balance between elements derived from its German Jewish heritage, and influences stemming from the American environments. When German Jewish refugees came to this country and to Washington Heights during the Nazi period, they were drawn to the Hebrew Tabernacle particularly on account of its unique character. Yet while they were German Jews like the Tabernacle's founding fathers, they had not emigrated voluntarily, and their most recent experiences were bound to have left an impact. The congregants in the early periods of the Tabernacle could affirm in all naiveté their German ties, sometimes bordering on German patriotism. The present membership's German roots are burdened with singular painful memories.

Due to the events of the Hitler era, German Jews have asked themselves whether emancipation and the dual identity of being a Jew and a citizen were not a chimera. Other Jews have accused them of having been German Jewish rather than Jewish Germans, and hence deserving the lesson that assimilation bears no other fruit but destruction.

To what extent did German Jews, after their resettlement in the United States, remain true to the social and intellectual traits which had formed them in Germany? Historians have pointed to areas where the former German Jewish refugees continued the patterns established in Germany.³⁸ This pattern includes their middle class economic status, their charity and welfare concerns, and their capacity to speedy Americanization while maintaining social and religious ties within their group.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, German Jews initiated a process to re-examine the nature of their identity. Motivated by a number of factors, of which the resurging anti-Semitism, Zionism and the encounter with East European Jewish culture were the most prominent, the so-called Hebrew Renaissance was generated. The names of Buber and Rosenzweig come readily to mind as the main representatives of this movement. As the destruction of German Jewry at the hand of the Na'is unfolded, and German society became again closed to Jews, the Jewish cultural activity gained in importance.

After German Jews arrived in their new home countries, chiefly Israel, the United States and England, they soon established organizations as they had known them in Germany, serving their religious and social needs. They founded synagogues, social clubs, and welfare institutions. In the cultural field, however, the work begun in Germany was not continued. A *Lehrhaus* sponsored by Temple Habonim soon ceased functioning for lack of support. No theatres, no publishing house, no schools were established. An exception to this pattern is the Leo Baeck Institute. But here the question arises as to what extent that institution plays a part in the former immigrants' community, or whether it is instead sustained by a scholarly audience interested in preserving and examining German Jewry's past.

Whatever the reasons for this discontinuity may be — and this is not the place to examine them — once the German Jewish immigrants settled, they concentrated on reaching at least the economic position and status they had enjoyed in Germany. The speed with which it was achieved is, so far, unprecedented in the immigration history of the United States. The mutual aid societies and other institutions that had helped them with this task either became superfluous and disbanded, or became transformed and joined the general American scene. This observation also holds true for the many synagogues founded by German Jewish immigrants. Those which are still in existence today are in the process of merging with the American Jewish community. One member of the Tabernacle expressed himself to that effect: “the German Jewish tradition will come to an end as the former German Jews are passing away. The young generation has not been taught to carry on the tradition.”³⁹ What the young received instead from their parents was a hazy notion of Germanness, exemplified in manners, attitudes towards music and books, formality and thrift.

The United States, from its very inception, represented the most advanced and egalitarian ideas of Western Civilization. It was not burdened with a tradition of feudal restrictions. Thus the American Jew, as a citizen of the United States, was free to partake of freedom and equality in an unprecedented way.

German Jewish refugees, arriving here, found a country which is open, pluralistic, and materially rich. Being largely middle class, they were in a unique position to take advantage of these opportunities. While

doing so they adhered to the belief that one can be American and Jewish, without the contradictions which were inherent in the past German Jewish experience.

One could argue whether the discontinuity of one cultural strand, in this case the German Jewish, is, in the end, the decisive issue. As much as the disappearance of one cultural heritage is a loss to humanity, one has to assume that a culture which plays an important role in a people's life will be treasured and transmitted to future generations.

The history of the Hebrew Tabernacle has shown that in cycles it was and still is a viable institution. And in this we find the main criterion for determining the merit of an institution, namely whether it fulfills a living function for the community it serves. In case of the present membership the Hebrew Tabernacle became an extension of their lives. When the time comes, it will be up to the next generation, based on their needs, to model and develop the Tabernacle so that it may play a role in their lives.

Today the Hebrew Tabernacle is quite different from the Tabernacle of 1906. Its activities have changed and so has its membership. What remained constant throughout the various periods of the temple's history is the Tabernacle's commitment to its congregants. This relationship is reciprocal. Unlike many institutions which with age become self-perpetuating, the temple's existence depends on the support of its membership. The temple relocated twice in an effort to follow the settlement pattern of its community. On the other hand, the congregants are also in need of the temple, and this has become particularly evident in the post-War period. For the refugees from Germany the Hebrew Tabernacle was their home. At first it provided them with a setting, similar to the one they had been forced to leave. Subsequently, as the immigrants became acculturated, the temple's unique character assumed a special significance. As an American synagogue with a German Jewish heritage it became the symbol of the congregation's hopes and strivings.

Throughout its history the temple was never content merely to exist, since it was dedicated to fulfilling certain tasks. In its first decades it found a special calling in the religious education of the young. Later it became a home for the expelled. Today the Tabernacle's commitment is twofold. It cares for its aging membership, and it also prepares the

ground for the inevitable changes in the future. The temple's extensive cultural programs do not provide entertainment and stimulation for its members only, but establish the Tabernacle as a center of activities for the entire neighborhood. Musical performances, art exhibits, and lectures on topics ranging from the Bible to present day politics, have expanded the temple's scope. In the process it was transformed into a community center appealing to people of different ages with a variety of interests.

At present the Tabernacle's membership is advancing in years, and the religious school enrollment is low compared to other periods in the temple's history. But this problem and the inherent question of the congregation's future may not be solely in the hands of the Tabernacle. The history of the temple has shown to what extent it shares the fate of the community at large. Such factors as demographic trends, economic developments, and housing policies of New York City may play more of a role in determining the temple's future than any plans and strategies devised by the temple. This history has also shown that the temple survived many difficult periods. It underwent changes by adapting to varied circumstances and emerged renewed in "body" and "spirit."

NOTES

This history is based upon the following primary material: *Minutes of Board of Trustees Meetings*, (1905-1938). *Minutes of Congregation Meetings*, (1911-1931). *Bulletins*, (1922-1941; 1956 to present).

Interviews conducted by the author during spring 1985 with: Cantor Emeritus Henry Ehrenberg, Mrs. Mildred Engel, Ms. Sadie Gold, Dr. Max Hamburgh, Mrs. Sonya S. Hartog, Mr. Ernest Hartog, Mr. Paul A. Kohlmann, Rabbi Dr. Robert L. Lehman, Mrs. Ella Maier, Mrs. Gertrude Maier, Mrs. Rosalyn Manowitz, Mr. Kurt J. Schloss, Mr. Ernest W. Stein, Mrs. Joan Taub, Mr Justin Winter.

- 1 Circular letter by the Hebrew Tabernacle Association dated October 13, 1905, p. 1.
- 2 Jeffrey S. Gurock, *When Harlem Was Jewish 1870-1930*, New York, 1979, p 40 f.
- 3 Pauline Wengeroff, "Memoirs of a Grandmother," in Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe*, Boston, 1967, pp. 160-68.
- 4 Circular letter, op. cit., passim.
- 5 Gurock, op. cit., ch. 4.
- 6 *ibid.*, ch. 5
- 7 *ibid.*, p. 117 ff.
- 8 We have examples from Alexandria in 40 C.E. where the Jews were accused of siding with the hated Roman occupying power, or Spain in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, where the Christians suspected the Jews of aiding the Moslems during the Reconquista (the reconquering of Spain from the Moors). It always resulted in harassment for the Jews.
- 9 Letter by Gustav G. Berger to Mr. Adolph Schwarzbaum, n.d.
- 10 Gurock, op. cit., ch 6.
- 11 *ibid.*, ch. 6.
- 12 A beam or truss which is supported or held firmly at one end and which projects from its support so that the outer end is free and unsupported. *The Winston Dictionary*, College Edition.
- 13 The Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Central Conference of American Rabbis are two organizations established by the Reform movement in 1873 and 1889 respectively. Hebrew Union College, the movement's Rabbinical institution was founded in 1875.
- 14 Although the Reform movement originated in Germany, it never became as radical there as it was in the United States.

- 15 Gurock, *op. cit.*, ch. 7.
- 16 Inspired by Protestant custom reformers introduced the Confirmation to Judaism first in Germany. It was not the girls' equivalent of the *Bar Mitzvah*, but was meant for both sexes.
- 17 Hebrew Tabernacle Minutes of Board of Trustees Meetings, 1927, p. 193
- 18 Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, New York, 1976, chs. 8-10, 13-16.
- 19 I am aware that this characterization of German Jews is rather schematic and as such opens itself up to the charge of generalization. Aside from innovations in the religious field, German Jews were trailblazers in the scholarly study of Judaism. Such men as Jost and Graetz in history, Steinschneider in bibliographical studies and Zunz on synagogue liturgy laid the foundations for today's extensive research in Judaic studies.
For an excellent summarizing essay on the Modern Period in Jewish history, see Salo W. Baron, "The Modern Age," in *Great Ages and Ideas of the Jewish People*, ed. with an Intro. by Leo W. Schwarz, New York, 1956, pp. 315-484. See also Salo W. Baron, "The Jewish Question in the 19th Century," *Journal of Modern History*, X (1938), 51-65; Isaac Barzilay, "The Background of the Berlin Haskalah," in *Essays on Jewish Life and Thought Presented in Honor of Salo W. Baron*, New York, 1959; Shmuel Ettinger, "The Beginnings of the Change in the Attitude of European Society Towards the Jews," *Scripta Hierosolomytana*, VII (1961), 193-219; Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto. The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870*, Cambridge, Mass., 1973, esp. chs. III, V, VI, XII. See also Peter Gay, *Freud, Jews and Other Germans. Masters and Victims in Modernist Culture*, New York, 1978.
- 20 *Ismar Schorsch, Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism, 1870-1914*, pp. 103 ff.; and also Arnold Paucker, "Zur Problematik einer juedischen Abwehrstrategie in der deutschen . Gesellschaft," in *Juden im Wilhelminischen Deutschland 1890-1914*, pp. 479-548,
- 21 Fritz Stern, "The Political Consequences of the Unpolitical German," *History. A Meridian Periodical*, III (September, 1960), 104-134.
- 22 idem, "Germany 1933: Fifty Years Later," *Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture*, 21 (1983), p. 26.
- 23 Frederick L. Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920's*, New York, 1964, pp.204 ff.
- 24 Mr. Meyer Levinson was also Cantor at the Dutch *shul* at 79th Street, between 2nd and 3rd Avenues and owned a cigar store on Second Avenue between 79th and 80th Streets.
- 25 See letters included in the temple's *Minutes* of the year 1933.
- 26 Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died. A Chronical of American Apathy*, New York, 1967; David S. Wyman, *Paper Walls. America and the Refugee Crisis 1938-1941*, Amherst, 1968; idem, *The Abandonment of the Jews*.

America and the Holocaust, 1941-1942, New York, 1984; Henry L. Feingold, *The Political Rescue. The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust. 1938-1945*, New Brunswick, 1970; Saul S. Friedman, *No Haven for the Oppressed. United States Policy Toward Jewish Refugees. 1938-1945*, Detroit, 1971; Kurt Jakob Ball-Kaduri *Vor der Katastrophe. Juden in Deutschland 1934-1939*, Tel Aviv, 1967; Hans Habe, *The Mission*, New York, 1967.

- 27 Alexander Carlebach, "The German-Jewish Immigration and Its Influence on Synagogue Life in the U.S.A.," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (following LBIYB), IX (1964), pp. 351-372; Herbert A. Strauss, "Jewish Emigration from Germany — Nazi Policies and Jewish Responses (I)," *LBIYB*, XXV (1980), pp. 313-361; idem, "Jewish Emigration from Germany — Nazi Policies and Jewish Responses (II)," *LBIYB*, XXVI (1981), pp. 343-409.
- 28 Generally speaking, Jews from Southern Germany were in a better position to secure affidavits. There existed family and community connections, due to the fact that the post-1848 Jewish immigrants to America had largely come from Southern regions of Germany.
- 29 "A movement to admit British children following the fall of France, in contrast, was widely supported by public opinion and the Washington bureaucracy. It led to the admission of about 4,000 British children in the few months before the programme came to an end in the late summer of 1940, following the sinking of the *City of Benares* by German submarines with the loss of 79 children." Herbert A. Strauss, "The Immigration and Acculturation of the German Jew in the United States of America," *LBIY*, XVI (1971), pp. 66 ff.
- 30 See note 26 and esp. David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of Jews*.
- 31 See Steven M. Lowenstein, "German Jews in Washington Heights" *LBIYB*, XXX (1985), p. 246.
- 32 idem., *ibid.*, p. 246 n. 4.
- 33 The law also stipulated that every community member had to pay synagogue tax. That money constituted the main revenue of the *Gemeinde*, with which it financed its various welfare, social and cultural programs. The situation was changed by the law of March 28, 1938, which denied the *Gemeinde* its corporate status. Henceforth, funds had to come from voluntary contributions.
- 34 Michael N. Dobkowski, "The Fourth Reich—German-Jewish Religious Life in America Today," *Judaism*, (Winter, 1978), 80-95; Robert L. Lehman, "Washington Heights and Its Religious Institutions," in *Hebrew Tabernacle Congregation and Isabella Geriatric Center*, unpubl. D. Min. Dissertation, New York Theological Seminary, 1985.
- 35 See Steven M. Lowenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 248 f.
- 36 Information gained from Mr. Ernest Stein during an interview on February 8,

1985.

- 37 Rosalyn Manowitz, ed., *Reflections on the Holocaust*, New York, 1978.
- 38 Herbert A. Strauss, "The Immigration and Acculturation of the German Jew in the United States of America," *LBIY*, XVI (1971), p. 91.
- 39 Interview with Cantor Ehrenberg on January 18, 1985. This statement needs some modification, however. Maybe the German Jewish tradition will not be carried on, yet from the Tabernacle's second generation already three members chose the rabbinate as a profession.

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