

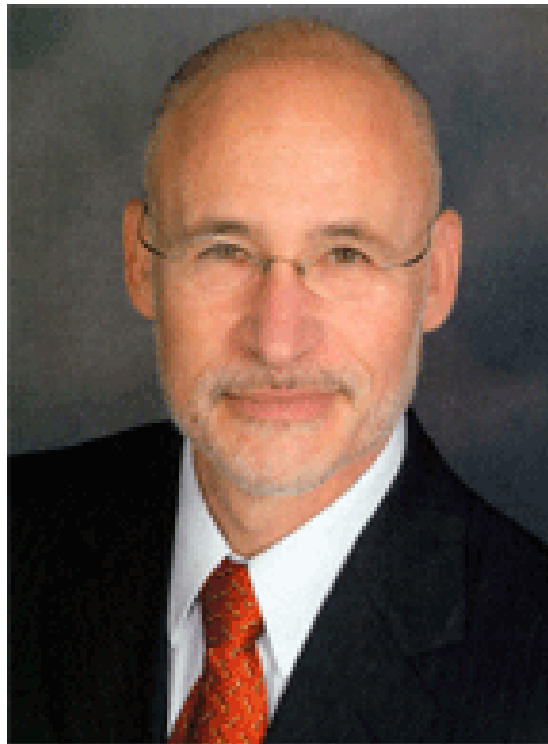
Enjoy our ***A Moment in Our History*** series for a deeper understanding of how B'nai Jehudah has evolved and where we are going in our future. We are also excited to introduce the digital copy of ***Roots In A Moving Stream***, by Frank Adler, z"l. Click the button below to read or download this B'nai Jehudah treasure.

[Roots in a Moving Stream](#)

None of this history would be possible without the work of Frank Adler, author of ***Roots in a Moving Stream*** and Dan Stolper, author of ***A Moment in Our History***. A special thanks to Dan Adler for creating and sharing the digital copy of ***Roots in a Moving Stream***.

JULY 20, 2021

Rabbi Arthur P. Nemitoff



Rabbi Emeritus Michael Zedek moved to Cincinnati in 2000 after serving B'nai Jehudah for 26 years. The Congregation underwent a period of considerable transition for the next three years. Rabbi Joshua Taub, already a rabbi of the Congregation, was Senior Rabbi for two years. Interim Rabbi Marc Disick served for one year. We opened the Learning Center in Overland Park in 2000 and consolidated all operations there in 2003.

A search committee led by Howard Mayer (president 2009-11) interviewed candidates and recommended hiring Rabbi Arthur P. Nemitoff as Senior Rabbi. He was approved by the congregation and began what would become an 18-year tenure on July 1, 2003.

Early Life

Arthur P. Nemitoff was born in Kansas City in 1954. His father, William, was a sales representative of furniture and bedding supplies and equipment. His mother, Henrietta, came from an observant family and stayed home with her four children in the early years. Arthur enrolled in B'nai Jehudah's religious school at age five and the Congregation welcomed the Nemitoff family with open arms, though they had limited ability to afford dues.

William Nemitoff died suddenly from a heart attack when Art was 15 years old. Henrietta went to work as a nurse in order to support the family. She went on to earn Bachelor's and Master's degrees in nursing and enjoyed a successful career at Research Medical Center as director of a new transitional nursing program.

Arthur turned to B'nai Jehudah for support after losing his beloved father. For a period of one year, he walked three blocks to minyan services each day at our 69th Street and Holmes building. At times, there were a handful of other

worshippers at the afternoon service. In other instances, Nemitoff was the only one present. He found solace in the daily ritual and grew in his spirituality during that year.

Nemitoff attended Southwest High School, a few blocks from B'nai Jehudah. He continued his Jewish education in the local Hebrew High program and was one of four students who graduated with its first class. In 1971, he spent six weeks in Israel on the Kansas City youth pilgrimage. The trip was a seminal event in his life, one that would have a lasting influence for decades to come.

After high school, Art enrolled as a pre-med student at Washington University in St. Louis. After two years, he changed his major to psychology and began considering the rabbinate as a career. He wrote to rabbis he knew and sought their input into his decision process. He was encouraged by their responses. He taught Sunday school at United Hebrew Congregation and served as a BBYO chapter advisor during his college years.

Nemitoff graduated from Washington University in 1976 and entered Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion that July.

He studied at HUC-JIR's Jerusalem campus the first year and was waiting for a friend at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport on July 4. While there, Nemitoff heard a large airplane landing and observed its passengers disembarking. That plane was an Israel Defense Forces C-130 Hercules and the passengers were [the Jewish hostages who had just been rescued from Uganda's Entebbe Airport](#) by IDF commandos. He witnessed a historic moment on his first day in the Jewish state.

Israel was a precarious place in 1976-77. Early on, Nemitoff spent a night holding a rifle on guard duty in the front lobby of his student dormitory. Terrorist bombings were a regular occurrence and a devastating blast was detonated at a site he had visited hours earlier.

Art returned to HUC-JIR's Cincinnati campus for the next four years and was one of 40 Reform rabbis ordained in 1981. He won the class homiletics award for writing and delivering sermons.

Nemitoff first served as assistant rabbi at Congregation Beth Israel in Houston. He served other congregations in Levittown, PA, Peabody, MA and Brookline, MA. He and Leslie Ringel were married in 1987.

He served as Senior Rabbi at Temple Israel in Columbus, OH from 1995-2003. Much like B'nai Jehudah, Temple Israel celebrated its 150th anniversary and completed a major renovation during his tenure there.

Coming Home

Rabbi Nemitoff was not looking to leave Columbus but was intrigued by a phone call telling him that he needed to come home to B'nai Jehudah, which was struggling with transition issues at the time. He felt a sense of indebtedness to his childhood congregation and remembered the support he received here following his father's death. He applied for the Senior Rabbi position and was chosen to follow interim Rabbi Mark Disick.

"I returned to repay a debt," he often said.

Nemitoff began at B'nai Jehudah on July 1, 2003. It was also the first day of work for Rabbi Neal Schuster and Cantor Sharon Kohn. The entire clergy team was new and Nemitoff's first priority was to create a unified B'nai Jehudah community. Some families left the Congregation during and after this period of transition. Rabbi Nemitoff wrote a letter to all former members who left and had conversations with about 100 of them. He estimates that 75-100 former members rejoined B'nai Jehudah.

Rabbi Nemitoff recognized that the Congregation had tremendous needs including healing. He focused his energies internally during the first few years at B'nai Jehudah. Nemitoff brought in a consultant from the Alban Institute, a resource for congregations that has since closed.

He encouraged the formation of a Shared Vision Task Force, which spent many months defining what kind of congregation we wanted to be. Based on the work of that Task Force, the Congregation adopted a core purpose: "To nurture Jewish meaning, connection and continuity." The congregation's core values were defined as "Open Hearts, Kedushah (holiness/sacredness), and Derech Eretz (common decency)." We set a goal of every congregant pursuing an individualized Jewish path.

In the Congregation

Rabbi Nemitoff implemented a number of innovations during his 18 years at B'nai Jehudah, all of which were designed to increase participation and meaning.

- Shabbat Chadash was introduced as a contemporary musical service with seating in the round. It was held one Friday night each month and enjoyed consistently strong attendance.

- The Congregation conducted a Tefillah (prayer) study in 2012-13, to ascertain worship preferences. Internal research showed that the most meaningful liturgy elements were music and message, with a preference for contemporary music. These preferences were incorporated into services and resulted in higher Friday night Shabbat attendance.
- Shabbat in the Park began in 2013 and has continued as an outdoor service series at Gezer and Loose Parks each summer. Attendance has reached several hundred at many of these services and they attract worshippers from outside the Congregation. Shabbat in the Park is patterned after [Beit Tefilah Israeli's Erev Shabbat service](#), held outdoors at the Tel Aviv Port.
- Rabbi and Leslie Nemitoff opened their home to the entire congregation the afternoon of Rosh Hashanah each year. Congregants gathered at the Nemitoff home for fellowship and food followed by Tashlich at a nearby pond.
- In social justice programming, Nemitoff introduced an annual Mitzvah Day one Sunday each year. As many as 650 congregants volunteer their time each year to support various local projects, non-profits and a blood drive. Addressing hunger was another focus and the Congregation's volunteers continue to help feed the hungry at kitchens in Kansas City and Olathe.
- Rabbi Nemitoff also introduced an annual confirmation class trip to New York City. He and Leslie traveled with students to visit historical and Jewish sites as well as to engage in social justice activities there.
- Israel is one of Nemitoff's passions and he led several congregational trips with typical stops in Tel Aviv, the North, the Dead Sea, Kibbutz Gezer and Jerusalem. He supports the Women of the Wall and says he is "lovingly critical and supportive of Israel."
- Rabbi Nemitoff introduced Machane Jehudah, a two-week summer day camp with monthly meetings throughout the school year. It was offered as an alternative to traditional Sunday school with the goal of increasing engagement among school children.

In addition to these innovations, Rabbi Nemitoff was instrumental in the vision and fundraising for our 2019 building renovation. He successfully advocated for a much larger scale project that was initially contemplated and was closely involved in the design process.

In the Community

While Rabbi Nemitoff intentionally focused internally during his early years at B'nai Jehudah, he also formed relationships with other clergy and organizations in the community.

United Methodist Church of the Resurrection was founded in 1990 by its lead pastor, Reverend Adam Hamilton. The church, with its original campus located two miles from B'nai Jehudah, has become the largest United Methodist congregation in the world. It has more than 25,000 members and multiple locations.

Nemitoff and Hamilton became close colleagues and engaged in pulpit exchanges. They traveled to Israel together in 2019 to produce a [series of video teachings about King David](#) that were presented at both B'nai Jehudah and Resurrection. We held High Holiday services at Church of the Resurrection in 2004 and again in 2019, when our building was under renovation. The church's video production department produced our online High Holiday services in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Violent anti-Semitism came to Overland Park on the afternoon of Sunday, April 13, 2014. Perhaps not coincidentally, Erev Passover was the next day. An anti-Semite from rural southern Missouri shot and killed Dr. William Corporon and his 14-year-old grandson, Reat Underwood at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Kansas City. The shooter then drove one mile

to Village Shalom where he murdered Terri LaManno. None of the victims were Jewish. Police learned that the shooter also intended attacks at area synagogues including B'nai Jehudah, but he was apprehended first.

Rabbi Nemitoff led a community response to the tragic shootings. Four days after the attack, 1,300 people gathered at the Jewish Community Center for an interfaith Service of Unity and Hope. Rabbi Nemitoff, Reverend Hamilton and other clergy spoke at the service, which also was attended by U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder.

Nemitoff engaged with Mindy Corporon, the daughter of William Corporon and mother of Reat Underwood. As a response to the shootings, Mindy founded [Faith Always Wins Foundation](#) to increase tolerance. Rabbi Nemitoff and B'nai Jehudah members were involved in supporting the Foundation and its [Seven Days](#) activities from the beginning.

Post B'nai Jehudah

Rabbi Nemitoff informed the Congregation of his desire to retire effective June 30, 2021 after a 40-year pulpit career.

He will be remembered as a healer, an innovator and for several firsts: our first Senior Rabbi who was raised in the Congregation; the first whose policy included officiating at interfaith weddings; and the first to officiate at same-sex weddings.

Arthur Nemitoff was elected Rabbi Emeritus in 2021, only the fourth rabbi in the Congregation's 150-year history to have been so honored. Our small

prayer space, which he imagined and helped design, is named the Rabbi Arthur P. Nemitoff Small Prayer Space in his honor.

Nemitoff's near term plans include serving as a part-time interim rabbi in Des Moines and continuing his passion of advancing Progressive Judaism internationally. He hopes to return to Shanghai, China to work with the progressive [Kehilat Shanghai Congregation](#).

He also plans to spend more time with Leslie, his daughter, Rabbi Elana Nemitoff-Bresler and son, William Nemitoff, and their families.

In one of Rabbi Nemitoff's departing messages to the Congregation, he shared a personal philosophy that guided his 18 years at B'nai Jehudah, "Dream of what's possible and put your heart and back into doing it right."

By Dan Stolper
July 22, 2021

JUNE 10, 2021

12320 Nall Avenue



B'nai Jehudah moved into its 69th and Holmes facility in 1957. The migration of our members to Johnson County, Kansas accelerated over the next several decades, especially among young families who sought to enroll their children in the Shawnee Mission and Blue Valley School Districts. Many Jewish institutions moved to Johnson County, including the Jewish Community Center in 1988 and Menorah Medical Center in 1996.

Early Johnson County Presence

Initially, the Congregation rented space in Johnson County for mid-week Hebrew School classes. This made attendance more convenient for families that lived nearby. Sunday religious school and worship continued at 69th and Holmes.

In 1989, B'nai Jehudah paid \$565,000 for 12.8 acres of land on the east side of Nall Avenue at 125th Street in Overland Park. The initial plan was to build an educational facility and chapel there, with remaining land for a future sanctuary if and when the Congregation decided it might want one. However, the plan then was to conduct worship at 69th and Holmes, continuing our presence in Kansas City, Missouri that existed since our founding.

In 1990, the Jewish Federation and United Jewish Appeal launched Operation Exodus, a nationwide effort to raise funds for the resettlement of Jews from the former Soviet Union. The Jewish Federation of Greater Kansas City asked local Jewish organizations to suspend their own fundraising efforts to prioritize Operation Exodus and B'nai Jehudah's board agreed. Development of the land in Johnson County was temporarily put on hold.

Operation Exodus concluded successfully, both in terms of fundraising and immigration. Congregations were free to resume raising funds for their own needs.

Mid 1990s

On October 4, 1993, B'nai Jehudah's Johnson County Task Force had its first meeting under the leadership of Donna Thalblum (president 2015-17) and Mike Fishman. The 32-member task force sought congregational input from surveys, focus groups and open meetings. It delivered a report to the board

on January 24, 1994, recommending a capital campaign that would fund the construction of a primarily educational facility in Johnson County. The recommendation included funding for repairs and renovation at 69th and Holmes.

B'nai Jehudah's board approved a campaign and Irv Robinson (president 2001-2003) and Donna Thalblum agreed to lead the effort. Robinson focused on fundraising and Thalblum focused on the building with then Executive Director Joe Boston. A fundraising consultant was retained and Temple leadership set a goal of \$8.5 million including \$6.5 million for the educational facility, \$750,000 for renovation and repairs at 69th at Holmes and \$1.25 million for the endowment fund.

In the meantime, the board reassessed land requirements including parking needs for large events. In early 1995, it voted to sell the land and begin looking for a larger site in Johnson County. The initial parcel was sold for \$715,000 on October 22, 1997.

On April 11, 1996, the board approved the \$2,080,000 purchase of 24 acres of undeveloped land on the west side of Nall Avenue, south of 123rd Street, where our present facility is located. The seller was Dardanelle Timber Co., an affiliate of the Sutherland family (Sutherland Lumber). By the end of 1996, the capital campaign had secured enough pledges to move ahead with the project.

B'nai Jehudah hired Hansen, Midgley, Neimackl Architects to design what would be known as the Learning Center. The local firm was selected for its experience in designing outstanding school buildings. The design included

classrooms, a pre-school, office space for the religious school, a chapel, kitchen, and a large multi-purpose gathering space.

Construction was completed and B'nai Jehudah occupied the Learning Center in April 2000. Worship and ritual activities continued at 69th and Holmes and offices for clergy and administration remained there as well. Mid-week and religious school classes were taught at the Learning Center.

University Academy

The costs of operating two facilities exceeded estimates and the burden on the Congregation's budget became acute within a short time. Dual costs included utilities, janitorial, grounds maintenance, etc.

University Academy began operations as a non-profit college preparatory charter school in Kansas City, Missouri in 2000. Shirley and Barnett Helzberg, longtime B'nai Jehudah members, were among the founders of University Academy. The Academy was looking for a mid-town location for a new campus and approached then Temple president Irv Robinson about the possibility of buying the 69th and Holmes property. The Helzberg Foundation made a generous offer for the B'nai Jehudah property, which was accepted by the Temple's board in 2002. We also sold some property in Rose Hill Cemetery.

University Academy razed the old temple building and began construction in 2004. It occupied its new campus the next year.

Shirley and Barnett Helzberg were married in B'nai Jehudah's Mayerberg Chapel in 1967. To preserve its sense of history and ties to Rabbi Mayerberg, University Academy's community meeting space is named the Rabbi Samuel S. Mayerberg Hall in his honor.

University Academy now enrolls 1,000 students in grades K-12, and has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a Blue Ribbon School. Its mission of providing top educational opportunities to Kansas City, Missouri students is closely aligned with B'nai Jehudah's long history of social justice activism.

B'nai Jehudah consolidated all operations at 12320 Nall Avenue in 2003. A few classrooms were converted to offices for the Senior Rabbi and administrative staff. Weekly Shabbat Services were held in the chapel. The Congregation held High Holiday services at the Overland Park Convention Center and Church of the Resurrection for the first couple of years. Later, High Holiday services were held in our own social hall with a video feed to the chapel.

2019 Renovation

The Learning Center was stretched beyond its intended purpose and needed repairs after 15 years of busy use. Senior Rabbi Arthur Nemitoff encouraged our lay leadership to consider a major renovation and was closely involved in the process. In 2015, a small task force headed by Ira Stolzer (president 2003-05) and Mary Davidson (a vice-president at the time) began to study the Congregation's physical needs and costs of making changes.

The Task Force engaged Rogers Krajnak Architects of Columbus, Ohio, which earlier planned a renovation at Rabbi Nemitoff's former congregation in the

same city. Rogers Krajnak prepared a facilities analysis, architectural programming study and a master plan to transform the existing building into one that could serve as a full-service synagogue. They gathered input from a variety of stakeholders including clergy, staff, teachers, board members and the congregation at large.

The board approved a capital campaign with a goal of raising \$12 million, which was achieved with broad participation. The campaign co-chairs were Irv Robinson, Ira Stolzer, Donna Thalblum, and Gail Weinberg along with Rabbi Nemitoff.

Bill Carr (president 1987-89), an experienced real estate development attorney, chaired the building committee. This committee solicited proposals from many local architectural firms and construction companies. Based on their presentations, the building committee, with board approval, hired HOK Architects to develop a revised master plan and design the project. McCownGordon Construction was chosen as general contractor.

HOK and the building committee worked together for many months during 2018 to achieve a design within the basic footprint of the existing building. The focus was on function, enhancing Jewish spirituality and creating community. The project modestly increased square footage on the building's south side.

The renovation included the use of Jerusalem stone in the religious spaces. A large menorah, created by local artist and artisan Norman Brunelli for the 69th and Holmes sanctuary in 1967, was placed in our expanded main entrance lobby. Four stained glass windows, designed by artist John La Farge for B'nai Jehudah's Linwood and Flora building in 1908, were also brought out of storage and reinstalled.

The social hall was enhanced and enlarged to seat 650 people. It includes an original ark and state-of-the art audio, video and lighting technology. The Congregation's historic bronze yahrzeit plaques surround a new intimate prayer space. Needed repairs and maintenance were completed.

Michael Klein, long-serving chair of our Art Committee and a former board member, is a decades-long collector of Judaica. Concurrent with the building renovation, Klein gifted his extensive collection to B'nai Jehudah and provided funding for a curator/educator. Pieces from the Klein Collection are prominently displayed in museum-quality exhibit cases in the entrance lobby. The new Memory Murals of the Michael Klein Collection were commissioned for B'nai Jehudah's commons area and depict various aspects of our history.

The Congregation vacated the building in early 2019 so construction could commence. We held weekly worship services at the Jewish Community Center and High Holiday services at Church of the Resurrection. Administrative and clergy offices were moved to rented space in southern Johnson County.

The renovation project was completed within cost estimates in November 2019. A well-attended weekend of activities in the building was held November 15-17 and included Shabbat services, a Sunday morning pancake breakfast sponsored by Brotherhood and a community open house Sunday evening. The building was rededicated as part of our 180 Menorah Shabbat Chanukah service on December 27.

The Covid-19 pandemic hit in March 2020, just four months after we had reoccupied the building. Ironically, new technology that was included in the renovation allowed the Congregation to live-stream worship services and

other programming online during the next 15 months, when the building was closed for the pandemic. Staff worked remotely for many of these months.

The building was reopened to limited in-person worship in May 2021.

By Dan Stolper

June 11, 2021

Photo: The renovated chapel at 12320 Nall Avenue, complete with Jerusalem stone.

MAY 26, 2021

Rabbi Michael R. Zedek



In 1974, B'nai Jehudah hired 27-year-old Michael Zedek as Assistant Rabbi. Two years later, Senior Rabbi William Silverman took a pulpit in Palm Desert, California and Zedek succeeded him as our Senior Rabbi. Rabbi Zedek led the Congregation 1976-2000.

Early Life

Michael R. Zedek was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1946, the only child of first-generation Americans Mildred and Benjamin Zedek. His father, the son of an ordained orthodox rabbi, dropped out of school in eighth grade to help support his family. Benjamin Zedek formed socialist leanings, married and moved his young family around the country before planting roots in Albany, New York.

Benjamin Zedek eked out a modest living from his automotive radiator repair shop in Albany. He yearned for a better life for his son, one that would be based upon a life of the mind. The family belonged to a conservative synagogue in Albany and Michael dropped out of religious school after his Bar Mitzvah. He was active in the Young Judea youth movement and was elected New York state president during high school.

Michael won a full scholarship to Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, about 100 miles from home. Personal tragedy befell the family during Zedek's freshman year when his beloved father died of cancer at the age of 58. His father's dying wish was for Michael to become the first generation of their family to earn a college degree. In fact, when Michael discussed dropping out of Hamilton to help his mother, his terminally ill father responded by slapping Michael and demanded that he finish college.

Zedek excelled academically at Hamilton, where he majored in Philosophy of Religion, and graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1968. He won a [Fulbright-Hays Scholarship](#) that funded a year of post-graduate study at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. Upon returning to the United States, Zedek took a job at Syracuse University teaching English and writing.

The Director of Admissions at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) learned about Michael Zedek by looking for Jewish names among recipients of the Danforth Graduate Fellowship, which Zedek had also received. They began corresponding by mail and the admissions director had high conviction that Michael would make an excellent rabbi. Zedek was not enthusiastic about becoming a rabbi but accepted the Director's challenge to try the program for one year. He stayed, spending his second year of seminary in Jerusalem, and received his ordination in 1974.

B'nai Jehudah Assistant Rabbi

In early 1974, Rabbi Silverman and past president Martin Fromm traveled to the Cincinnati campus of HUC-JIR to recruit an assistant rabbi. They interviewed and were impressed with Zedek. Michael accepted B'nai Jehudah's job offer, moved to Kansas City that summer with his then-wife Naomi (they divorced in 1988), and he began what would become a 26-year engagement with the Congregation.

After a few months in Kansas City, Zedek observed that B'nai Jehudah had many members but low participation. Our building at 69th and Holmes Road reminded him of a Jewish cathedral. "It was pretty empty in terms of activity," he said. With Senior Rabbi Silverman's support, he began to experiment with activities designed to boost involvement. These included an Israeli film festival and a mini-university for adult study.

In the mid 1970s, the congregation offered two evening and morning services each for the High Holidays due to capacity constraints. Rabbi Zedek recalled his first High Holiday sermon here when a mass exodus of congregants headed for the doors just before he began speaking. “Was it something I said?” he quipped. That comment brought laughs and some people sat back down to hear what the young rabbi might have to say.

Senior Rabbi

When Rabbi Silverman left the Congregation in 1976, Michael Zedek was named interim Senior Rabbi. At that time, the Reform movement’s Rabbinic Placement Commission had a rule that a candidate must have ten years of experience to apply for a senior rabbi position at a congregation of our size. Zedek did not qualify.

The Congregation’s board wanted Rabbi Zedek to have the job but leaders of the Placement Commission were firmly against it. Eventually, Irvin Fane, a B’nai Jehudah past president and former chairman of the board of The Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now the URJ), worked out an acceptable plan and Zedek was hired as Senior Rabbi.

From the beginning of his rabbinate here, Zedek’s goal was to change our culture to one where congregants would “do Jewish” for themselves as opposed to delegating it to clergy and staff.

In the early 1980s, the Congregation started a Para-Rabbinic program where lay people were trained to assist with lifecycle events. We formed havurot, small groups of people who met regularly outside of the Temple building. A few of the original groups continue meeting to this day.

Zedek delivered dynamic sermons, often beginning with a parable. The topics frequently were related to some aspect of social justice which he believes is part of the Congregation's DNA.

He also began leading congregant trips to Israel, believing that the Jewish people's return to Israel is nothing short of miraculous. This represented a change from B'nai Jehudah's Classical Reform roots where Zionism was not a priority.

In the Community

Rabbi Zedek joined an interfaith clergy group in 1975 and immediately established a connection with Emanuel Cleaver II, an African American pastor. Both wore their hair in an Afro/Jewfro style that was popular in the day, both were young and new to the city. They recognized that the narratives of their people overlapped in substantial ways. Cleaver was pastor of St. James Gregory church, now St. James United Methodist Church. This relationship grew over time, and the two congregations enjoyed pulpit, choir and student exchanges, as well as other joint activities. For a number of years, St. James members gathered with B'nai Jehudah members at the Temple for Martin Luther King Day activities.

Cleaver was elected to the Kansas City Council in 1979 and became the city's first African American mayor in 1991. At his mayoral inauguration, Cleaver was sworn in with Rabbi Zedek holding B'nai Jehudah's Holocaust Torah scroll, reflecting the ties that existed between St. James and the Temple.

In 1997-98, Rabbi Zedek chaired a committee that arbitrated African Americans' grievances of discrimination against Dillard's Department Stores.

Cleaver also appointed Zedek as chair of the Mayor's Red Flag Commission whose charge was to investigate municipal corruption in Kansas City and formulate policies to make it less likely to occur in the future. This appointment was a fitting coda to the work of Rabbi Samuel Mayerberg who crusaded against municipal corruption the 1930s.

Cleaver is currently serving in his ninth term as U.S. Congressman from Missouri's fifth district.

Refuseniks and Russian Immigration

The term [Refusenik](#) refers to a person in the former Soviet Union, usually Jewish, who had applied to emigrate but was refused permission by the Soviet government. Some of these Jews got out in the early 1970s, most choosing to go to Israel or the United States. But, others were not permitted to leave and often were victims of discrimination and the loss of employment.

B'nai Jehudah sponsored the Yvgeny Yakir family of Moscow and made regular phone calls to them and in their behalf to the Soviet embassy. Associate Rabbi Mark Levin headed the social justice committee and traveled to visit the Yakirs. He brought them articles of clothing that could be traded for money, as well as Judaic material. The Yakir family was eventually permitted to immigrate to Israel. (Rabbi Levin was the founding rabbi of Congregation Beth Torah in 1988.)

Jewish Family Services of Greater Kansas City was heavily involved in resettling immigrants from the former Soviet Union during the 1970s and 1980s. Most knew very little about Judaism as religious study was prohibited in the Soviet Union. B'nai Jehudah made memberships available and welcomed these émigrés into our community.

Rabbi Zedek saw an unmet need to serve recently arrived Russian Jewish immigrants in Kansas City. He recruited Victor Rashkovsky to come to B'nai Jehudah as a student rabbi. Rashkovsky was born in Kiev in 1940 and was studying at HUC-JIR. He traveled to Kansas City from Cincinnati bi-weekly 1979-1982.

Rashkovsky conducted Russian language Shabbat and High Holy Day services in B'nai Jehudah's Mayerberg Chapel during these years. He also translated liturgy readings into Russian, which we copied for worshippers. Attendance was consistent and the Mayerberg Chapel was full for our Russian language High Holiday services during these years.

Rashkovsky was ordained in 1983, the first Russian immigrant of his generation to become a Reform rabbi. He has served as a congregational rabbi in Oak Ridge, Tennessee for the past 38 years where he will become Rabbi Emeritus in July 2021.

1990s

The geographic center of the greater Kansas City Jewish community shifted to Johnson County, Kansas over several decades beginning in the 1960s. By the beginning of the 1990s, the Jewish Community Center had moved to Johnson County. Beth Torah was established as a Reform congregation in Johnson County in 1988. Many B'nai Jehudah families had children in the Shawnee Mission and Blue Valley School districts and found the commute to 69th and Holmes to be inconvenient for mid-week Hebrew School.

The Congregation responded by offering mid-week Hebrew School classes at a rented satellite location in Johnson County. These early Johnson County

initiatives led to the decision to build at 12320 Nall Avenue, initially as a Learning Center.

In 1993, Rabbi Zedek partnered with a Catholic priest and Protestant minister to broadcast a weekly radio call-in talk show, "Religion on the Line." The show has been running continuously on Sunday mornings on KCMO radio for 28 years and Zedek is one of the two founding hosts still on the air.

Another of Rabbi Zedek's interfaith initiatives was *Sacred Seeds: Children of Abraham Reading Sacred Texts Together*. Congregants from B'nai Jehudah, several Christian churches and, eventually an Islamic mosque, came together for religious study in these years.

During the 1990s, Rabbi Zedek continued his pastoral, counseling and teaching work in the Congregation; served as a Kansas City, Missouri Police Department Chaplain; and served on the Board of Trustees of Baker University in Baldwin City, Kansas. He was instrumental in fundraising for the Congregation's Nall building.

Rabbi Zedek admits that one of his shortcomings was time management. After 26 years of serving B'nai Jehudah, he was in his mid-50s, and found himself working an 80-hour week with little time off. He began thinking about his own mortality. He considered that his father died at 58 and his dear friend Rev. Thom Savage, a Jesuit Priest who was President of Rockhurst College, died at 53. He began envisioning how he wanted to spend the rest of his working days with a goal of spending more time with his second wife, Karen, and his children.

B'nai Jehudah honored Rabbi Zedek in conjunction with its 130th anniversary on January 8, 2000, with a dinner and entertainment at the Muelhebach Hotel. He became Rabbi Emeritus later that year.

Post B'nai Jehudah

Michael Zedek accepted a job as CEO of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati in 2000. The job appealed to him as a way to have more personal time while still being able to enjoy building community, which was one of his passions. After leading the Cincinnati Federation for four years, he came to miss the interpersonal aspects of being a Rabbi and sought a pulpit in a smaller congregation.

In 2004, Zedek became Senior Rabbi of Emanuel Congregation in Chicago, which had about 200 families at the time. He revived Emanuel and grew its membership to 400 families before becoming Rabbi Emeritus of that congregation in 2016.

Rabbi Zedek is relocating back to Kansas City, where he will be teaching a course in Judaism for divinity students at the St. Paul School of Theology here beginning in Fall 2021.

He says of his long rabbinic career, "Every day someone touches your heart and, if you are fortunate, you get to do the same for them."

[Click here to read the Charles N. Kimball Lecture](#) delivered by Rabbi Michael Zedek on October 23, 2000. He discusses his experience in and observations about Kansas City.

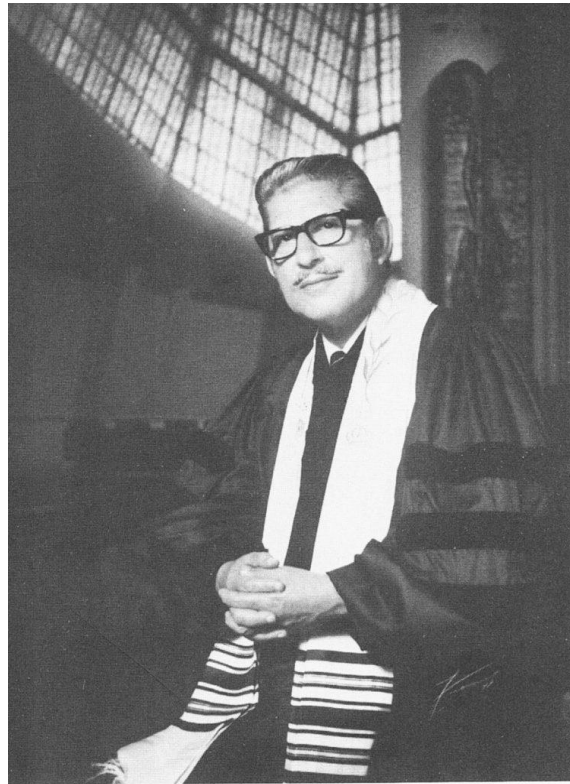
By Dan Stolper

May 28, 2021

Photos: 1) Rabbi Michael Zedek and 2) Rev. Emanuel Cleaver II (L) and Rabbi Michael Zedek (R) at B'nai Jehudah for Cleaver's popular sermon, titled "One More Night with the Frogs."

MAY 14, 2021

Rabbi William B. Silverman



In May 1959, Rabbi Samuel Mayerberg informed B'nai Jehudah's board that he would retire after 31 years of service to the Congregation. Mayerberg privately let it be known that he hoped Rabbi William Silverman would be hired as his successor. Mayerberg had unsuccessfully tried to recruit Silverman to serve as B'nai Jehudah's Associate Rabbi in 1951.

On December 30, 1959, after the pool of candidates had been narrowed to two, B'nai Jehudah's board unanimously selected Silverman as its new rabbi. The Congregation approved him a week later and he served the congregation 1960-1976.

William Bertram Silverman was born in 1913 in Altoona, Pennsylvania, the birthplace of both of his parents. His family moved to Cleveland in his early youth and he worked a variety of jobs to supplement the family's income. He was raised in a conservative synagogue in Cleveland where he taught and conducted youth services. One of his fellow teachers was Pearl Bailes, who became his wife after a six-year courtship.

Silverman began his rabbinic studies at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1935. He was elected President of the student body during his last year at HUC. One of his assignments in that role was to serve as a guide to visiting alumnus. He met Rabbi Mayerberg for the first time during one such visit.

Rabbi Silverman's first pulpit was in Battle Creek, Michigan, from 1941-43. He later served congregations in Gastonia, North Carolina and Duluth, Minnesota.

In 1950, Silverman was hired to lead The Temple Congregation Ohabai Sholom (formerly The Vine Street Temple) of Nashville. The Congregation was founded in 1851 and was the largest Jewish congregation in Nashville. His tenure in Nashville was a ten-year crusade for social justice.

Silverman was a vocal proponent for integrating Nashville schools, which did not win him any friends among segregationists. In March 1958, dynamite was detonated at the Nashville Jewish Community Center, luckily with no injuries and minimal damage. Minutes after the blast, a caller from the “Confederate Underground” called the Silverman home and told Pearl Silverman that her husband’s temple would be bombed next. Rabbi Silverman responded by announcing that his sermon the next Friday night would be titled, “[We Will Not Yield!](#)” Despite more threats, he delivered the sermon as planned. Armed guards were stationed at his home and the rabbi reluctantly carried a gun for protection for the next six months.

[Click here to read more about Rabbi Silverman’s courageous stance in fighting desegregation in Nashville, written by Rabbi David J. Meyer, a Kansas City native who was raised at B’nai Jehudah during Rabbi Silverman’s tenure.](#)

Rabbi Silverman left Nashville and began serving B’nai Jehudah in 1960. He introduced changes in his first year here including: Shabbat evening family services in alternate months; a memorial service at Rose Hill Cemetery on the Sunday during the high holidays (which continues to this day); and a noon-hour service on Yom Kippur for those desiring to spend the entire day at temple.

Silverman transitioned B’nai Jehudah away from classical Reform Judaism and towards mainstream Reform Judaism of the era. These changes included

more Hebrew (with Sephardic pronunciation), more ritual observance, and B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies (formerly called Reader of the Torah at B'nai Jehudah). Lay people were allowed to recite Torah blessings during services for the first time. Some Temple members resisted these changes but the board generally supported them and the rabbi.

Our present-day custom of consecrating children entering Religious school was re-established by Silverman, and 61 children were consecrated in 1960. He began a post-confirmation class for students who were juniors and seniors in high school.

Silverman was a prolific writer and dynamic speaker. Attendance at Friday night services was rarely fewer than 400 people – and frequently many more than that. Some congregants remember his commanding presence on the pulpit, in full robe with outstretched arms.

The nationwide baby boom peaked around 1957. B'nai Jehudah's membership grew significantly in the 1950s and 1960s, to the point that the Congregation was challenged to serve all of its members in a personal way. In 1961, the board set a membership cap of 1,400 family and single memberships. The limit was raised to 1,500 in 1963. Religious school enrollment was at an all-time high of 1,057.

To alleviate overcrowding, B'nai Jehudah sponsored the founding of another Reform congregation in 1958. Temple Beth El received organizational support and financial assistance from B'nai Jehudah. By 1963, Beth El had completed a building at 9400 Nall Avenue in Overland Park. Beth El was later dissolved and its former building is currently a church.

In 1967, a group made up primarily of B'nai Jehudah members and former members organized The New Reform Temple. It offered a smaller congregational experience (membership capped at 225) and was founded on the principles of classical Reform Judaism. We lost an estimated 120 families to New Reform in its early years.

Despite these two new Reform congregations in town, B'nai Jehudah's membership continued growing and reached 1,850 in 1972.

The Congregation began a capital campaign for new sanctuary in 1963. Ground was broken in 1965 and the iconic sanctuary at 69th and Holmes Road was dedicated in 1967.

Rabbi Silverman was active in engaging with other faith groups during his tenure and received standing ovations in his early local community appearances. He was a participant in a monthly broadcast on WDAF radio that also included a Protestant pastor and a Catholic priest.

He continued pursuing civil rights activism through his leadership of the Greater Kansas City Council on Religion and Race. This group pushed for fair housing throughout 1965-66. At the rabbi's urging, B'nai Jehudah's Board endorsed the effort. The Kansas City Council enacted fair housing legislation in 1967 after considerable campaigning by Rabbi Silverman and his allies.

In 1976, Rabbi Silverman was 63-years-old and moved west to Palm Desert, California to become rabbi of Temple Sinai, where he served for a number of years. He passed away in Scottsdale, Arizona in 2001, at the age of 87.

Twenty eight-year-old Michael Zedek was hired as B'nai Jehudah's Assistant Rabbi in 1974 and succeeded Rabbi Silverman when he moved to California.

[Read more about Dr. Martin Luther King's 1961 address to B'nai Jehudah's Brotherhood](#), likely arranged by Rabbi Silverman.

Adapted from **Roots In A Moving Stream**, by Frank Adler, z"l and "Fighting Segregation, Threats and Dynamite: Rabbi William B. Silverman's Nashville Battle," by Rabbi David J. Meyer, **American Jewish Archives Journal** Volume 60, published 2008.

May 14, 2021

APRIL 30, 2021

Esther Brown, Civil Rights Activist



The new Memory Murals of the Michael Klein Collection in B'nai Jehudah's commons area depict various aspects of our history. None is more important than the contribution to the civil rights struggle made by B'nai Jehudah member Esther Swirk Brown. Her courageous efforts paved the way for desegregation of public schools in the 1950s.

Born in Kansas City in 1917 to Russian immigrants Ben and Jenny Swirk, Esther Brown grew up here in a working class neighborhood. Her dad was a watchmaker who later started Swirk Jewelers. Her mother died of cancer when Esther was ten years old. Ben was socially conscious and leaned left.

Esther was influenced by her father and became involved in various social causes during her teen years. She picketed for workers' rights in the cosmetics and garment industries.

Esther married Paul Brown, a Kansas City native and officer in the U.S. Army Air Forces. When World War II ended, they moved into a home in Merriam, Kansas with their two young daughters. Esther learned from her black housekeeper about the inferior conditions at the segregated Walker School in the nearby township of South Park.

Walker was built as a one-room school in 1888 to serve South Park. In 1912, a new school building opened for white children and black students continued attending classes in the original 1888 schoolhouse.

The small school district (District 90) opened another new building in 1947, for white children only. Black students were required to attend classes at the 1888 building (described as a "shack") that had no indoor toilets, poor heating and two teachers for 44 students in eight grades. Black families were taxed for the new school building even though they were not allowed to enter it. They demanded that their children be enrolled at the new building but the school board would not consent. The Browns' maid's children were among those who were denied enrollment.

A 30-year-old mother of young children herself, Esther Brown visited Walker school and was angered by the injustice she saw. She began crusading in cooperation with members of the South Park black community. It was Esther's idea to form a South Park chapter of the NAACP that joined the fight. Additional demands were made of the school board, to little avail.

Brown was invited by the District 90 school board president to a small meeting to make her case. When she arrived, the school gym was filled with a rowdy crowd of several hundred people. Some shouted obscenities and racial slurs. When Esther spoke, she was hooted and booed. A woman started to hit her with an umbrella but was restrained. After that meeting, Esther Brown was subjected to days of harassing phone calls and a cross was burned in the family's front lawn.

Esther would not be intimidated. She worked with NAACP attorneys to file a case known as *Webb v School District No. 90*. At her urging, a more aggressive attorney replaced the first one. When school opened in fall 1948, the black students attempted to enroll in the white school building but were denied entry. Brown convinced all but two of the black parents to boycott Walker School and she helped organize a home-based school program as an alternative. She raised funds from friends, business people, Jewish organizations and others to pay the salaries of the two black teachers.

The case continued into 1949 at a personal toll to the Browns. Esther's father-in-law called her a communist and fired her husband. The FBI tried to discredit her. Paul Brown was asked to resign his commission from the Air Force Reserve on account of her activism.

Finally, in June 1949, the Kansas Supreme Court ruled in favor of the black plaintiffs. The school district was ordered to rebuild or make Walker School comparable to the white school, and implement a plan for black and white children to attend both buildings. Despite further tactics on the part of the school board, all children in the district, both black and white, began attending the South Park School together that fall.

For the first day of school, Esther Brown purchased a new dress for every girl and a new shirt for every boy who had previously attended the Walker School. She also worked to raise funds for books and school supplies for these students. Of the six plaintiffs in the Webb case, all graduated from high school and several graduated college.

Brown went on to work towards desegregation of other schools in Kansas. The result of one of these cases was the 1954 US Supreme Court ruling in Brown (Linda, not Esther) v Board of Education of Topeka that prohibited segregation in all US public schools.

In the ensuing years, Esther Brown continued her efforts to promote racial equality. She successfully lobbied to locate a new junior college in downtown Kansas City, Missouri, instead of the suburbs so black students would not be excluded. She helped organize the first Panel of American Women, a program that promoted dialog and understanding among women of diverse races and faiths. That program spread to 63 cities and involved more than 1,400 women.

Esther Brown died of cancer in 1970 at the age of 52. Her funeral was held in the B'nai Jehudah sanctuary at 69th and Holmes and she is interred at Rose Hill Cemetery. Brown Memorial Park at 5040 Booker Street in Merriam, Kansas is named after her. There is a historical marker there telling the story of this brave woman's important role in the fight to desegregate schools in Kansas and across the nation.

[Click here for further reading about Esther Brown.](#)

Adapted from **Roots In A Moving Stream** by Frank Adler, z”l and
A Pioneer in Civil Rights by Milton S. Katz and Susan Brown Tucker,
published by
The Kansas Historical Society in **Kansas History** Winter 1995/96. Ms. Tucker
is Esther Brown’s daughter.

April 30, 2021

*Photos: 1) Esther Brown, 2) Walker School, aka “a shack,” 3) Brown Park in
Merriam, KS*

APRIL 16, 2021

Holmes Road at 69th Street



Great demographic changes swept the United States beginning with the close of World War II. The end of the 1930s economic depression and return of American soldiers from overseas sparked a baby boom that would last nearly 20 years. Reflecting broad prosperity and the formation of many new families generally, B'nai Jehudah's membership reached 900 families and individuals in 1948 compared to 450 in 1932. Sunday school enrollment nearly doubled to 545 in 1951, from 280 in 1943.

B'nai Jehudah had been occupying its Linwood Boulevard Temple since 1908, a midtown facility that was built when the congregation had about 200 members. During the 1950-51 school year, Sunday school was so over-enrolled that the Congregation resorted to double class sessions in order to accommodate all students.

Another emerging challenge was B'nai Jehudah's location: the Kansas City Jewish community was migrating south. Forty percent of Temple members and nearly 60% of families with children in religious school lived south of 63rd Street in 1951. The time had come for a fourth congregational home.

At the May 1951 annual meeting, the Congregation approved a plan to raise funds for a combined school building and social hall on a site that would allow for the later addition of a sanctuary. On January 3, 1952, B'nai Jehudah closed on the purchase of 5.5 acres on the east side of Holmes Road, between 68th and 69th Streets. The site was next to a public park and adjoined Rose Hill Cemetery. The land was purchased for \$50,000 from J.E. Dunn Construction Company. [Clarence Kivett](#), a B'nai Jehudah member, was engaged as architect.

A capital campaign was launched in the summer of 1952, with a goal of raising \$1 million. But, fundraising proved difficult and only half of the goal had been reached by the end of the year. By 1954, construction costs had escalated and sufficient funds had not been pledged. Further, the Congregation was divided about allowing B'nai Mitzvah ceremonies, a change that was opposed by some potential large donors. A compromise was reached to allow a ceremony to be called "Reader of the Torah." It included many of the same elements that are familiar in our present day B'nai Mitzvah services.

With this controversy settled, the capital campaign reached the initial goal of \$1 million and the Congregation authorized a \$200,000 mortgage to complete the project. The design included a chapel (later, the Mayerberg Chapel) set in a terraced courtyard, along with 32 class rooms, a social hall seating 1,000, a youth lounge, scout room, library, boardroom, and rabbis' studies and offices.

Ground was broken February 5, 1956, and the new building was completed in April 1957. The social hall was utilized for Shabbat and holiday services until 1967, when the sanctuary was added.

The building featured an originally commissioned ark, [Ner Tamid](#), and 16-foot-high bronze "Moses" exterior sculpture which was cast at the foundry of Bruno Bearzi in Florence, Italy. That piece is currently displayed at the Congregation's Nall Avenue facility.

The Holmes Road facility was dedicated during the weekend of April 5-7, 1957. Guests included Kansas City Mayor H. Roe Bartle and Missouri Governor James T. Blair. The principal speaker was Rabbi Maurice N.

Eisendrath, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now the [URJ](#)).

A building committee under the leadership of past president Irvin Fane began plans for a sanctuary in 1962. At the May 1963 annual meeting, architect Kivett presented a modern sanctuary design that was approved by the membership. The new sanctuary would have pew seating for 700 and was expandable with portable chairs for an additional 300 worshipers.

In 1963, The Congregation began another capital campaign with an original goal of \$900,000. The campaign was broadly supported with more than 80% of members making a pledge. Estimated construction costs escalated by over \$200,000, and the membership approved a mortgage in 1965 to cover the higher cost.

The groundbreaking for the new sanctuary was held on February 21, 1965, and construction took more than two years. The sanctuary dedication took place May 5-7, 1967.

The Architectural Record magazine featured B'nai Jehudah's sanctuary in its July 1969 issue. It said, "The sanctuary evokes one of the oldest structural forms, the tent, but translated into today's materials and methods. And the interior, punctuated by an 83-foot-tall concrete center pole, provides a big, serenely uncluttered space permeated by soft blue light from the spiraling skylight."

The Holmes Road facility served B'nai Jehudah well during its peak membership years. However, many Temple members moved to Johnson County, Kansas during the ensuing years and the Congregation completed its fifth building at 12320 Nall Avenue in Overland Park, Kansas in 2000.

Adapted from **Roots In A Moving Stream** by Frank Adler, z"l

April 16, 2021

Photos show the interior and exterior of B'nai Jehudah's sanctuary at 69th & Holmes.

APRIL 1, 2021

Eddie Jacobson



Eddie Jacobson's good name is closely associated with President Harry Truman. Jacobson's sustained efforts for Israel spanned several years and

made a critical difference during the new nation's precarious infancy. He was an unlikely diplomat, yet he rose to the occasion with distinction when he was needed most.

Edward Jacobson was born to poor immigrants in New York's East Side in 1891. His father was a shoemaker and the family was orthodox. His parents moved the family west to Leavenworth, Kansas in 1893, in search of a better living, which proved elusive. In 1905, the Jacobsons moved to Kansas City and Eddie, then 14 years old, got a job at a wholesale dry-goods firm. It was in that role that he first met Harry Truman, who was working as a bookkeeper at Union National Bank. Truman returned to his Grandview, Missouri family farm in 1906, and the two young men lost touch.

Jacobson and Truman were reunited in the U.S. Army in 1917. Lieutenant Truman and Sergeant Jacobson were tasked with opening a canteen at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. The operation thrived. Truman noted in his memoirs, "Many other canteens of the 45th Division were failures, and some of the men who ran them were sent home, but after our arrival in France I was promoted, largely because of the work Eddie Jacobson and I had done."

The success of their canteen led them to open a men's clothing store in downtown Kansas City in 1919, after World War I. The store did well initially but was forced to close in 1922, after an economic downturn. Truman and Jacobson each assumed their share of remaining debt from the store, which took years to repay. Truman became a judge of the Jackson County Court and Jacobson went on the road as a traveling salesman.

In 1919, Jacobson married Bluma Rosenbaum who was a B'nai Jehudah confirmand. After the failure of the haberdashery, they made their home with

her parents and the family regularly attended Temple services together. In 1927, Bluma and Eddie became members in their own right to enroll their first child, Elinor, in Sunday school. Jacobson maintained his B'nai Jehudah membership throughout his life and served on the Brotherhood board in 1944.

Jacobson's concern for the plight of Europe's Jews was first nurtured through his active participation at B'nai Jehudah. The British were threatening to close Jewish immigration to Palestine by March 31, 1944. B'nai Jehudah's board sent a resolution to then U.S. Senator Truman in favor of opening Palestine to Jewish immigration, a desperate need as Nazi persecution of the Jews became known. Truman went on record as being supportive of a Jewish Homeland in Palestine.

Truman's unexpected elevation to the Presidency lifted Eddie Jacobson from obscurity to public notice. By 1945, Jacobson was back in the menswear business at 39th and Main Streets in Westport. Soon, people were stopping in the store to ask him to use his friendship with President Truman for favors. Jacobson was uncomfortable to impose on the President for personal gain and all such requests were rejected on the spot. However, he said he was glad "to urge the President to use every influence he has to rescue and save as many of the desperate and homeless Jews of Europe as possible."

Jewish leaders, including B'nai Jehudah's Rabbi Samuel Mayerberg, sought to persuade Jacobson to discuss Palestine with President Truman. Great Britain was enforcing Jewish immigration restrictions more than ever, just as hundreds of thousands of homeless European Jews needed a place to resettle. Some of Truman's closest advisors opposed any involvement in Palestine. In 1946, Jacobson arranged a meeting with President Truman for himself and Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld, who was director of the Committee on Unity for Palestine. They asked the President for financial and technical aid to

transport 100,000 displaced persons to Palestine. Truman agreed to support the request.

Jacobson and Kansas City Jewish attorney A.J. Granoff called on Truman at the White House on December 9, 1947. The purpose of that visit was to express appreciation for the U.S. role in obtaining the United Nations General Assembly recommendation for a Jewish State in a partitioned Palestine. By January 1948, Palestine was in chaos while the British prepared to end their mandate on May 14. Meanwhile, Arabs demanded control of all of Palestine with no partition. Zionist leaders pushed President Truman aggressively, so much so that he refused further appointments with anyone promoting a Jewish homeland.

Dr. Chaim Weitzman came to America in February 1948, to try to gain an audience with Truman. Again, Eddie Jacobson was asked to arrange a meeting between the future President of Israel and President Truman. Initially, Truman refused the meeting but Jacobson persisted. Eddie presented himself at the White House in March and persuaded Truman to meet with Weitzman. The meeting took place days later. Truman committed to work for the establishment and recognition of the Jewish State.

In Tel Aviv, at midnight on May 14, 1948, the first sovereign Jewish State in more than 2,000 years came into being as the British mandate ended. Eleven minutes later, the White House announced United States' de facto recognition of the provisional government of Israel.

Weitzman was elected as Israel's first President on May 17, and asked Jacobson to call on President Truman as his unofficial ambassador to discuss lifting a U.S. arms embargo and for a \$100 million loan to Israel. On June 22,

the United States and Israel established diplomatic relations. The loan was authorized in January 1949. On January 31, 1949, Eddie Jacobson was one of three American Jews to witness the signing of the decree by which President Truman proclaimed full United States recognition.

In March of 1949, Bluma and Eddie Jacobson flew to Israel and were houseguests of U.S. Ambassador and Mrs. James G. McDonald for two weeks. Upon his return, Jacobson gave President Truman a first-hand report about his visit to Israel and its “great potential for industrial, agricultural and scientific growth.”

Jacobson called on the President several more times during his administration, each time making the case for economic or other support for Israel. His influence resulted in Truman requesting an increase in assistance to \$80 million from a planned \$25 million. Congress approved a \$73 million grant-in-aid for the government’s fiscal year 1953.

Eddie Jacobson died on October 25, 1955, at the age of 64 and was interred at Rose Hill Cemetery. B’nai Jehudah’s sanctuary was filled to overflowing for his funeral. Former President Truman said poignantly at his death, “Eddie was one of the best friends I had in the world. He was absolutely trustworthy. I don’t know how I’m going to get along without him.”

This B’nai Jehudah member and unlikely diplomat was one person who made a world of difference.

Click below for a short video about Eddie Jacobson, President Truman and Israel: <https://www.aish.com/jw/s/Harry-Trumans-Lifelong-Jewish-Friend.html>

Adapted from **Roots In A Moving Stream** by Frank Adler z”l
April 2, 2021

MARCH 19, 2021

The War Years



When Hitler became chancellor of Germany in early 1933, laws and actions against Jews began almost immediately. Some German and Austrian Jews sought haven in the United States but needed an American sponsor who could guarantee that they would not become public charges for a minimum of five years.

B'nai Jehudah members organized to provide such sponsorship. Within the Congregation, Brotherhood took charge of this initiative. In the community, Ruth Kander, the granddaughter of former B'nai Jehudah Rabbi Elias Eppstein, and Miriam Steifel were leaders. A community group called the Placement Council was formed in 1937, with past B'nai Jehudah President Sidney Altschuler as Chairman. Temple member Paul Uhlmann, Sr. personally sponsored many refugees and organized job placements for them and others.

Mrs. Paul Uhlmann, who later served as Sisterhood President and on B'nai Jehudah's board, organized a tri-weekly meeting of ladies who baked cakes at the temple for 100 regular subscribers. The ladies sold these cakes for two years and proceeds provided financial support for recently arrived refugees.

Despite the gathering storm clouds over Europe, many Americans initially favored pacifism and isolationism. Personal losses from World War I were still fresh memories. Rabbi Samuel Mayerberg addressed the 1939 graduating class at The University of Arkansas and advised the students to emulate the quest for world peace of isolationists such as Charles A. Lindbergh. By February 1941, Mayerberg had changed his outlook and spoke in favor of severing ties with Germany and providing armaments to Great Britain without regard for possible future payback.

Japan attacked Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941. Shortly thereafter, B'nai Jehudah began a weekly social hour for armed forces personnel and Temple members following each Friday night Shabbat service. Sisterhood women took training courses in Civil Defense and sold more than \$1 million in War Bonds from a booth at 12th and Walnut Streets downtown. That accomplished, Sisterhood sold \$345,000 of additional bonds to fund three ambulance planes in Rabbi Mayerberg's honor.

As the war effort grew, many B'nai Jehudah members and their adult children joined the armed forces. In all, 346 of B'nai Jehudah's men and women served during World War II. Four gave their lives: Marvin Earl Cobrin, Raymond L. Friedson, Richard Rosenbloom and J. Donald Silberberg. Former Associate Rabbi Henry J. Berkowitz, who left Kansas City in 1927, served as a Navy chaplain in the Pacific theater. He contracted a rare disease while on duty and died from complications in 1949, at the age of 54.

At this writing during B'nai Jehudah's sesquicentennial year, we proudly recognize three of our oldest living Temple members who are WWII veterans. Meyer (Mike) Katzman, age 100, enlisted in the Army Air Force in 1942, and served as a specialist in Texas and at five other bases and schools throughout the U.S. Bob Navran, age 98, served in the U.S. Army in Europe. Judge Howard Sachs, age 96, served aboard the U.S. Navy battleship South Dakota and was in Tokyo Bay during the signing of Japan's surrender. We thank them and all of our veteran members, past and present, for their service to our country.

B'nai Jehudah had been holding multiple services for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur at the Linwood Boulevard Temple. With 600 member families, the Congregation moved these services to the Music Hall at Municipal Auditorium in 1941, so all members could worship together. High holiday services

remained there from 1943-1967 when the new Holmes Road facility was completed.

1943 also saw the first all-day Institute of Judaism for the Christian clergy sponsored by B'nai Jehudah. 158 clergymen attended and the success of the first institute enabled it to continue for a number of years. It was recognized by a local Catholic priest as "the first ecumenical meeting held here with Protestants, Catholics and Jews ...under the brotherhood of one God and Rabbi Mayerberg."

Victory in Europe came on May 8, 1945. That night, B'nai Jehudah families joined in a V-E Day service of thanksgiving. Rabbi Mayerberg paid tribute to the memory of President Roosevelt and prayed for Divine guidance for the new President, "our fellow-citizen Harry S. Truman."

The mood of the service was not one of unbridled jubilation, though. The loss of millions of Jews in the Nazi death camps – long rumored and now irrefutably substantiated – cast a shadow upon the evening.

A new challenge was how to resettle the hundreds of thousands of displaced European Jews who had lost their homes and family members. In the next installment of **A Moment in our History**, we will explore the critical role that B'nai Jehudah member Eddie Jacobson played in the United States' recognition of Israel.

Adapted from **Roots In A Moving Stream** by Frank Adler, z"l, and **Mid-America's Promise: A Profile of Kansas City Jewry** edited by Joseph

P. Schultz
March 19, 2021

MARCH 5, 2021

The Birth of Brotherhood



Henry J. Berkowitz joined B'nai Jehudah in 1925, as the Congregation's first Associate Rabbi. The nephew of former B'nai Jehudah rabbis Henry Berkowitz and Joseph Krauskopf, he set out to build a more vibrant congregational life.

In his second month in Kansas City, Rabbi Berkowitz organized the Men's Temple Club, which was the forerunner of the present Brotherhood. The Men's Temple Club affiliated with the National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods in 1926. Its membership reached 320 that year, virtually as large as the roster of the congregation itself.

Temple membership and revenue declined during the Great Depression as people sought to cut expenses. The Men's Temple Club was negatively impacted by the hard times and was unable to continue its costly lecture series. The club was disbanded in 1931.

After five years with no men's auxiliary, Rabbi Samuel Mayerberg encouraged two Temple leaders to recreate a men's group in 1936. Those men were Sidney Altschuler, a past president of the congregation, and Irvin Fane, an attorney and up-and-coming younger leader. Fane served as B'nai Jehudah's president from 1940-45 and was chairman of the board of the UAHC (now URJ) from 1963-67. In 1951, he was a founding member of the law firm of Spencer, Fane, Britt & Browne.

Altschuler and Fane called a meeting for the night of November 10, 1936, to form the new men's auxiliary. 125 men attended the meeting and elected Altschuler as the first Brotherhood president with Fane as recording secretary. Fane also served as program chairman and became the second Brotherhood president from 1937-38.

Early Brotherhood meetings were planned to create a heightened awareness of Jewish values. Brotherhood members began ushering at Friday night services, a practice that continued for many decades. The auxiliary sponsored Boy Scout Troop 2 that met at B'nai Jehudah for decades. It also supported the Jewish Chautauqua Society that promoted interfaith activities and education.

Members of a Brotherhood committee regularly visited Jewish inmates at the penitentiaries in Leavenworth and Lansing, Kansas. Other Brotherhood members taught night courses in English for newly arrived German-Jewish immigrants.

In 1938, Brotherhood devoted itself to finding sponsors who would help rescue German and Austrian Jews who were without relatives in the United States. B'nai Jehudah members sponsored a number of refugees through Brotherhood's initiative. Our members further assisted with job placement. Many of these immigrants stayed in Kansas City and became Temple members.

Brotherhood sponsored an annual dinner-lecture series from 1955-1964. This event featured nationally known speakers and drew large attendance. After that program ended, Brotherhood focused on service-centered programming. These activities included an annual interfaith dinner, a monthly luncheon with the Rabbi series, an annual retreat, traffic supervision in the Temple parking lot and continued support of the Jewish Chautauqua Society. Membership stood at around 400 men in the mid 1960s.

Jerome Cohen served as Brotherhood president from 1965-66, and later served as B'nai Jehudah president, 1980-82. Cohen was a successful Kansas

City businessman who had a vision to create a retreat center that would be operated for the community by Brotherhood. With Cohen's financial support, 91 acres of land in Cass County, MO, was acquired in the 1970s to create the Jeannette and Jerome Cohen Retreat Center. Brotherhood operated the property and later gifted it to the Congregation in 1984. The facility had fishing ponds, dormitory sleeping rooms and a kitchen/dining hall. It was used for over 40 years for retreats by confirmation classes, Israel pilgrimage and youth groups, for the annual Brotherhood fishing derby and by other groups. Following an in-depth feasibility study, B'nai Jehudah sold the property to a private individual in 2014, due to infrequent use and high maintenance costs. Proceeds were placed in B'nai Jehudah's endowment fund and continue to support retreats.

Brotherhood continues to serve the Congregation by sponsoring Brotherhood Breakfast Cafe, Chanukah Happenings, the annual Family Fishing Derby, the Confirmation Class Essay Contest, Religious School Pancake breakfast and other activities.

Since 1936, Brotherhood has provided an outlet for its members to make friends, enjoy the fellowship of fellow temple members and enhance the quality of congregational life.

Adapted from **Roots In A Moving Stream** by Frank Adler, z"l

March 5, 2021

Photo Captions: (left) Jeannette and Jerome Cohen Retreat Center; (right) Irvin Fane

FEBRUARY 19, 2021

Rabbi Samuel S. Mayerberg



In 1926, B'nai B'rith District Grand Lodge No. 2 held its district convention in Kansas City and elected Rabbi Samuel Mayerberg of Dayton, Ohio as president. He impressed members of the Kansas City Jewish community with his eloquent, vibrant personality and infectious enthusiasm. So when Rabbi Harry Mayer retired from B'nai Jehudah in 1928, the Congregation recruited Samuel Mayerberg to become its rabbi.

Rabbi Mayerberg was born in 1892 in Goldsboro, North Carolina, where his father served as a Reform rabbi for nearly 40 years. Samuel enrolled in the University of Cincinnati and Hebrew Union College at the age of 16 and received his ordination in 1917. He was married to Gertrude Rothschild two weeks later. Mayerberg first served as an assistant rabbi in Detroit and then had his own pulpit in Dayton 1920-1928.

Rabbi Mayerberg joined B'nai Jehudah when he was 36 years old and set his energies to strengthening the congregation's spiritual life and its influence in Kansas City. He initiated adult Bible study classes; the class for men met with Mayerberg weekly for more than 20 years. He successfully advocated for changing the name of Sunday school to religious school, a designation that continues to this day. Mrs. Mayerberg reorganized a children's choir that had not been active for several years.

In 1929, the Rabbi requested that parents keep their children home from public school on the first and seventh days of Passover in order to attend temple services: most did. Later that year, he encouraged a conscientious celebration of Chanukah for all eight days and asked Temple families to refrain from having Christmas trees in their homes.

Rabbi Mayerberg's focus also extended beyond the Congregation. He initiated various interfaith activities that continued for decades. The National Conference of Christians and Jews honored him in 1955 for "having established a spirit of friendship between clergymen and lay leaders of all faiths."

Mayerberg was quick to speak out when he saw injustice. One of his early stands was a sharply worded letter published in 1930 by *The Kansas City Star* on its front page, protesting a plan of the local Council of Clubs to present a Passion Play in Kansas City. Passion plays have been a source of anti-Jewish sentiment for centuries. While the play went on, Mayerberg received sympathetic understanding from the city's leading liberal Christian clergy.

Rabbi Mayerberg next set his sights on the president of the University of Missouri in Columbia. The issue began with the controversial firing of a sociology instructor and grew into an investigation of general academic conditions at the university. The MU President was dismissed from his post in the month following the Rabbi's call for his resignation.

In 1931, Mayerberg called Missouri's governor and asked him to dispatch the National Guard to intervene in a planned lynching in Maryville, Missouri. While the governor agreed, the troops did not stop the mob rule that resulted in the death of an African American man that day.

Rabbi Mayerberg was best known in the community for his fight against the political machine of boss Tom Pendergast, chairman of the Jackson County Democratic Party. Mayerberg called out graft, political patronage and influence peddling as wrong and unjust. He believed that provisions of the city charter were being illegally applied for personal gain. He was quoted in the May 23,

1932 issue of *The Kansas City Star*, “You’ve turned your city over to a gang and given it into the hands of crooks and racketeers because you’ve been asleep. The time has come for action.”

The Rabbi organized and served as the first president of the Charter League that sought to circulate a petition calling for the recall of the entire city council. The entrenched politicians and racketeers fought back aggressively. They tapped the temple’s telephone line and ransacked files in Mayerberg’s study. As he drove to a meeting one night, the Rabbi’s car was forced to the curb and a gunshot was fired at him. For weeks after this incident, two bodyguards accompanied Mayerberg wherever he went, including to temple during services.

Strong pressure was put on the congregation to put a stop to the rabbi’s crusade and some members resigned in protest. Eventually, the B’nai Jehudah Board of Trustees insisted that the rabbi devote himself entirely to the work of the congregation. It took seven more years for Federal investigations and grand juries to expose the corruption that Mayerberg alleged. Pendergast was sentenced to prison for tax evasion in 1939 and a non-partisan city government was established in 1940.

In 1933, Rabbi Mayerberg turned his attention to the rise of Nazi power in Germany. Even at that early date, he preached that the Spanish Inquisition was not as bad as the rapidly accelerating peril in Germany. He felt confident that “the Jews of America will not look quietly on the extermination of some 600,000 of their co-religionists in Germany.” He later supported Israel as a destination for Jewish refugees.

In 1957, Missouri Governor James Blair appointed Mayerberg as the first clergyman in Missouri to serve as a commissioner of the Kanas City Police Board. He displayed a keen interest in the personal welfare of individual police officers during his term as commissioner. He became the first Rabbi to receive appointment as a police chaplain.

After nearly 32 years at B'nai Jehudah, Rabbi Mayerberg asked the board to be permitted to retire in June 1960, soon after his 68th birthday. He was elected Rabbi Emeritus and served in that role until his death in 1964.

Rabbi Mayerberg was one of fourteen people who distinguished themselves as Jews in the field of social justice as listed in **Giants of Justice** by Albert Vorspan, published in 1960. Others included Louis Brandeis, Albert Einstein, Stephen S. Wise and Henrietta Szold.

Through it all, Samuel Mayerberg was a beloved and revered rabbi, teacher and friend. The Mayerbergs did not have children, but formed many deep friendships within the congregation. While he was a fearless soldier in his public career, congregants knew Rabbi Mayerberg as a kind, gentle man who guided his people to “love mercy and to walk humbly with God.”

For additional reading about Rabbi Mayerberg:

<https://pendergastkc.org/article/biography/samuel-mayerberg>

(Adapted from **Roots In A Moving Stream** by Frank Adler, z”l)

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Photo Captions: (left) Former President Harry S. Truman (L) and Rabbi Samuel S. Mayerberg, February 10, 1960. Photo Credit: Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. | (right) Portrait of Rabbi Samuel S. Mayerberg.