

CHAPTER 2

BUILDING AN ACTIVE JEWISH COMMUNITY

By Lawrence Krause with research by Rabbi Ronald Gerson



JUST AS THE YEAR 1886 MARKED THE beginning of the Big Boom in San Diego, so did the year mark an expansion in San Diego's Jewish communal life. The completion of the railroad brought a remarkable period of business prosperity and increased population to San Diego, leading to the frontier town finally becoming a real city.

During this period, real estate doubled and tripled in value. Between 1886 and 1888, approximately \$10 million was invested in the city as 15 large business buildings were constructed, along with many new hotels and homes and a number of theaters, churches and schools. The growth in population was swift. With thousands arriving each month, the population shot up to 34,000 by 1887, and 40,000 by early 1888.^{xxxiv}

Writing a historical sketch of San Diego in 1887, T. S. Van Dyke described the lightning-quick growth taking place at that time:

New stores, hotels and dwellings are arising on every hand from the center to the farthest outskirts in more bewildering numbers than before, and people are pouring in at double the rate they did but six months ago. It is now impossible to keep track of its progress. No one seems any longer to know or care who is putting up the big building, and it is becoming difficult to find a familiar face in the crowd or at the hotels. It may well be doubted if any city has ever before had such a growth of the same character.^{xxxv}

During this major boom, a great deal of modernization also took place. In 1886, electricity came to San Diego, and within a year the city had electric lights and the start of street car lines. Furthermore, hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent on grading streets, installing water and gas pipes, and improving the sewer system. In short, the Big Boom changed the whole nature of San Diego. After almost 40 years as a

frontier town, it was now an active city with a good-sized population.

These boom years, 1886 to February 1888, saw increased activity in San Diego's Jewish community, too. In 1886, approximately 40 families were members of Beth Israel. By 1888, the congregation numbered more than 60 families.^{xxxvi}

During the boom period, the new congregation concentrated on three major endeavors: meeting for regular Shabbat and High Holy Days services and for occasional lectures, providing a religious school for the congregation's children, and taking steps toward building a synagogue.

The congregation at this time was meeting in homes, halls or the Unitarian Church for High Holy Days services and the first sustained period of regular Shabbat worship services. Congregants also gathered for occasional lectures at the Unitarian Church.

Marie (Mrs. Abraham) Blochman started the religious school,^{xxxvii} and in 1887 "the members of the Sunday School, under the direction of Mrs. Blochman ... sang the old Hebrew anthem *En Kelohenu*"^{xxxviii} at Rosh Hashanah services. Among the first teachers were Celita Mannasse and Celia Schiller (respectively, the niece and daughter of Marcus Schiller), who remained active in the religious school for many years.

BETH ISRAEL BUILDS A TEMPLE

It was at this time that the congregation also embarked upon plans to build its own synagogue. For some 35 years the Jewish community had never had its own home. In the fall of 1886, the *San Diego Union* reported: "The Jewish citizens of San Diego are taking steps for the erection of a building to be used as a synagogue and a school for religious instruction. At a meeting a few days ago \$500 was subscribed."^{xxxix}

In February 1887, the congregation had incorporated so it could acquire property for its future temple. As the idea of a synagogue building gained momentum,

the members of Beth Israel became enthusiastic and envisioned a structure much more elaborate than their efforts would ultimately produce. By the fall of 1887, they were contemplating “the erection of a \$20,000 synagogue at an early day,” having pledged over half the amount.^{xi}

In December 1888, the congregation purchased a lot at the corner of Second and Beech streets on which to build the synagogue. Samuel I. Fox and Adolph Levi were instrumental in selecting the site.^{xii} The actual synagogue, completed in 1889, cost about \$8,500 for the land and construction costs.

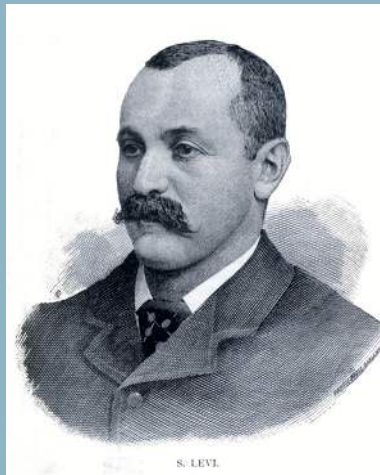
Simon Levi, a Civic Leader by Stanley Schwartz

BORN IN 1850 in Bohemia, Simon Levi, one of five brothers, came alone to the United States at the age of 12. Arriving first in San Francisco, he came to San Diego in 1873, where he worked for Louis Wolf for one year in Temecula. From 1873 to 1876, Levi had his own general merchandise store in Temecula. All five brothers lived in San Diego at various times. A sister stayed behind in Europe.

In 1876, Levi joined his uncle, Samuel Steiner, and Abraham Klauber in Steiner, Klauber and Company, a grocery and general merchandise enterprise founded in 1869.

In 1883, Steiner retired and an ailing Abraham Klauber moved to San Francisco to oversee the company’s business there. Simon Levi became a partner, and the company became known as Klauber and Levi, the Klauber being Abraham’s son Melville. Under Levi’s leadership, the company became a large wholesale grocery firm that supplied the Southwest from Baja to New Mexico. By 1895, when the firm incorporated as Klauber and Levi with Simon Levi as president, it also had two large warehouses, one at Seventh and Island and one at Fourth and K, plus a flour mill at Thirteenth and K.

Increasingly, Melville Klauber and his friend and brother-in-law Julius Wangenheim were making decisions for the firm. In 1896, Simon Levi resigned to form his own company, the Simon Levi Co., dealing primarily in produce. Later he expanded into a large wholesale grocery that handled many supplies and foods, including liquor. Today it specializes in wholesaling wines and spirits from its 15-acre headquarters in Wilmington in the Los Angeles area.



Simon Levi, a civic leader in San Diego, helped select the site and complete the building of the first Beth Israel synagogue at Second and Beech Streets.

Simon Levi’s civic career began in the 1870s. He was secretary of a committee on public safety that helped protect the local Chinese community from hoodlums. In the 1880s, he was president of the Chamber of Commerce and of the Building and Loan Association, and vice president of the San Diego Telephone Company and of the San Diego Gas and Electric Light Company. He served nine years as a city councilman of San Diego, some of this time as chairman. Though urged to run for mayor, he never did.

Levi’s involvement with Beth Israel started in 1887 when the congregation incorporated; his name is on the incorporation papers. He, his brother Adolph, and Samuel Fox were instrumental in selecting the site and completing the building of the first Beth Israel synagogue at Second and Beech streets in 1889. He was the third president of Beth Israel and served from 1909 to 1912. Simon Levi died on September 14, 1918. His descendants live primarily in Los Angeles, but descendants of his brother Adolph remain prominent citizens in San Diego today.

Adolph Levi, A San Diego Patriarch

By Stanley and Laurel Schwartz

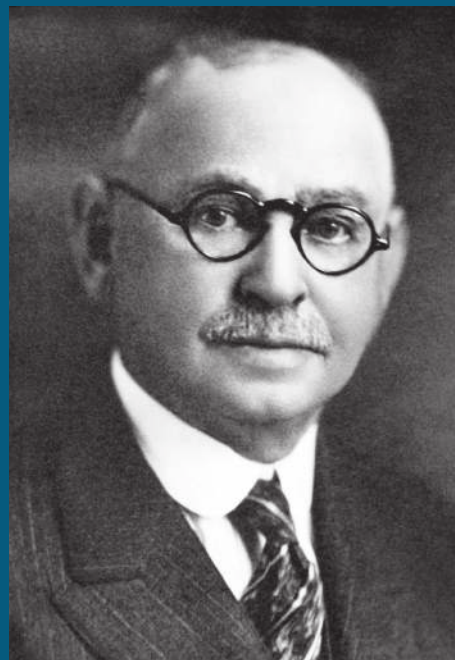
ADOLPH LEVI WAS BORN in 1858 in the village of Langendorflas, in western Bohemia. He had four brothers, Simon, Nathan, Isaac and Rudolph, and one sister, Rosa.

In 1877, at age 18, Adolph joined his older brothers Simon, Nathan and Isaac in San Diego. Simon was working for their uncle, Samuel Steiner, at Steiner, Klauber and Company, a grocery and general merchandise store at Seventh and Island avenues in downtown San Diego.

After joining Simon at Steiner, Klauber and Co. for a year, Adolph set out on his own and eventually settled in Julian City, where his brother Isaac owned a store. Adolph bought a grocery business there, then expanded to a sawmill and livery stable. He and his partner, Joseph Marks, built a brick building in Julian that would eventually become the Julian Drug Store. They also owned Oak Grove Ranch, 14 miles north of Warner Hot Springs.

In 1885, Adolph traveled back to his birthplace in Europe to attend his sister's wedding; there he met Eleanora Schwartz. The two married and returned to Julian. When they started a family, they moved to San Diego, where Adolph went into the hack and livery stable business. He had several hack, or horse-drawn taxi, companies and stables around San Diego, such as the Diamond Livery Stable at 521 Seventh, the Pacific Coast Hack and Transfer Line, and Levi's Hack and Transfer Co. He was also involved in real estate and owned land from the ocean to Lakeside.

Eleanora and Adolph had a son, Edgar, and a daughter, Selma. Later, Adolph and Edgar owned



Adolph Levi and a small group of men kept Beth Israel from dissolving when the Economic Panic of 1893 caused the congregation's membership to drop to fewer than 20 families.

Adolph Levi and Son Livestock as well as ranches and dairy farms throughout the county.

Adolph Levi was deeply involved with the San Diego Jewish community. He, his brother Simon, and Samuel Fox were instrumental in selecting the site and completing the building of the first Beth Israel synagogue at Second and Beech streets in 1889. It was also Adolph Levi and Samuel Fox who selected the site of Beth Israel's second building at Third and Laurel in the mid-1920s. Adolph Levi was the fourth president of Beth Israel, from 1912 to 1926, following the presidency of his brother Simon.

Although the five Levi brothers all lived in San Diego at one time, family members still in San Diego today are descendants of Adolph and Eleanora.

The Eduard Lasker Lodge No. 370 of B'nai B'rith was also started at this time. The Blochman daughters, Mina and Jeanne, founded the Clionian Society for young people.

Around March 1888, the Great Boom came to an end. Speculators and investors – losing interest in the exaggerated market – became fewer, business activity

dropped dramatically, and suddenly the short period of prosperity turned into a time of economic difficulty. People poured out of the city. Within a few months, the population had dropped from a high of 40,000 to 16,000, and two million dollars had been withdrawn from local banks, leaving them in a precarious condition.

BETH ISRAEL'S FIRST RABBI

Nevertheless, the Jewish community, with its numbers still substantial, remained religiously active for the next five years. Sometime between February and June 1888, Beth Israel enlisted its first rabbi, Rabbi Samuel Freuder, to provide religious and educational leadership for its members, who now numbered more than 60 families.

Samuel Freuder, Beth Israel's First Rabbi

By Jim Malkus

RABBI SAMUEL FREUDER came to the United States from Europe in 1883, and started out as a peddler. In his autobiography, he wrote of his arrival: "My hope was to become a prosperous merchant and I made a start for that final goal by peddling with suspenders."

Freuder soon wound up in Cincinnati, where he met Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise and enrolled in Hebrew Union College. In 1887, he became Beth Israel's first full-time rabbi and, in 1888, he was unanimously re-elected to a second one-year term at Beth Israel. Rabbi Freuder enjoyed great popularity; he was well liked by the congregation especially for his sermons, which included topics on superstitions, folklore and omenology of cultures from other parts of the world. He was recognized as an outspoken, impatient and radical sermonizer. Non-Jewish groups appreciated the lectures he delivered at churches and other venues. Rabbi Freuder was noted for encouraging city-wide participation between Jews and gentiles, a characteristic of Beth Israel and its religious leaders that has continued to the present time.

Beth Israel initially held its religious services in private homes and churches, and it was Rabbi Freuder who is credited with having encouraged the small congregation to acquire its first permanent place of worship. Nevertheless, Rabbi Freuder left San Diego by mid-1889 for a pulpit in Davenport, Iowa, before the first Beth Israel synagogue was consecrated in September of that year.

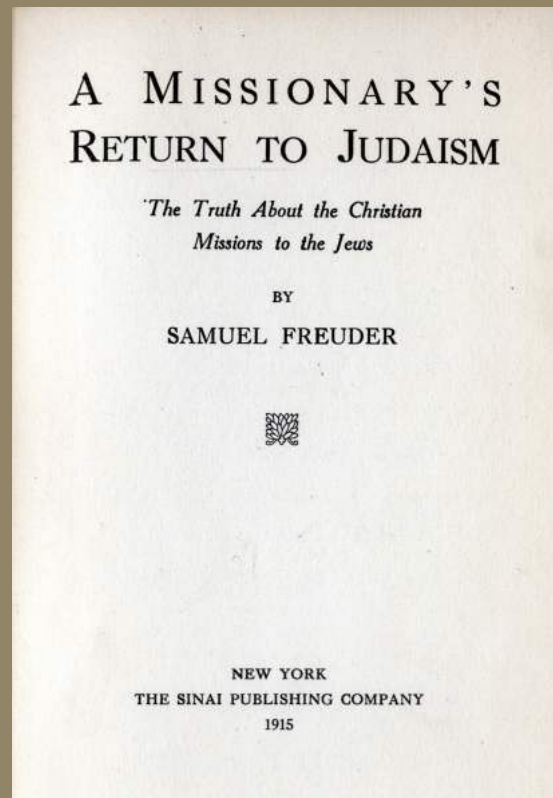
For reasons unknown, Rabbi Freuder rejected

In Rabbi Freuder, the congregation engaged a spiritual leader whose bizarre career surely made him one of the strangest figures of the Reform rabbinate of his day.

Freuder was unanimously re-elected for another year at a congregational meeting in September 1888. He was seen as "scholarly and popular...a man of culture, refinement, and liberal scholarship, somewhat advanced

Judaism. In 1891, he was baptized in Chicago and became a Christian missionary. He followed serially the precepts of various Protestant churches, leaving one and joining another, before ultimately returning to his Jewish roots and dying in 1931 as a Jew.

Rabbi Ronald Gerson in his master's thesis described Rabbi Freuder as follows: "He is remembered for periods of excellence, periods of misbehavior, periods of apostasy and his return to full Jewish identity, although not to the synagogue pulpit."



Samuel Freuder, Beth Israel's first rabbi, encouraged the small congregation to build its first permanent place of worship. For reasons unknown, he later rejected Judaism and became a Christian missionary, eventually returning to his Jewish roots.

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SCHILLER & MURTHA, LEADING DRY GOODS AND CLOTHING HOUSE.

A week-long Jewish fair in 1889, held by the women of Beth Israel, raised \$1,500 for the construction of the congregation's first permanent home.

in his views, whose lectures are always an intellectual treat.”^{xlii} He encouraged the congregation in its plans to build a synagogue, which became a reality after he left Beth Israel and San Diego, sometime before the High Holy Days of 1889.

The women of the congregation, led by Mrs. C. Wolfscheimer, Mrs. S. Levi, and Miss L. Schiller, held a major week-long Jewish Fair in February–March 1889 to raise money for construction of the new temple. This event – replete with many booths, full meals, entertainment and dancing – raised \$1,500 from both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities, and also turned

out to be one of the leading social events in the city that year. It received a tremendous amount of publicity in the local press and increased the already strong relationship between Beth Israel and the Christian community.

Additional money was raised through the sale of permanent pews in the soon-to-be synagogue.^{xliii} As was long the practice in Orthodox synagogues, designated seats on benches were “sold” and reserved for “owners” for services. Seats closest to the pulpit commanded the highest prices.

By the summer of 1889, sufficient funds had been raised to begin construction of the synagogue. The

The Beech Street Temple

By Stanley Schwartz

THE BEECH STREET TEMPLE is the oldest synagogue in Southern California and one of the two oldest in California. (The other is in San Leandro and was also built in 1889.) A newspaper article in September 1889 described the building as follows:

“The Temple is a neat redwood structure 56x30 feet with a five foot wing for anterooms on each side of the entrance, which is a square front with the tablets of law rising from the gable peak above. The Temple is a light brown with chocolate trimmings. Six ground glass windows stained yellow, blue and rose, light it and four rose windows cut the upper front to light the gallery.

The upper half of the entrance doors is of ground glass. The interior woodwork is oiled redwood, comprising a wainscoting and four arched tresses, supporting a gabled ceiling painted sky blue. The walls are French gray. The front of the gallery is arched and it has a seating capacity of forty or fifty.

The pulpit is carpeted with body brussels. In the wall at the rear the doors of the Ark of the Covenant stand out in fine relief. The carved work is of sugar pine and the panels of redwood.

The aisles are for the present carpeted with striped cocoa matting and plain matting covers the entrance hall and anterooms. The audience room is seated with 250 chairs, which are numbered and a handsome chandelier descends from the center.”^{xliii}

The “audience room” was the main sanctuary. The Beech Street Temple was a small, intimate building conducive to a feeling of closeness among the worshippers.

Beth Israel’s first temple building is open to visitors as a historical building in Heritage Park San Diego, where it was moved in 1978.

The Beech Street Temple, built in 1889, is the oldest synagogue in Southern California and one of the two oldest in California. This photo was taken circa 1892; the building was moved to Heritage Park in 1978.



THE JEWISH NEW YEAR The 5650th Anniversary Observed in This City.

In the absence of a rabbi, the Jewish services at the Temple yesterday were rendered by Mr. Lippman, Mr. Blockman, Mr. Schiller, and Mr. Jacobs, of Oceanside.

The Synagogue is very unique in arrangement and is quite a cosy house of worship. The majority of the Jewish residents of this city were in attendance yesterday, it being “Rosh-Hoshana,” which means the New Year. The choir was composed of the following ladies and gentlemen: Professor and Mrs. Engel, Mr. Phan, Misses Schiller and the Misses Blockman.

Yesterday was the 5,650th celebration by the Israelites of the New Year.



The Temple, which is centrally located at the corner of Beech and Second streets, has just been built and is the second Temple ever constructed in Southern California. It is a very pretty and attractive little structure. The cut shows the front of the edifice.

When San Diego’s first synagogue was completed in time for Rosh Hashanah services in 1889, Beth Israel was without a rabbi and services were led by knowledgeable lay people, with a choir of women and men.

building committee chose an “unpretentious building”^{xlv} similar to the Unitarian Church, which so often had been used for the congregation’s services. After receiving bids from various companies, construction began in July, and the Beech Street Temple was completed in September 1889.

The first synagogue in San Diego was completed in time for Erev Rosh Hashanah services, but the congregation was without a rabbi. This first service was led by Abraham Blochman, Marcus Schiller and two men identified only as Lippman and Jacobs of Oceanside.

RABBI MARX MOSES

The congregation retained the services of Rabbi Marx Moses in March 1890. Despite the difficult post-boom economic conditions, membership was at a peak, with 80 families and 50 children enrolled in the religious school.

Rabbi Moses had served a congregation in Goldsboro, North Carolina, where his work gained him a “host of friends.”^{xlvi} Under his leadership, the new Beech Street Temple quickly became an active house of worship in the community, and Friday evening services were held with regularity. Each week the *San Diego Union* announced Beth Israel’s services and the topic of the rabbi’s sermon.

Rabbi Moses’ sermons embraced a wide range of subjects, and he drilled home to the congregation the basic concepts of Reform Judaism, speaking often about a rational understanding of Judaism, the importance of the moral law, liberalism in religion, and religious universalism. He would also discuss important issues of the day, including capital punishment, the Sunday closing law, and the country’s economic depression. Non-Jews were drawn to services on Friday nights to hear the rabbi’s liberal religious and political outlook.

Under Rabbi Moses, notices of weekly Sabbath services announced musical selections and special solos by the temple choir, a group primarily composed of gentiles.

In June 1892, Rabbi Moses gave a speech about Beth Israel and the city of San Diego to the national convention of the UAHC (Union of American Hebrew Congregations, now Union for Reform Judaism) in New York. As San Diego was a city few people knew much about, the rabbi’s speech received much interest.

Rabbi Moses supported the work of the Jewish women of the city and urged them to organize both a Ladies Hebrew Aid Society and a Mothers Club. The purpose of the Ladies Hebrew Aid Society was “to render

The Pittsburgh Platform of 1885

By Sydney Wexler

THE FIRST Pittsburgh Platform is a crucial 19th-century document in the history of the American Reform Movement in Judaism that called for Jews to adopt a modern approach to the practice of their faith. A conference was convened by Rabbi Kaufman Kohler, and 15 Reform rabbis attended the meeting presided over by Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise in November 1885 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

The document that resulted from this meeting is now viewed as Classical Reform theology. It explicitly called for a rejection of “all such Mosaic and Rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas entirely foreign to our present mental and spiritual state.” The view of the document was that these laws detracted from Jewish life in the modern era by placing undue emphasis on ritual, rather than ethical considerations.

Concepts such as bodily resurrection and Gehenna (hell) or Eden (paradise) in the life hereafter were also rejected as “ideas not rooted in Judaism.”

The Platform envisioned Jews as a religious community within the nation. There was an explicit rejection of Zionism because American Jews were at home in the United States. It affirmed that Judaism was the “highest concept of the God-idea” and offered clear recognition to the inherent worth of Christianity and Islam.

The Platform helped shape the future of American Reform Judaism by an ongoing commitment to *tikkun olam* (repair of the world). The Platform affirmed “. . . we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society.”

The Economic Panic of 1893

By Lawrence Krause

THE U.S. ECONOMIC PANIC of 1893 – which actually began in 1891 – was caused by railroad overbuilding and shaky railroad financing, which set off a series of bank failures. Making things worse was a run on the gold supply, and a policy of using both gold and silver metals as a peg for the U.S. dollar's value. Many silver mines were opened – frequently with rail connections – and silver began to flood the market.

When two different metals are used for coinage with the same face value but have different trading values, people tend to hoard the more valuable and spend the cheaper one. In a process well known to economic historians, bad money drives out good money, so the United States lost gold. The first sign of serious trouble was the bankruptcy of the

Philadelphia and Reading Railroad on February 23, 1893.

As concern over the state of the economy worsened, people rushed to withdraw their money from banks and caused bank runs. The credit crunch rippled through the economy. A series of bank failures followed, and the price of silver fell. The Northern Pacific Railway, the Union Pacific Railroad, and the Atchinson, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad all failed. This was followed by the bankruptcy of many other companies; in total more than 15,000 companies and 500 banks failed – many in the west. About 18 percent of the workforce became unemployed. The once secure middle class could not meet its mortgage obligations and many walked away from recently built homes.^{xlvii}

relief to the sick and needy, to rehabilitate families and to aid the orphan and half-orphan.^{xlviii} The primary force behind this humanitarian group was Ermance (Mrs. Simon) Levi, who served as its treasurer for the first 30 years.

The Mothers Club of Beth Israel was formed in about 1892 as a women's auxiliary whose primary objective was to support the congregation's religious school. With the funds the group raised, it remunerated the teachers, gave gifts to the children, and provided for other needs of the small school. Another of the Mothers Club's functions was to support the temple's choir.

The Mothers Club played an important role in keeping Beth Israel alive financially, especially in the difficult economic times of the early 20th century through World War I. The Mothers Club consistently contributed critical funds to the congregation during these difficult years.

Under Rabbi Moses' leadership, Beth Israel acquired land in the Mount Hope city cemetery for a new Jewish burial ground to replace the old Roseville cemetery, which was now far from the center of Jewish population in San Diego. In the summer of 1891, the congregation petitioned the San Diego city council, asking that “five

acres be set aside in the city cemetery as a Jewish burial place.” In February 1892, the petition was granted, giving Beth Israel the land for its Home of Peace cemetery. The council ordinance establishing the grant was signed by the congregation's own Simon Levi in his role as president of the Board of Aldermen.^{xlix}

Unfortunately, during Rabbi Moses' tenure, which lasted nearly three years, San Diego's economy grew dismal with the onset of the economic panic of 1893. Harsh economic conditions caught up with Beth Israel. Membership and finances dropped considerably, and the congregation entered a long phase of limited activity. Rabbi Moses decided to leave the congregation, and for 16 years Beth Israel was again without a rabbi.

CONGREGATION SUSTAINED BY CORE MEMBERS

By 1896, Beth Israel's membership had dropped to about 19 families, and four years later to about 14 families. With its financial resources depleted, the congregation's activities were confined to annual High Holy Days services conducted by lay leaders and, importantly, a small religious school.

Through financial support and leadership, a small



group of men kept the congregation from dissolving and maintained hope for better times. These leaders were Louis Mendelson, Abraham Blochman, Simon Levi, Adolph Levi and Samuel I. Fox. (Joseph Mannasse died in 1897 and Marcus Schiller died in 1904.)

Louis Mendelson was among the first Jews to settle in Baja California, Mexico. Born in Poland, he moved to Baja California in 1871, attracted by gold discovered there. He owned a ranch and was involved in mining.

With his Mexican Catholic wife, Carmen Lamadrid, he moved to San Diego around 1890 and became a shipping agent for a coastal shipping firm.¹

Mendelson was well versed in Hebrew and Judaism, and he led all but two of the High Holy Days services throughout the period when there was no rabbi at Beth Israel. Even in 1899 and 1900, when the congregation enlisted Rabbi Sydney Menkus of San Francisco to lead worship, Mendelson assisted the rabbi. In 1894, the congregation brought in Cantor Sands, an eminent tenor from Los Angeles, to conduct the service and preach a sermon, but Mendelson also preached a sermon. Furthermore, in 1895, Mendelson conducted the first known confirmation service held by Beth Israel.

Another key leader during this difficult period was the French-born banker Abraham Blochman, who came to San Diego from San Francisco and became prominent in the Jewish and general communities. In 1893, with his son Lucien, he established the Blochman banking company, which he directed until 1912. He was a member of the city council and the acting French consul for San Diego for 30 years.

Blochman was also well trained in Hebrew and Judaism, and he assisted Mendelson in leading the small



Beth Israel's resilience during lean times was due in large part to the interest and financial support of the Levi brothers. Left to right (standing) are Rudolph and Adolph; (sitting) Isaac, Simon and Nathan, circa 1890.

congregation in worship during the annual High Holy Days services. He also filled the important function of reading the burial service at funerals. Blochman succeeded to the presidency of Beth Israel following Marcus Schiller's death in 1904. He held that position until 1909, when he resigned due to old age.

The resilience of Beth Israel during this difficult period is also due to the interest the Levi brothers took in the temple and the financial support they provided. Simon and Adolph Levi were successful businessmen in San Diego. The brothers' leadership continued into the early part of the 20th century, as first Simon and then Adolph served as president of the congregation.

Samuel I. Fox rounded out the small nucleus of leadership and support during this period. This highly popular man was the epitome of the upstanding, good-looking gentleman, admired both within the congregation and in the community at large. He was a Hungarian immigrant who arrived in San Diego in 1886, spent 12 years in real estate, and in 1898 founded Lion Clothing Company. Fox assumed an active role in the congregation that lasted more than 50 years. He served as president from 1926 to 1939, the year he died.

During the economically challenging years from 1893 to 1905, communal worship did not include regular Shabbat services. Special Friday evening services may have been held when Jewish speakers of note passed through San Diego, such as the San Francisco Jewish writer G. A. Danziger at the end of 1886 and again in early 1893. Thus, the High Holy Days services took on extra meaning for the congregation.

Although Beth Israel relied on its own members to lead these services, the congregation hired well-known local gentile singers for most of its choir, and the *San Diego Union* emphasized the musical aspect of the services:

A choir of nine voices rendered excellent music. One peculiar feature was that most of these selections were in the Hebrew tongue. At their rehearsals these young people, who come from various local musical bodies, had to learn the scores syllable by syllable. The Hebrew is not the easiest tongue to acquire, particularly because pronunciation is, to an English ear, at least erratic. The singers mastered the good old hymns, however, and their work was a success.¹¹

**CHILDREN
CONFIRMED**

**AT THE JEWISH SYN-
AGOGUE.**

**IMPRESSIVE EXERCISES WITNESSED
BY A LARGE CROWD.**

**Names of the Confirmants—Beautiful Dec-
orations—The Programme—Services
Conducted by Rev. Mr. Menkus
—Reception in G. A. R. Hall.**

The confirmation exercises held in the Jewish synagogue last night were beautiful and impressive. The decorations of the church consisted of smilax, flowers and the stars and stripes. Suspended in golden letters over the altar was the class motto, "Onward! Upward!" There were two arches near the altar. The church was filled to overflowing with the members of the congregation and invited friends. The names of the confirmants are: Adele Welisch, Sadie Nauman, Julius B. Brown, Fanny Nauman, Louise Mendelson, Edgar Bernard Levi and Henry Frank Lesem. The class had been prepared by Mrs. Samuel Brust, and the results showed with what care she had taught her pupils.

The exercises were conducted by the rabbi, Mr. Menkus, and the music was furnished by a choir composed of Mr.

Although Shabbat services were not held regularly during the economically challenging years from 1893 to 1905, the women of Beth Israel continued to operate the religious school, and confirmation services were held in 1895 and 1899.

While the choir was predominantly gentile, several Beth Israel members also participated as volunteers, either singing or playing the violin. Among them were Laura and Nathan Schiller, Feodor and Fannie Naumann, Edgar and Selma Levi, and Pearl Jacobs. Fannie Naumann began playing *Kol Nidre* as a violin solo in 1901, and continued in that role for about 13 years.

The religious school continued to operate with weekly classes. There were 18 students in 1900. The main forces behind this small school were now Mina (Mrs. Sam) Brust (daughter of Abraham and Marie Blochman) and longtime teachers Celita Mannasse and Celia Schiller.

Confirmation services were held a second time in 1899. In the confirmation class was Fannie Naumann (Rosenfeld), who later recalled that the Dreyfus Affair,

still going on at that time, was discussed frequently.^{lii} An article in the *San Diego Union* in September 1899 noted that:

The confirmation exercises held in the Jewish synagogue last night were beautiful and impressive. The decorations of the church consisted of simlax, flowers, and the stars and stripes. Suspended in golden letters over the altar was the class motto: “Onward: Upward!” There were two arches near the altar. The church was filled to overflowing with the members of the congregation and invited friends. The names of the confirmants are: Adele Wellisch, Sadie Naumann, Julius B. Brown, Fanny Naumann, Louise Mendelson, Edgar Bernard Levi, and Henry Frank Lesem. The class had been prepared by Mrs. Samuel Brust, and the results showed with what care she had taught her pupils . . . ^{liii}

In a reversal from its early years, when Adath Yeshurun and later Beth Israel had met in homes, halls and churches, the congregation now rented out its Beech Street Temple on Sundays to the Universalist and later the Christian Science churches in order to bolster its sagging finances.

JEWISH REVIVAL IN SAN DIEGO

Around 1905, the Jewish population of San Diego began to increase significantly, due to the massive immigration of Eastern European Jews to the United States. These Russian and Romanian Jews were fleeing intense persecution in their homelands. By 1909, the San Diego Jewish community had returned to a firm footing.

Furthermore, San Diego for several years had been experiencing a spurt of new business development resulting in a large population growth. A new breed of businessmen – Louis J. Wilde, D. C. Collier, G. W. Cotton, Ed Fletcher, and, most importantly, John D.

Religious Practice in Classical Reform Judaism

By Steve Gould

REFORM JUDAISM affirms the three essential pillars of Judaism: God, Torah and Israel – the people and the land – and validates the diversity of Reform Jewish beliefs and practices. Reform Jews feel a responsibility to learn about historical, or traditional, Jewish practices in order to choose those practices that add meaning to their lives, and don’t judge those who practice more or do less. Moreover, those observances often expand or contract at different stages of life.

Classical Reform Judaism dispensed with much of *halachah*, Jewish law. In the absence of Hebrew, *kipot* (head coverings) and *tallitot* (prayer shawls), and with Sunday rather than Saturday services, many congregations almost seemed Protestant. This was more often the case than not for the Movement’s first approximately 100 years in the United States. In some synagogues, b’nai mitzvah students read only the Haftarah, and the Torah portion was not included in the service. Beginning in the middle of the 20th century, however, Reform Judaism began bringing back many traditional practices. Hebrew

is now liberally included in services. Torah is again central to Shabbat services, and many men – and women, too – wear *tallitot* and *kipot*. It is not unusual for Hassidic *niggunim* (wordless tunes) to be incorporated into the beginnings of Shabbat services in many congregations.

Religious practice at Beth Israel in its founding year of 1861 reflected the traditional practices of the era. When the congregation was reconstituted as a Reform congregation in the latter part of the 19th century, the congregation’s practice – to the best of our knowledge – reflected the Reform Movement’s Pittsburgh Platform of 1885.

Jews in America today enjoy an unprecedented degree of acceptance. Contrary to the years preceding World War II, there no longer exists a perceived need to sanitize our practices to conform to societal norms. Especially in the latter decades of the 20th century, Beth Israel’s practice gradually became more traditional. Indeed, the Reform Movement in general is becoming more traditional in its practices.



During the summer, many affluent San Diegans would move into rented tents or cottages in a resort community on Coronado. Shown here are members of the Levi family circa 1928 (left to right): Estelle, Edgar, Selma, Helen, Norman, Ruth, Richard, Adolph and Eleanora. Levi family members still in San Diego today are descendants of Adolph and Eleanora.

Spreckels – was building up the city, and as a result, many more people were attracted to San Diego. By 1906, the population grew to 35,000, more than double that of 1900. After Spreckels’ announcement in December 1906 that he would build a railroad directly eastward to Yuma, Arizona (the railroad was completed in 1910), business activity and population grew even more; by 1910, the population reached nearly 40,000. Consistent with the pattern established in earlier periods, more Jews came into the city as business opportunities increased.

The ensuing rise in Jewish religious life in 1905 was seen in the formation of a new Orthodox congregation – Congregation Tifereth Israel. A group of newly arrived Eastern European Orthodox Jews had received permission from Beth Israel’s officers to conduct traditional High Holy Days services at the Beech Street Temple. The Orthodox group began its worship early, and the Reform group was to begin its services when the traditional service ended.

On Rosh Hashanah the arrangement worked smoothly. However, on Yom Kippur the Orthodox group was still praying when the time arrived for Beth

Israel to begin its Reform worship service. One of Beth Israel’s members asked the leader of the Orthodox group to shorten his service. Irritated at the interruption, the Orthodox group left the temple and went to the leader’s home, where the group apparently finished its worship service. It was at that point that the Orthodox Jews decided they needed their own congregation, even without a building.

Beth Israel’s membership grew gradually as a result of the general growth of the city, which brought with it some Reform-oriented Jews. In 1908, about 22 families constituted Beth Israel’s membership. Services still were held regularly only on the High Holy Days, conducted by Louis Mendelson through 1906, and later by visiting rabbis. The religious school was improved through the guidance of Rabbi Hirsch Werner of Los Angeles, who had come to San Diego to preach during the High Holy Days some years back.^{liv}

In 1908 the B’nai B’rith Lasker Lodge No. 370 formed an anti-defamation committee in response to a disturbing tendency of some local media to label lawbreakers as Jews.

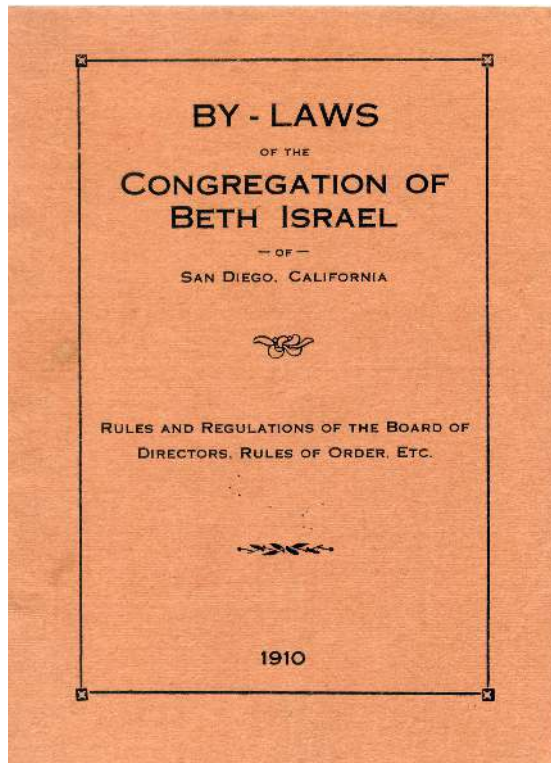
RABBI EMIL ELLINGER ENGAGED AS FULL-TIME RABBI

In the interest of holding regular Shabbat worship again, Beth Israel engaged a full-time rabbi, Emil Ellinger, who came to San Diego around September 1909. Rabbi Ellinger had received his rabbinical education in his native Hungary and his secular education at the University of Vienna. He had been in the United States for some time, serving congregations in Mount Vernon, Indiana; Sioux City, Iowa; Alexandria, Louisiana; and Austin, Texas, and had aligned himself with the Reform Movement.

Rabbi Ellinger reinstated weekly Shabbat services at Beth Israel, and the Beech Street Temple was renovated and rededicated on Friday evening, September 10, 1909. Rabbi Ellinger also brought a high level of Jewish education to the religious school and to adults in the congregation.

SAN DIEGO BECOMES A MILITARY TOWN

In April 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt's Great White Fleet anchored off Coronado and visited San Diego for four days of celebrations, parades and an



When Rabbi Emil Ellinger officiated at the wedding of a Jewish man and a Catholic woman, many in the congregation were outraged, and the board of directors drafted a strong resolution against allowing a Beth Israel rabbi to perform an interfaith wedding.

incredible welcome that left an indelible positive impression on the Navy. Historians credit the city's warm welcome with overcoming the Navy's resistance to locating facilities in San Diego. After the visit of the Great White Fleet, numerous military installations were established in San Diego, and today it is almost impossible to overstate the importance of the Navy to San Diego's growth.

The Great White Fleet – so-called because the 16 U.S. Navy battleships' hulls were painted the peacetime color white – was on a worldwide voyage to promote goodwill and to demonstrate that the United States was now a major sea power. Approximately 16,000 sailors and officers ferried ashore with machine-like precision, since the harbor was too shallow to accommodate the flotilla. This visit was seen as the biggest event in San Diego's history. It significantly influenced the future direction of San Diego's business and opened the door to the development of the aviation and defense industries.

San Diego continued to grow. The Panama California Exposition of 1915–1916, which marked the opening of the Panama Canal, provided the opportunity to greatly expand Balboa Park and construct many Spanish-style buildings. Close to four million people attended the Exposition, most from out of town. Among them was Franklin D. Roosevelt, then assistant secretary of the Navy, who was impressed with San Diego's potential for a Navy base.

U.S. involvement in World War I led to San Diego's becoming an important military town. In 1917, the Naval Air Station was established on North Island, enhancing the Naval presence of warships that docked in the harbor. Soon thereafter, a destroyer base, a Marine base, and the Naval Hospital were added. The Army established a large training camp, Camp Kearny, in San Diego and set up an airfield, Rockwell Field, on North Island. Many Jewish servicemen and some Jewish civilians arrived in the city. By 1918, at the end of World War I, San Diego's population had reached 70,000.

From 1910 to 1918, Beth Israel continued to be the primary organizer of San Diego's Jewish religious life. The congregation grew in number and expanded and improved its activities to provide a solid foundation for congregational life in the years ahead.

In early May 1911, the strongly liberal Rabbi Ellinger touched a nerve in the congregation when he officiated at a wedding between a Jewish man, Stanley F. Schneider, and a Catholic woman, May Elizabeth Kilpatrick. This

“Temple “Beth Israel”

Second and Beech Sts.

BULLETIN NO. 1

1912-1913, C. E., 5673, A. M.

REFORM: Jewish Light and Jewish Life.

Fall Holyday Services New Year

Wednesday evening, Sept. 11th, 8 p. m. Sermon—“As a Tale That is Told.”

Thursday morning, Sept. 12th, 10:00 a. m. Sermon—Repentance.

Atonement

Friday evening, Sept. 20th, 8 p. m. Sermon—The Choice.
Saturday morning, Sept. 21st, 10 a. m. Sermon—Confession.

Saturday afternoon, Sept. 21st, 2 p. m. Memorial Sermon—Immortelles.

Tabernacles

Wednesday evening, Sept. 25th, 8 p. m. Sermon—The Harvest.

Thursday morning, Sept. 26th, 10 a. m. Sermon—The Succah.

Eighth Day of Solemn Assembly

Wednesday evening, Oct. 2nd, 8 p. m. Sermon Life's Inwardness.

Thursday morning, Oct. 3rd, 10 a. m. Sermon—Post Festum.

Hannukah commences December 5th; Purim, March 23rd.
Passover commences April 22nd; Pentecost, June 11th.

Services every Friday evening and Festival evenings at 8 p. m.

Services every Saturday morning, 10:30 a. m.; Festival mornings, 10 a. m.

Addresses will be delivered at every service.

A special series of monthly Friday evening addresses will be delivered on “The Laws of Judaism and Contemporary Life.”

If you desire any particular subject treated or any information on Judaism, consult your Rabbi.

Literary, social and musical societies are in process of formation. Ask your Rabbi about them.

Mother's Club and Ladies' Aid meet every month. Join now, if not a member, and enroll your daughters.

Beth Israel Sisterhood in formation.

Religious School Registration, Sunday morning, Sept. 22nd, 10 to 11 a. m., at the Temple. All children from 5 years up must be registered on that day and accompanied by a parent or guardian. Register your children up to 5 years on Cradle roll.

Let us unite for Jewish worship and education.

MONTAGUE N. A. COHEN,

Rabbi.

Res., 2256 Union St., (bet. Ivy and Juniper).
Tel., Sunset, Main 2334.

event was quickly reported by the *B'nai B'rith Messenger* to its many Southern California Jewish readers, along with the following angry editorial comment:

That Miss Kilpatrick and Mr. Schneider should see fit to become life partners is not surprising, but that a Jewish rabbi should draw up the contract is an anomaly, as it is against the principle of even our most radical reformers.^{lv}

While Beth Israel was a Reform congregation and accustomed to liberally minded rabbis, most of its members retained deep feelings about certain traditions – such as marriage within the Jewish faith – and could not countenance their rabbi violating these traditions. At its May meeting, the directors of the congregation – reflecting the outrage of its 45 member families – began making plans for a special election of a new rabbi, with the intention, evidently, of terminating Rabbi Ellinger's service. The directors also drafted a strong, unequivocal resolution against a Beth Israel rabbi performing an interfaith marriage. Rabbi Ellinger, in August 1911, wrote a letter of resignation to the board, effective January 1912.

RABBI MONTAGUE N.A. COHEN

Rabbi Montague N.A. Cohen arrived in the summer of 1912 to succeed Rabbi Ellinger. Rabbi Cohen was originally from England and attended Manchester Jews' School, Jews' College of London, and University College of London. When he came to the United States, Rabbi Cohen aligned himself with the Reform Movement and served congregations in Tacoma, Washington; Sacramento, California; and Butte, Montana. He was also an active Jewish journalist, contributed to English, Canadian and American newspapers, and while in Tacoma served as associate editor of the *Jewish Tribune*. His editorials appeared frequently in the *B'nai B'rith Messenger*, of which he was associate editor. He was described as “an ardent liberal, a rationalist, a sturdy advocate of American principles and a firm believer in social service and social welfare.”^{lvi}

Rabbi Montague N.A. Cohen's sermons and lectures set a new intellectual standard for the congregation, and he encouraged members to expand the temple's activities beyond prayer services.

Rabbi Cohen's four-year rabbinate at Beth Israel brought solid improvement to the congregation. His stimulating sermons at services set a new intellectual standard. His Friday evening and Saturday morning addresses showed great depth of thought covering theology, politics, literature, and other areas, and at times were reprinted for the readers of the *San Diego Union*.^{lvii} Rabbi Cohen also conducted adult study sessions to deepen his congregants' knowledge of Judaism.

As he had at his congregation in Butte, Montana, Rabbi Cohen brought many new ideas to Beth Israel. In his installation address of September 6, 1912, entitled "The Future of Beth Israel," Rabbi Cohen impressed upon his new congregants the need to make available a full Jewish experience to members of the growing San Diego Jewish community:

... We must to this end come forth out of past provincialism and metropolitanize, do things on a somewhat larger scale, so that we may even create the need of a still larger scale Our membership is on the increase – a natural and permanent increase... We need, therefore, to expand our activities, other than gatherings for temple prayer services. We need to introduce such features as will strengthen our organization. We need the social and literary features for men and women, old and young... We need to thoroughly systematize and coordinate our religious school with parental interest and cooperation. Our ladies – wives and daughters of our members – need to band together under temple auspices as a sisterhood for the furtherance of this work, supplementary to the Mothers Club, which has done noble service . . .^{lviii}

Following this initial charge to the congregation, Rabbi Cohen proceeded to bring to Beth Israel the very things he had mentioned in his opening sermon. In October 1912, the Beth Israel Sisterhood was formed "with comprehensive committees covering every aspect of congregational activity."^{lix} The Sisterhood not only supported the religious school, but also prepared the highly successful congregational Passover seder in 1913. Held at the Wednesday Club House, this seder apparently was the first of its kind in San Diego. Moreover, as Rabbi Cohen accurately predicted in his June report to the

congregation's board of directors, it would become an important fixed event in the years to come.

For Beth Israel's younger set, Rabbi Cohen formed the Beth Israel Young People's Club in October 1914, open to "all the young people over 17 years of age."^{lx} The rabbi took a particular interest in this segment of the congregation, urging the board on more than one occasion to involve these young men and women more actively in congregational life.

Finally, Rabbi Cohen also introduced innovations in the religious school. By 1915, he had divided the school into kindergarten, junior, senior and confirmation grades, as well as a post-confirmation department. In addition, he taught Hebrew during the week. In order to better acquaint the children with Jewish worship, he scheduled special Shabbat services for them during the year.

Attracted by Beth Israel's increased depth and breadth of activity, more Jewish residents joined the congregation. In early 1912, just prior to Rabbi Cohen's arrival, the congregational minutes showed a paying membership of 43 families. By February 1914, that number had shot up to 73. (The number of Jews living in San Diego at this time is not known, but data for 1905 shows 110 Jews and for 1927, 2,000 Jews.^{lxi})

Predictably, a successful congregational rabbi like Rabbi Montague N.A. Cohen would eventually be lured away from San Diego – still isolated from the eastern centers of Jewish activity – to pursue an opportunity in the east. In his June 1916 letter of resignation he wrote:

... I have recently received a call to the pulpit of Congregation Beth Israel, Hazelton, PA., through the recommendation of the President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. He gave every confidence that I shall be happy in my new field of labor, since it is in the very centre of Jewish activity. . .^{lxii}

In its letter of response the board of directors regretfully accepted Rabbi Cohen's resignation and expressed the warm admiration and respect that Rabbi Cohen had earned from the congregation:

... It is with much regret that we learn that the Jews of this community, and more particularly the members of Beth Israel Temple, are to lose the services of their Rabbi, associate, and friend...it is done with the confidence that you are fulfilling a duty to yourself, and

accomplishing the goal for which you are striving. The Trustees feel that in your going, they are losing a valued advisor, one who has strived with them to further the interest of Beth Israel Temple. . .^{lxiii}

Indeed, when Rabbi Cohen departed for Pennsylvania in the summer of 1916, the congregation he left behind was far different from the Beth Israel of four years earlier; not only was its membership significantly larger, but it was also much more active and better organized.

OUTREACH TO JEWISH SAILORS AND SOLDIERS

Rabbi Julius Halprin succeeded Rabbi Cohen on a trial basis in the fall of 1916. Rabbi Halprin had been ordained only a year earlier at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. For this reason the board brought Rabbi Halprin to San Diego for the High Holy Days on a trial basis, and then based on the success of this trial, the congregation elected him full-time rabbi in October 1916.

In the early years of his rabbinate, the young Halprin continued to develop Beth Israel's overall organization, a process which Rabbi Cohen had begun. One of Rabbi Halprin's primary concerns was to promote a stronger communal feeling among the members of the congregation, and he formed a Temple Fellowship Committee in January 1917. He maintained Rabbi Cohen's focus on the young people of the congregation, attempting to stimulate their intellectual interest in Judaism by starting a junior history class in early 1917.

However, the greatest impact of Rabbi Halprin's rabbinate at Beth Israel was that he led the congregation to reach out to the many Jewish soldiers and Navy personnel stationed in San Diego. The United States at this time was directly involved in World War I, and San Diego was already a strategic military center. Beth Israel fulfilled the religious needs of these soldiers and sailors in several ways: many regularly attended the congregation's weekly services, and on the High Holy Days, the men were given seats free of charge and were hosted by congregants. As for the congregation's own young men who had joined the Armed Services, they were given free, honorary membership in the congregation.

It was at this time, during World War I, that a branch of the Jewish Welfare Board was established in San Diego,

led by Chairman Jacob Weinberger. In 1918, a special Jewish Welfare Building was constructed at Camp Kearny for some 450 Jewish soldiers stationed there. This was a place where the soldiers could feel at home as Jews, and where services and activities were held. In 1920, after the war, the building was moved adjacent to Temple Beth Israel, where it was used as a community center.

By the close of 1917, members of Beth Israel had become generally dissatisfied with Rabbi Halprin's service to the congregation. At a December 1917 board of directors meeting, President Adolph Levi reported that many complaints had arisen among the members "having to do with [Halprin's] non-compliance with the by-laws of the congregation."^{lxiv} Accordingly, the secretary was instructed to inform Rabbi Halprin of this discontent among his congregants. Further consideration of the matter occurred at board meetings in January and March, and then at the end of a May meeting, what would be the board's last action in the matter took place:

Discussion followed regarding the dissatisfaction expressed by members of the congregation with Dr. Halprin, and the secretary was instructed to again inform Dr. Halprin of this condition, with a request that he advise the Board of his views.^{lxv}

Recognizing the impossibility of reconciling the situation, Rabbi Halprin's written response to this request in June contained his resignation, effective at the end of August 1918.



Shortly before the November conclusion of World War I, the congregation engaged Rabbi Alexander Segel, who was ordained a few months earlier at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. At this time the congregation numbered about 60 members.

However, the congregation was running at a financial deficit and encountering substantial difficulty paying its bills. In the fall of 1918, in order to make necessary payments, the congregation had to borrow \$250 from the cemetery fund. The massive influenza epidemic in the fall of 1918 exacerbated this difficult financial situation, as

it made it impossible to collect all the members' dues on time. The flu epidemic also significantly hurt attendance at congregational events.

Yet, in the midst of these difficulties, the organization itself, which had been strengthened over the past decade with a regular schedule of worship services, a reinvigorated religious school, two vibrant women's organizations, and a young people's group, remained active. And with this strong, dynamic organization, Beth Israel remained the focal point of San Diego's Jewish religious life.



