

## Temple of Aaron; A synagogue History...

### The Beginnings: 1910–1923

It was *Rosh Hashanah* afternoon, a crisp October day in 1910, and a handful of Orthodox St. Paul Jews had come together to express their common concern for the future of Judaism in the New World. They spoke of the fact that their children and grandchildren, unlike themselves, were being raised and educated in the United States, and they expressed a fear that these young people would lose interest in their religion. They affirmed their conviction that St. Paul Jewry should have a Conservative movement to preserve the basic traditions of their faith while adapting that faith to the demands of twentieth century America.

Three days later, they held a formal meeting at Bowlby Hall in the Hill district with the avowed purpose of insuring “that Judaism should live forevermore.” To accomplish this purpose, they pledged themselves to establish a Conservative synagogue in St. Paul. Their task was a difficult one, for the Conservative movement was so young that there was not yet a Conservative synagogue association to guide them.

Only a week passed before they met again and elected officers and a board of directors—the men who were willing to shoulder the tremendous organizational burden that lay ahead. Joseph Levy was elected president; Louis Orenstein, vice-president; Sam Rubenstein, secretary; R. N. Katz, treasurer; Harry Harris, L. B. Schwartz, Henry Horwitz, J. S. Cohen, M. Rosenholtz, S. J. Goldberg and M. S. Jacobson were named as directors.

These men did not think of themselves as pioneers; they kept no journals, and the only existing records of their deeds are the sets of figures on the yellowed pages of an old ledger. But even figures can tell a story, and these figures show that this group had more than just a dream; they had the drive to make the dream a reality.

The organization was incorporated and the articles filed on September 26, 1912. It was named the Temple of Aaron in memory of Aaron Mark, a St. Paul resident whose name was synonymous with devotion to Judaism.

In the fall of 1913, the congregation rented Ramaley Hall in order to hold the service for the High Holydays. Rabbi Reuben Kaufman, a student at the Jewish Theological Seminary, conducted the service—the first Conservative Jewish service ever held in the city of St. Paul.

By 1914, the lower part of the Temple of Aaron Synagogue building had been constructed at Ashland and Grotto in St. Paul. It was only a basement, but it was to be the beginning, not only of a house of worship, but of a new way of religious life for its congregants. The structure was completed in time to permit holding *Rosh Hashanah* services there. Rabbi Arthur Ginzler was selected as the spiritual head. It was he who instituted the regular sermon at Friday evening services. He also established a Sunday school, where members’ children were taught the principles of Jewish religion, Jewish history, and the meaning of Jewish ceremonies. His 46-member congregation contributed a total of \$759.00 for the year.

On June 25, 1916, the men and women who had worked so tirelessly for so many years assembled with pride and reverence to witness the laying of the cornerstone for the superstructure. Mrs. Aaron Mark, widow of the man for whom the building was named, set the cornerstone in place. The opening address was given by Rabbi Alfred H. Kahn, who had occupied the pulpit since the fall of 1915. Work on the superstructure was continued throughout the summer months, and the consecration service for the new Temple was held on September 17, 1916.

### The Kleinman Years

In 1917, Rabbi Phillip Kleinman became the spiritual leader of the Temple. Rabbi Kleinman’s rabbinate in St. Paul saw other beginnings too. A ten-acre tract of land on the corner of Dale and Larpenteur was purchased in 1918 to be used for the Temple’s cemetery. On Wednesday evening, June 4, 1919, Rabbi Kleinman had the joy of presiding over the first confirmation exercise of 13 class members.

A solid core of congregants was finding more and more that the Temple of Aaron was part of their daily lives. There was the Ladies’ Auxiliary, who paid the Sunday School teachers’ salaries, kept fresh flowers on the pulpit, held ice cream socials and paper



sales, and never seemed to run out of novel ways to help the Temple whenever help was needed. There was a bowling team and a Young People's League, and there were men's and women's Bible classes.

On July 24, 1923, seven years and one month after the laying of the first cornerstone, the final work on the building was begun and a new cornerstone was laid. By this date, the congregation included 250 members. Rabbi Kleinman, looking ahead perhaps to the day when the congregation would outgrow the new building and place still another cornerstone, included in the 1923 cornerstone five mementoes: a 1916 cornerstone laying program, some copies of the Temple bulletin, an invitation to the first Temple Talmud Torah graduation exercises program, and a letter in which he states: "Our purpose was to exalt the Torah and to edify it."

In 1916, the Temple began its own Hebrew school. When Rabbi Kleinman came to St. Paul in 1917, he found the sexton teaching a class of 35 pupils. The rabbi wanted more of his congregants' children to receive a Hebrew education, and he wanted them to be taught by the newest and best methods.

Consequently, in October, 1918, Ida Leviton and Rae Goldberg, seniors at Minneapolis' North High School, were hired. They earned \$40/month, out of which they paid their own streetcar fare, a dime each way (double the five cent intra-city fare). Under the direction of these two girls, the number of students rose to 60.

In 1919, Rabbi Kleinman also hired Louis Gordon, a young man who was to become a legend in the annals of Hebrew education in St. Paul. Gordon dedicated his life to securing the finest possible Hebrew education for all who sought it. In 1921, he became the first Talmud Torah principal, working at that position until ill health forced him to give it up in 1959.



Rabbi Kleinman and Louis Gordon in 1918 launched a new era in Hebrew education for St. Paul, introducing the *Ivrit B'Ivrit*, where classes and readings are given only in the language being taught, rather than relying on translations. Next, Rabbi Kleinman started a tuition scholarship system for the many students who could not pay for lessons, and he instituted a bus system so that students from all over St. Paul could easily attend classes.

Hebrew School was a forerunner of synagogue youth groups like USY. Ample opportunities were provided for fun and creativity. In winter, the corner lot was flooded for ice skating, and in summer, it became a baseball diamond. There were long-remembered special events, such as the play, *In the Days of the Maccabees*. The performance, given entirely in Hebrew, prompted skeptical grandparents to admit beamingly that their grandchildren were learning Hebrew properly after all!

Programs and parties marked every holiday, but students who had completed two years of study didn't need a program to display their talents. For them, there was the Junior Synagogue every Saturday and holiday, with one of the students acting as cantor.

On October 5, 1924, David Blumenfeld, recording secretary of the Hebrew School committee, in a comprehensive report, stated only 15 per cent of the Jewish children of school age in St. Paul were receiving any Hebrew education. "The chief step necessary to extend the usefulness of the school and to insure its continued growth," Blumenfeld declared, "is a suitable school building, and I strongly recommend and urge that such a home for the school be provided in the very near future."

Acting on this recommendation, a committee approved purchase of the property at Holly and Grotto for the construction of a Temple Hebrew School Building. Many thought that the building should be underwritten by the Temple. But by 1926, with children of non-members attending Hebrew School outnumbering children of members by nearly two to one, the idea of a community Hebrew School found some advocates. This idea had been considered intermittently since 1920 by both the Temple and groups from other schools, but it was unable to gain wide support. As a result, plans proceeded for a school built and run by the Temple of Aaron.

On Monday evening, December 3, 1928, the members of the congregation at a special meeting decided the time had come to construct the new Temple Hebrew School building. But, as the Jewish population became more and more decentralized, the idea of a centrally located Talmud Torah and meeting place now seemed increasingly desirable to Jews throughout the city. Therefore, a Jewish Educational Center Association was formed, incorporating the Capital City Hebrew School, the West Side Hebrew School, and the Temple of Aaron Hebrew School. In October, 1929, the

Temple of Aaron transferred the three lots on Holly and Grotto to the new Association. In December, 1929, ground was broken for the new building and on October 26, 1930, the Talmud Torah transferred to its new quarters.

### The Years of Decision: 1923–1930

From 1923 to 1930, the Temple of Aaron struggled for survival as a Conservative synagogue. Established as a Conservative congregation whose members' roots sprang from Orthodoxy, the congregation passed through a period in which it had to decide either to cleave to that Orthodoxy or to develop on its own into a genuinely Conservative group.

There were many problems, all of which perhaps seemed thorny at the time. In the long view, some of them now appear to have been less serious. Take the question of women directors of the synagogue board. At the annual meeting of September 16, 1923, Max Friedland read a note from the Ladies' Auxiliary asking that two women be allowed to become members of the board of directors. The constitution of the United States had been amended only four years earlier to grant women the right to vote, and already they were sufficiently confident of their new role to ask for membership on the synagogue board. The men, however, still unready to accept this new role, refused the ladies' request. Repeating its request in March, 1924, the Auxiliary was turned down once more. In October, 1924, Mr. Friedland (undoubtedly prompted by his wife who was a member of the Auxiliary) proposed an amendment to the Temple by-laws which would permit two women directors to be named. After two years of conflict, in June, 1925, Mrs. H. Hallock and Mrs. J. N. Bernstein were accepted as the first women directors.



Other problems were solved more easily. One of the founders of the Temple, Samuel Grosby was its first recording secretary—a post to which he was unanimously elected every year for 25 years. Grosby was also in charge of seat assignments, which were made until 1957 on the basis of seniority. The man in charge of assigning seats had to be patient, tactful, and even-tempered. Sam Grosby was the ideal man for the job. Each night for an entire month before the High Holidays, Sam and his daughter Phyllis would work on the seating chart. “No, no,” he would say to Phyllis about some particular arrangement. “Don’t sit her next to her sister—they’ll talk all during the service.” Or he would caution, “You mustn’t put those two men together. They don’t get along at all.”

In August, 1926, Rabbi Kleinman resigned to accept a call from a congregation in Milwaukee. Rabbi Herbert Parzen came to St. Paul in September to officiate at High Holyday services and to be interviewed as a potential permanent rabbi.

Rabbi Parzen recognized at once that the Temple was struggling between Orthodoxy and Conservatism, with Orthodoxy winning out. He saw that the services interested few men and women between the ages of 18 and 25, and he felt that unless it appealed to that age group, the Temple could not survive. Conservative congregations everywhere were facing the same problem, and Rabbi Parzen wanted his position clearly understood before he would accept the pulpit. Over and over he repeated that he would not conduct an Orthodox service. He demanded full freedom to conduct services in the manner he thought best, and asked for a free hand in making the changes he felt necessary. The board accepted Rabbi Parzen's terms, and on September 26, 1926, a special congregational meeting unanimously elected the spiritual head of the Temple.

Rabbi Parzen set out at once to introduce the changes he felt were necessary. He reorganized the Sunday School, added women members to the choir, and organized an activity committee. He modernized Friday evening services and instead of hewing to the traditional sermon that consisted of interpretations of passages from the Bible, he delivered sermons on ethics and morality. He invited groups of young people to his home for informal gatherings, and these young people grew very fond of him and began attending Friday evening services in greater numbers than ever before.

But while the young people and many older people gave their wholehearted support to Rabbi's proposals, a group among the older congregants found these changes shocking and even heretical. These people were not simply opposed to any change; they were honestly afraid that these changes were wrong. At the 1927 annual congregational meeting, Rabbi Parzen begged the congregation to decide what it was to become. He said that Jewish life could not be hermetically sealed in a preserving jar. He reminded the congregation that Judaism must adopt sound new ideas if it was to play a fruitful part in their lives.

In spite of the tremendous efforts of Rabbi Parzen to make the members see that he was only working to help them, the turmoil within the congregation continued. Rabbi Parzen resigned in December, 1927, after a sojourn that had been brief and stormy. Although he had few tangible achievements to point to, he may have made one of the most significant contributions to the Temple's history, for Rabbi Parzen forced the congregation to take an honest look at itself. As a result of this look, it decided to become a truly Conservative congregation.

## The Cohen Years

Determined that the cleavage in its midst be permanently sealed, the whole congregation united behind Rabbi Parzen's successor, Rabbi Herman N. Cohen. In turn, Rabbi Cohen tried to help draw the congregation together. He began by issuing a weekly bulletin.

New practices were introduced. On Friday, October 12, congregational singing was added to the services to give the congregants greater opportunity for participation. Simon Pugatch, the Temple's cantor as well as a Talmud Torah faculty member, had worked for weeks with the children of the upper grades of the school, and now their voices sang out the traditional melodies sure and strong. The rest of the congregation joined in timidly at first, but the children's delight in singing was contagious, and soon both young and old were singing in a manner which left no doubt that congregational singing had arrived to stay.

With the year 1929 came more changes, more activity and greater unity. Programs were presented over station WCCO for both *Purim* and *Sukkot*; the Ladies' Auxiliary adopted a new constitution and changed its name to Women's League; and so many people attended High Holyday services that at least 100 people had to stand. On October 19, 1928, Boy Scout Troop No. 53 met for the first time in the Temple building.

In June, 1929, the *Bat Mitzvah* ceremony was introduced. Most Conservative synagogues, including the Temple of Aaron, already had a confirmation service for girls, but it was felt that a group ceremony could not hold the meaning comparable to a ceremony in which only one child would participate. The *Bat Mitzvah* was for girls what the *Bar Mitzvah* ceremony had always been for boys.

Music was playing a more and more important part in the Temple service, and the congregants beamed with pride on the Friday evening in January, 1930, when the Temple of Aaron chorus made its first appearance, directed by Louis Melamed.

The Temple of Aaron's struggle for survival had ended. The Temple had endured and had achieved a solid strength.

## Trying Times: 1931–1934

It was warm in St. Paul that October day in 1931. Rabbi Cohen rolled up his shirt sleeves and sat down to his typewriter to write the sermon for Friday evening services. He looked at the blank sheet of paper and frowned. On the Jewish calendar a New Year had begun, and from all indications it looked like a hard one. The Depression was in its third year. Only the month before, 305 banks had closed. In Germany, Hitler's Brown Shirts were becoming more and more powerful. American business was weakening faster than ever, and several large corporations had just announced a 10% wage cut.

What could the rabbi say to guide these people whom he had grown to love during these past three years? He thought back over 1930—the year just past. Times hadn't been quite as hard as they were now, but they were hard enough. Absently, he leafed through his 1930 appointment book; and as the notations on its pages caught his eye, his frown changed to a smile, for his notations told mostly of happy things, not sad ones.

*May 4, 1930 — the Carnival Bazaar. Put on by the congregational family to raise funds for the much-needed redecorating of the synagogue.*

*May 19, 1930 — the Big Debate. Sponsored by the Men's Club on the question, "Resolved — That a Jewish University Be Established in America." Two hundred people watched the Temple team of Miriam Pusin, Lewis E. Solomon, and A. T. Levin speak for the negative, while a team from Beth El Synagogue in Minneapolis took the affirmative. December 1, 1930 — the Forum. An outstanding date in Rabbi Cohen's mind. It was the night the Men's Club sponsored the "Forum for Religious Discussion," held at the St. Paul Auditorium. The four speakers and their topics were: Clarence Darrow, "Why I Am an Agnostic"; Quinn O'Brien, well known Chicago attorney, "Why I Am a Catholic"; J.W. Hollard of St. Paul, "Why I Am a Protestant"; and Rabbi Cohen, "Why I Am a Jew."*

Rabbi Cohen then thumbed through his 1931 calendar to remind himself of the most enjoyable event of that year. It was the Women's League's production of *The Jazz Singer* at the Jewish Educational Center on January 26,

1931. *The Jazz Singer* had been regarded as one of the finest theatrical productions when it appeared on the Broadway stage with George Jessel and in the movies with Al Jolson playing the leading role. But the Temple cast drew cheers and applause unsurpassed by any professionals. The money earned from this successful production went to the hard-pressed Temple, to be used wherever it was most needed.

Rabbi Cohen began to write his sermon, which he titled "From Chaos to Order and Return." It was based on the story of creation, the progress from chaos to order. In the spiritual realm, Rabbi Cohen wrote, "Our sages spoke of the Temple as having been built, then destroyed, and ultimately rebuilt." He concluded, "In trying times, religious faith . . . will sustain man, until the world can be rebuilt."

On December 8, 1931, 35 young people met to organize the Junior Congregation, open to young men and women over 20. The group grew rapidly. From the outset, the Junior Congregation was clearly a training ground for the future leaders of the Jewish community.

Meanwhile, throughout the country, social conditions were growing steadily worse. The average number of unemployed people in the United States that year was between 12 1/2 and 13 million. Men were using up the money they had saved throughout a lifetime, borrowing on their life insurance, selling whatever could be sold. Walking down the streets in St. Paul, one saw "For Rent" signs in store window after store window. Rabbi Cohen asked that his salary be cut by \$2,000.00 a year, and the sexton followed by requesting a cut in *his* salary.

One of the hardest jobs in 1932 fell to the board of directors, which was trying to do so much with so little. President Herman J. Butwinick had the courage and tenacity to undertake the job of president of the congregation during the difficult years of 1929 through 1932. Perhaps no one knew better than he what a tremendous struggle it was just to keep the Temple doors open during those years; yet he always spoke confidently and hopefully of the synagogue's future.

Although fund raising was important and time consuming during the Depression years, it was not the solo focus of Temple activity. On Friday, October 28, 1932, the first *Bat Mitzvah* ceremony took place at the Temple. Alys Ruth Pritzker, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Leo Pritzker, was the first to be *Bat Mitzvah*. Rabbi Cohen said about the *Bat Mitzvah*, "It implies that Conservative Judaism recognizes the value of inducting girls as well as boys into the synagogue. Jewish obligations rest upon both sexes, and the religious influence should play a vital part in the life of the Jewish women. We hope that the *Bat Mitzvah* will become an established practice in our own congregation."

Another happy event took place on Sunday, December 25, 1932, when Dorothy Frishberg and Philip Moss became the first young couple to be married at the Temple.

On Friday, January 13, 1933, a new tradition was begun—the *Oneg Shabbat* hour following the religious service. The hour was devoted to discussions and group singing. The subject discussed at that first *Oneg Shabbat* was "Technocracy," an economic theory that was suddenly sweeping a nation desperate for an economic panacea.

In March, 1933, a new administration came into office in Washington. As Congress passed reams of legislation aimed at providing economic relief. Optimism grew. Rabbi Cohen, in fact, decided that times had improved sufficiently for him to take a long deferred trip to Palestine. Rabbi and Mrs. Cohen and their son, Ellis, sailed for Palestine on the S.S. Washington on July 5. When they returned just before the High Holydays, Rabbi Cohen was moved to write: "The thought of a New Year inspires courage and hope. We turn over a new page and we anticipate to write thereon a record of achievement and progress. My stay in Palestine has imbued me with a great deal of hope for the coming year. The return of the Jew to his ancient homeland, the zeal and enthusiasm with which he works to regenerate that land, the revival of the Hebrew language as a vernacular, the contentment and happiness with which the Jew in Palestine lives—all these are nothing short of miraculous. We feel inspired and venture to hope that all the problems of the world, economic, political and spiritual, will advance to a solution during the coming year." This was a forerunner of many congregational trips to the future State of Israel.

The foremost function of the Temple of Aaron then, as always, was its function as a house of God. But by 1934 the Temple had clearly taken on the role of a center of culture as well. Music, dramatics, lectures, and discussions were integrally related in every group meeting.

Adult education programs for the congregation-at-large included a concert of liturgical and Jewish folk music by Cantor P. Pinchick, celebrated New York singer. The most unusual cultural project of the year, instigated by the Men's Club under its president, Harry Wolkoff, was an institute on Jewish history. Led by Professor A.L. Sachar, executive director of all *B'nai Brith* Hillel Foundations and nationally known authority on Jewish history, the institute was held on three successive days.



As 1934 drew to a close, magazines throughout the nation were printing articles about how the Depression had affected religious institutions. The Temple of Aaron, like other religious institutions, had seen its members and its physical plant suffer from financial hardship. But spiritually, the Temple had flourished. Men and women had worked as never before—and enjoyed it. Strength of character was developed where it had not even been suspected to exist. And Rabbi Cohen's words in 1931 had proven true: "In trying times, religious faith as emanates from the House of God will sustain men, until the world can be rebuilt."

### The Silver Jubilee and After: 1935–1945

Although the "second 25" began in the heart of the Great Depression, the Temple of Aaron's work and the achievement of its organizations and individual members continued unabated. The period from 1935 to 1945 was marked by at least three great milestones. The first, of course, was the Jubilee Year. The second was the burning of the Temple's mortgage. The third, which left no one unaffected, was the cataclysm of World War II.

The Silver Jubilee Year saw a new membership drive with a goal of 100 new members. A Jubilee Book outlining the history of the congregation and its development was issued. On the date of the celebration, April 26, 1936, members attended a Jubilee dinner, planned by the Women's League. During the dinner program, Rabbi Cohen charged the congregation to give thanks and to realize three things: ". . . that Jewish life has gained a foothold in America and is becoming stronger at a time when Judaism is losing ground in European countries; that we are developing a type of Jewish life in this country which harmonizes with our modern civilization, thus demonstrating to the future generations of Jews, and that the pessimism of a few decades ago has completely vanished."

Two important building programs ushered in the "second 25." Plans for a chapel at the Temple of Aaron cemetery had been drawn up late in 1934, and actual construction had been started in December of that year. Plans called for an auditorium seating about 100 people. The dedication ceremonies on September 15, 1935, climaxed 10 years of effort, and the project was called the Leifman Chapel in recognition of Sam Leifman's great help in making this a reality. The other project, the construction of a balcony in the main auditorium of the synagogue, was begun three months later. The new balcony made it possible to increase membership to 450.

In 1938 another "first" occurred, when Cantor Maurice Goldberg introduced the practice of having boys of *Bar Mitzvah* age officiate as Cantor at *Shaharit* services on Saturday mornings, adding public service to the *Bar Mitzvah* boy's reading of the Torah. Under Cantor Goldberg, the first boy to participate as cantor at *Shaharit* services on the Saturday of his *Bar Mitzvah* was Morton Frishberg. Two years later, in 1940, young boys were beginning to conduct the *Musaf* service on Saturday. Cantor Goldberg soon organized a mixed voice choir, too.

In November, 1942, Cantor Goldberg found it necessary to take a leave of absence for the remainder of the year and George Pomeranz, who 15 years earlier had served as cantor, was appointed interim cantor for Friday night and Saturday morning services. The following spring a number of cantorial candidates were interviewed; and by autumn, the unanimously chosen candidate was Ben G. Nosowsky, who had served congregations in San Francisco for more than 12 years. During this period, the choir was reorganized.

In addition to the Jubilee celebration and the developments growing out of it, the Temple observed a second major milestone during the decade following its Jubilee. This was the burning of the Temple's mortgage. At the 1943 *Yom Kippur* services, members of the congregation presumably pledged sufficient funds to make this possible. The November, 1943 Bulletin proudly stated: "Sunday, December 26, (will be) destined to go down as one of the outstanding dates in the annals of the Temple of Aaron congregation. It will be the occasion of the burning of the mortgage, which for more than 13 years has weighed heavily upon our synagogue building."

Rabbi Cohen believed that the Temple was serving its members only in a limited way; he felt that the structure should be more than a place for religious services; it should be a cultural and social center as well, functioning for the well-being of its members. In accord with this desire to make services more meaningful, the hour for the Friday evening service was moved from 8:15 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. in January, 1943, to encourage members to gather in "Synagogue Circles" in private homes for a social hour following the service. These discussion groups were organized to build the attendance on Friday nights and to foster increased discussion and a more informed congregation.

Changes were made also in the Temple of Aaron religious school. In 1938, one day of weekly classes was added to the Sunday session for grades six, seven and eight of the Sunday School. As a result, instruction was considerably improved. A ninth year was added to the elementary department, so that confirmation would follow ten years of work (including kindergarten). The *Shabbat* service was lengthened and intensified and attendance at *Shabbat* services were made compulsory for the upper grades. In 1942, the education department inaugurated a cultural program of Jewish studies for Jewish high school students so that teenagers might get a fuller sense of the Judaic tradition.

Organizations became increasingly important during the 1935–45 period. The Temple of Aaron *Bar Mitzvah* boys formed a new group in 1936, participating in special services on Sunday mornings and taking part in athletic competitions. In March, 1937, after an absence of two years, Boy Scout Troop No. 53 returned to the Temple of Aaron and, under Milton Shilkroun, Scoutmaster, announced the wish to affiliate with the synagogue, followed shortly afterward by the Temple of Aaron Cub Pack 2 which became one of the outstanding Cub Scout groups in St. Paul.

A new girl's group, called the Temple of Aaron Leagues, was organized in October, 1937, to cooperate with Women's League and to present cultural programs. The Young People's League succeeded the Junior Congregation in 1939, instituting a series of open forum discussions to follow the Friday evening services.

Perhaps the most active of the Temple of Aaron's organizations, along with the Men's Club, was the Women's League, which in 1936 became affiliated with the National Women's League. Lists of functions and figures actually say very little in describing the work of the League, since these appear year after year in each annual report. Card parties, rummage sales, luncheons, programs—whatever the fund-raising event, quotas were always met. Gradually the functions of the Women's League broadened beyond just fund-raising. In 1938, with Rabbi Cohen as teacher, the Women's League started its beginners' Hebrew class. A class in Bible studies also was instituted, along with reviews and readings of important books.

But in the broader Jewish community, Jews were being killed by the millions all over Europe. And indeed, on May 16, 1943, the Temple of Aaron was the scene of an extraordinary service conducted by all the rabbis of St. Paul for Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jews. The service was held in response to the proclamation by the Synagogue Council of America that the period between Passover and *Shavuot* be a period of mourning and intercession in behalf of Jews in Hitler-occupied lands in Europe.

## The Temple of Aaron in World War II

"For the first time in 25 years, we are holding the annual meeting of the Temple of Aaron congregation when our country is at war. This tremendous fight is bound to affect every person and organization in this land." Those were the prophetic, opening sentences spoken by David Simon, president of the Temple of Aaron, at its annual meeting on April 29, 1942.

By the fall of 1939, all Europe had mobilized for war, and the members of the Temple began to mobilize in their own way with acts of charity and help. Money was poured into the support of great organizations, and Temple members were urged to support the Jewish National Fund to buy up needed land in Palestine for colonization by Jews escaping from western central Europe. This was perhaps the congregation's first active peace effort.

More than a year before this country was drawn into the war, members of the Women's League began to devote some of their time to aiding the "peace effort," by forming a Red Cross Unit which sponsored many projects including knitting and sewing. After Pearl Harbor, the Women's League Red Cross Unit prepared surgical dressings, sold defense stamps to the children of the Sunday School, and generally helped raise morale in conformity with the request of the Civilian Defense Committee. The Women's League work for the Red Cross had increased by February, 1942 with 164 women were attending the weekly surgical dressing meetings, working a total of 760 woman-hours and rolling 2,826 bandages with tenderness, love, and a prayer that these would help heal the wounded on the battlefields. Packages from home always were welcomed by servicemen and the sons and husbands of the Temple of Aaron members were additionally blessed by receiving gift boxes from the Women's League for both *Rosh Hashanah* and *Hanukah* of 1943.

These typical acts of kindness were not confined exclusively to the Women's League, however; and the congregation opened its doors in 1940 for High Holyday services to Jewish refugees in St. Paul. In March, 1941, the Temple quickly responded to the first appeal by the St. Paul division of the Army and Navy Committee, urging every Jewish family to invite a draftee at Fort Snelling to a *Shabbas* meal on Friday nights. The Women's League coordinated these arrangements. By the time *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* rolled around in 1942, a large number of Temple of Aaron members had already entered the service, leaving a void at home. Just as many of them received kindnesses from Jewish families in other communities, so servicemen from other parts of the country stationed in the Twin Cities area were welcomed to the Temple of Aaron. In cooperation with the Army and Navy Committee, many members of the Temple opened their homes to these boys.

President Franklin Roosevelt, just after Pearl Harbor, proclaimed that New Year's Day, 1942, be observed as a day of prayer. The solemnity of this special service at the Temple of Aaron was marked by a pledge which every person in the congregation repeated:

*"I solemnly offer to my country, the United States of America, all that I am and all that I possess. In the words of the Declaration of Independence, 'we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.' I*

*reaffirm my love for America and its ideals of freedom and democracy, justice and peace. To obtain these, I am prepared to make every sacrifice. I pledge my allegiance to the government of the United States, to our flag and to all who are in authority. In the war we are now waging against the Axis powers, I offer to serve in any capacity. I call upon God to witness this pledge."*

And the responsibility continued to grow with special services and acts of individuals who contributed in many ways. Special prayers were recited every Friday night for each boy who was about to be inducted into the armed forces. In addition to his synagogue duties, Rabbi Cohen volunteered to serve for a period as civilian chaplain at Fort Snelling for the Twin Cities Army and Navy Committee and the Jewish Welfare Board. Mr. and Mrs. Sol Berde presented the Temple with a plaque bearing the names of 117 Temple of Aaron men who had gone into the armed forces—a list that swelled to more than 200 by the war's end.

In 1943, the all-Jewish Women's Bond Drive was organized and participants maintained a special bond-selling booth at each meeting of the St. Paul Association of Jewish Women's Organizations and held classes of instruction for all volunteer bond sales women. The Temple's Scout Troop No. 53 distinguished itself particularly for cooperating in the scrap collection drives and for promoting civilian defense by serving as air raid messengers during trial blackouts. Through appeals by the Temple, members participated in a clothing collection by UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), and morale-boosting for the "women left behind" was provided by the organization of the Servicemen's Wives and Sweethearts Club.

By April 1945, the end was in view, and preparations for the V-E day were already being published in the Temple Bulletin. Rabbi Cohen declared that when V-E Day was announced, a service will be held in the synagogue immediately. It is not difficult to imagine even now that such planning made morale soar to new heights. It made the final month before V-E Day almost bearable. Yet for many, V-E Day never came. The greatest single loss to the country was memorialized on the afternoon of Saturday, April 1, 1945, when 1,000 persons assembled in the Temple of Aaron to pay tribute to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, at the precise hour when funeral services were being held for the late president in Washington, D.C.

But this national sadness was diminished in part as the young men began at last to come home from the war. It was a joyous evening at the Temple of Aaron, when on April 25, 1945, a reception was held to honor the earliest arrivals from overseas: Lt. Jack Abrahamson, Sgt. Jerry Bachrach, S2/c Milton Blumenfeld, Lt. Irvine Karon, Lt. Herbert Leifman, Capt. Norton S. Lieberman, and Lt. Hy Schumeister. More than 400 people came to rejoice in their safe return.

Following V-E Day, the attention of the world turned to the Pacific campaigns. On August 31, 1945, when the first Temple bulletin for the fall season came off the presses, the rabbi's weekly message carried the one-world title: "PEACE." The era of World War II had ended.

### **The Postwar Years: 1946–1952**

A period of great readjustment, both physical and spiritual, climaxed by renewed zeal best describes the six or seven years immediately following the war.

The Temple of Aaron congregation grew at an unprecedented rate. The boys were home from the wars and now they were men, many of them with families. Room had to be made for them in the synagogue as well as in the community, and neither was an easy job. Many sought membership in the congregation. Thus, 1946 saw the highest attendance to date at High Holiday services, which also became more meaningful to the younger members through the introduction of a new prayerbook using an increased amount of English text. At the end of 1946, the consecration ceremony for children in the lower grades of the religious school was initiated to add religious significance to the early Jewish education of the congregation's children.

In 1947, another religious institution, the *Oneg Shabbat*, was reintroduced largely through the efforts of Cantor Nosowsky. Every Saturday afternoon, the Temple's *Oneg Shabbat* featured open discussions, question-and-answer periods, and group singing.

The *Bar Mitzvah* ceremony also underwent some changes during the postwar years. The first of these came in 1947. Up to that time, the ceremony had been confined to the Saturday morning service. From then on, the *Bar Mitzvah* boy also chanted the *Kiddush* on Friday evening, and on Saturday, he led the *Musaf* service, in addition to reading a portion of the *Torah* and the *Haftarah*.

In November 1948, the Minnesota Rabbinical Association in the name of Twin City rabbis issued the following pronouncement dealing with Jewish wedding ceremonies: "Marriage is a sacred covenant, hallowed



by traditional prayers which bind two people unto each other before God and man. Only the sanctuary of the home or the sanctuary of the synagogue is an appropriate setting for so sacred a service. We, the rabbis of the Twin Cities, after due consideration, in accord with the spirit of our tradition, and to maintain the dignity of the Jew in our community, have resolved and do hereby declare that after March 1, 1949, we shall not officiate at weddings held outside the synagogue or home."

A new project was launched in January, 1950 to have more congregants participate in the daily services. A breakfast gettogether, featuring a guest speaker, was incorporated into the Sunday service. The first such breakfast attracted 75 men from *Bar Mitzvah* age to grandfathers. This gathering marked the birth of the popular Tallit and Tefillin Club.

The long-standing tradition of reading the names of members' loved ones during memorial services was eliminated beginning on *Yom Kippur*, 1950. Earlier that same year, Rabbi Cohen had introduced the use of the *Sephardic* pronunciation in reading the *Torah* in the synagogue. This followed a pattern employed in Israel. The action followed a resolution passed by the Rabbinical Assembly of America urging Conservative congregations to adopt the *Sephardic* pronunciation in the ritual of the synagogue.

As some practices were eliminated and others modified, still other customs were restored. Thus, according to Jewish tradition in Biblical times, a new mother expressed her gratitude by offering an animal sacrifice at the altar of God. In later centuries, the new mother came to the synagogue and recited a prayer of thanksgiving. Resurrecting this practice, the Temple of Aaron in 1951 regularly invited every new mother to come to *Shabbat* evening services soon after the birth of her child to have the event recognized by appropriate prayer.

The position of the Temple's younger generation became an ever-increasing cause for concern during this period. For those still receiving their education, Rabbi Cohen felt that the one-day-a-week religious school should give way to a more intensive program, one that would offer Hebrew, Bible study, religious services, and study of our prayer book and its contents. By 1951, a full year had been added to the curriculum of the Sunday school, but was clear that young people were still not being adequately trained for synagogue participation. Among the other changes proposed was a Saturday morning service conducted by the young people under the guidance of the rabbi and the teachers, with transportation provided inexpensively to encourage attendance.

Attempts were also made to create a warm social atmosphere in the Temple for its young people. In the fall of 1946, an organization was formed to bring together young married couples for the purpose of developing greater attachment to Jewish life. In two years, the Mr. and Mrs. Club, stressing social and cultural activities, had evolved. More than 200 attended the first meeting. But even more vigorous steps were needed. Temple President, M. H. Goodman, unblinkingly pointed out that this temple had lost its social prestige among Jewish young people in the community. He asked, "Are we to lose the best we have and permit other synagogues to affiliate them, or are we to do something about it?"

According to Rabbi Cohen, the problem arose partly because of inadequate physical facilities. He pointed out that since the end of the War, the Temple of Aaron had been unable to achieve normal growth. The synagogue simply could not seek new members because it did not have the space to accommodate them. The solution was obvious: the Temple must at once lay plans to build a new synagogue large enough to meet the religious, educational, and social requirements of both old and new members. The plan when drawn up provided that the building at Ashland and Grotto be retained; hence, a second rabbi would have to be engaged, and a new era would begin for the Temple of Aaron.

Almost immediately, guest rabbis became candidates for the new position. One of these young rabbis had distinguished himself in conducting the assembly hall High Holyday services in 1948 while in his final year at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He returned in 1951 to conduct these services again and to share the main pulpit with Rabbi Cohen during *Rosh Hashanah*. That young rabbi was Bernard S. Raskas.

### **1951–1960: New Beginnings**

So it was in October of 1951, that Rabbi Raskas of St. Louis and recent spiritual leader of a congregation in Euclid, Ohio, was appointed assistant rabbi of the Temple of Aaron. His record spoke for itself. As a senior at the Seminary, Rabbi Raskas had been president of his class. He had taken postgraduate work at Western Reserve University. His religious school at Euclid was regarded as one of the best in the entire Cleveland area. And at the Temple of Aaron, his energies would be channeled into areas where they were most sorely needed: strengthening and developing the religious school in its various activities, formulating programs for youth groups, participating with Rabbi Cohen in the

countless matters that would eventually make a finer and more vigorous Temple of Aaron. The formation of a Jewish library at the Temple was only the first of Rabbi Raskas' many contributions to the congregation

With the groundwork for a larger synagogue laid, plans for the old building were still under discussion. Numerous plans were offered, but all of them were ruined overnight for on April 8, 1952, a fire began during the very early hours of the morning. By noon, the synagogue lay in ruins. Thus, almost 40 years of service were abruptly halted. Almost immediately, offers of facilities poured in from Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic institutions and the city of St. Paul. With gratitude for all these offers, the Temple of Aaron congregation accepted the invitation of the Jewish Educational Center to use its facilities for religious services

The board of directors almost immediately began planning a new Temple of Aaron in the Highland Park area. They assigned Ben Freeman, Sam Miller, Hy Goldberg, Jerome Butwinick, Ben Rivkin, and Herbert Leifman with the task of finding a new site. An editorial in the Temple Bulletin stated: "The time for weeping over the ruins is past . . . A new, more beautiful and more-serviceable Temple of Aaron will rise from the ashes."

### **1956: Marking The Start Of The Highland Park Jubilee Era**

Rabbi Raskas took charge of the New Building Fund Campaign and worked closely with architect Percival Goodman for a unique Jewish architectural masterpiece, "a contemporary Torah Crown set in the earth." Paul Spicer, George Rutman, S. David Greenberg, Jacob Locke, and "Kokie" Goldenberg headed the volunteer efforts needed for financing and construction. Ground was broken in 1954, construction began in 1955, the cornerstone setting took place on September 30, 1956. Bertram Getsug voluntarily supervised the project engineering on a daily basis. The formal dedication took place on December 14, 1956 and continued throughout the next six months. Among the first dedications were

- Max Stein Good Neighbor Room
- Leifman Family Chapel
- Shirley Schleiff Greenberg Memorial Alcove
- S. David Greenberg Reception Room, followed shortly thereafter by dedication of
- Sam E. Smith Library
- Capp Family Lounge.

The celebration continued into the following year, starting with an art exhibit and continuing with programs on contemporary Jewish music, literature, theology, and even Jewish humor.

Parts of the story by Janet Kroll printed in the December 21, 1956 issue of the American Jewish World telling of the Temple's dedication bear reprinting here:

"It seemed as if the whole of Minnesota's countryside rejoiced and lent its tranquil tenor to the dedicatory rites of the new Temple of Aaron last weekend. . . .

The new \$800,000 edifice fits serenely within the winding curves of the landscape and already has an air of belonging . . . It beckons to all as a shrine of the spirit and its abiding place.

"It tells the story of the growth of St. Paul's Jewish community, the farsightedness of its leadership and the devotion and loyalty of a congregation that kept united through many vicissitudes, but was always keeping step with the evolution of Judaism on the American scene."

As we celebrate this building's Jubilee, I believe that these words are still true. The article continues:

"At the opening Friday night evening services, some 1200 worshippers heard Dr. Herman M. Cohen, rabbi emeritus, preach the first service on the theme of "Braisheit—In the Beginning," in which he traced the history of the congregation. Rabbi Philip Kleinman, Portland, Ore., a former spiritual leader, spoke at the first Sabbath devotions the following morning.

"Eight hundred persons attended the community dedication service Sunday afternoon. The Temple of Aaron choir, led by Cantor Ben G. Nosowsky, sang psalms of thanksgiving in spirited and exalted tones and members of the Twin City rabbinate assisted in the dedicatory prayers . . .

"An impressive moment was the presentation by Architect Percival Goodman, New York, of the completed edifice to Paul M. Spicer, building committee chairman and synagogue vice president. . . Ben Freeman, congregation

president, received the key of the completed synagogue from Paul Spicer and thanked 'the team' that made this dream a reality."

Rabbi Raskas brought a new focus on the place of the Temple of Aaron in the context of the Twin Cities and the world. All during the decade, he wrote about important topics, from the Supreme Court's decision outlawing segregation to the open occupancy code, to speaking out in 1959 about pollution, atomic fallout and the need for youth to learn foreign languages. He taught Jewish education classes, including "Judaism and Psychiatry," paved the way for women to have the opportunity to vote for the Temple Board for the first time in 1957, and was president of the Minnesota Rabbinical Association in 1958.

With the help of lay leaders, Rabbi Raskas brought in outstanding talent and intellect for the congregation and the community, including Jan Peerce in 1957 and the Jewish theologian of our generation, Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel. The artistic and intellectual programming did not stop with music: In 1958, Temple of Aaron received the United Synagogue of America Solomon Schechter Award for an outstanding program of creative arts in disseminating teachings of Judaism. Louis Poses and Harry Gottesman were added to the staff in 1959 to enrich regular services as Services Director and Torah Reader, respectively.

### 1960S: Community Engagement

The 1960s started with a look backward at the congregation as it celebrated its 50-year Jubilee, led by Jerome Butwinick, Donald Swartz, Frank Schaffer, and Mirel Marvy – and a letter of congratulations from President Dwight Eisenhower. The Congregational Jubilee included a Founder's Day celebration, which included numerous past-presidents and a procession of surviving charter members. Many descendants of those same charter members are still at Temple of Aaron today, as the list on pages 112–117 demonstrates.

In the November 28, 1960 Temple Bulletin, Rabbi Raskas wrote, "As I look forward to the celebration of Founders' Day, I am deeply stirred and moved when I contemplate what our founders have done for us. Without the foundation which they laid, we would never have the vital, dynamic and effective synagogue in which we are privileged to worship and gather today. I anticipate expressing my gratitude for all they have done for us.

"But even as I do this, I am equally impressed with the caliber and stature of our present day leadership of our synagogue. The efforts and constant devotion of our Executive Committee is truly remarkable."

Rabbi Raskas might well have spoken the same words of today's leadership. He also mentioned the Board's leadership in a campaign to raise \$237,000 to retire the Temple's mortgage. Fundraising doesn't change over the years, either!

Creativity reigned in this decade. Rabbi Raskas introduced the first contemporary service for the second day of Rosh Hashanah in 1963, wrote the narration for an original cantata to honor the memory of the late President John F. Kennedy, started the School of Adult Jewish Studies (1961), and began a new form of Torah reading on the second day of Rosh Hashanah, as well as the contemporary Musaf service (1964). The congregation's response to these innovations was overwhelmingly positive and so he expanded them even further with a specially-created Hanukat Bar Mitzvah ceremony to mark a first-year anniversary.

As the decade progressed, the eyes and ears of the congregation heard sermons and programs about the Vietnam War, capital punishment, civil rights, anti-Semitism, mental health issues, Jewish-Catholic relations and the Vatican Council, world survival, the hippie movement and number of Jewish young people involved, and Israel's continuing problems with its neighbors. Art of Israel was on display often and special Israeli anniversary services were held. The Sam E. Smith School Wing was added in 1960 and moving commemorative services for Dr. Martin Luther King and JFK eased our sorrow.

Starting in the 60's and continuing today, visiting Christian groups came to Friday Shabbat services to be informed by volunteer leaders. Rabbi Raskas always reminded them that "You are always welcome at the Temple of Aaron"—a phrase that has etched itself into the congregation's collective consciousness as not just an invitation, but a motto. "Minorities in the Mirror" was the focus of an adult education series, as well as "The Family—Foundation of Our Faith." In 1963, during a period of national struggle for racial equality, the Temple of Aaron sent a resolution to proper authorities condemning the bombing of a Negro church and the murder of four children and also sent \$1,000 to be used for rebuilding and for bereaved families.

Many new ideas for youth involvement in learning were added, including the "Golden Kepah," "greenie beanie," and youth making their own wooden Torah pointers for a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Two thousand men, women and children took part in a 1967 Siyum Sefer Torah to personally inscribe a letter in a Torah. USY presented such musicals as

“Oklahoma” and “South Pacific” in Hebrew, and in 1962, TUSY received the “Best Chapter” award for study, service, prayer, and programming and the “Building Spiritual Bridges Award.”

Notable people spoke, entertained, or exhibited art during the 1960’s: George Jessel, Richard Tucker, General Chaim Bar-Lev, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Henry Youngman, Max Dimont, Salvador Dali, Julia Pearl, and movie director Dore Schary.

In keeping with the Conservative Movement’s efforts to retain relevant rituals and traditions, Rabbi Raskas helped to revise the Yahrzeit system at the Temple of Aaron so reading of names was done on the Hebrew date itself, giving the family the opportunity for the religious remembrance of a dear one.

At his first inauguration as President in 1968, Saul S. Garelick acknowledged that the building at 616 Mississippi River Blvd. was “bulging at the seam, (but) new members are welcomed with open arms . . .” presenting a vision for the expansion of our facilities and the Capital Campaign that made it a reality.

Mr. Garelick’s September, 1969, letter to the congregation described the case clearly and compellingly: “For a considerable period of time we have been giving careful thought to the problems of discomfort, frustration, inconvenience and inefficiency which have resulted from the growth of our Synagogue. Our present structure was built for 750 families, but now is accommodating 1200 families. . . . during the High Holydays . . . attendance rises to 3500 . . . The time has now come when as Jews concerned with our own needs and sensitively aware of the needs of our young people and future, we must begin to mobilize for action.”

The first purchase of the \$1 million Campaign was a house and land to the south of the original building at 616 Mississippi which stood where the Education Building now stands. From there, the Campaign made progress under the leadership of Garelick, Kalman “Kokie” Goldenberg, Rod Effress, and Richard Smith. The Campaign had its kick-off with (what else? We’re Jews!) a black-tie dinner in December 1969, organized by Betty Shapiro, Sylvia Lipshultz, Mickey Kaplan, Maddie Winnick, Marjorie Freeman, Zelda Toushin, Rita Butwin, Leonora Greenberg, Maxine Goldenberg, and Helen Schaffer. Over the next two years, there were dozens of fundraising events. But most importantly, dedicated teams of volunteers visited nearly every member of the congregation in person to solicit their financial support.

The construction of this major expansion of the Temple building, as time- and energy-consuming as it was, did not totally overwhelm outstanding programming. A “Thanks to Scandinavia” service in 1968 showed our appreciation for the humanity of the Scandinavian countries of Denmark and Sweden on the 25th anniversary of saving Jews in those countries. Later that year, the congregation reaffirmed its commitment to the community at large with a 7-lecture series featuring the award-winning author Chaim Potok and leaders of St. Paul’s “communities of color”. In 1969, in the intense, early stages of the Capital Campaign, the Temple of Aaron received the Solomon Schechter Award for Excellence for a Year-Round Congregational Program.

### **1970S: Strengthening Ties In Minnesota And To Israel**

Groundbreaking to complete the building took place on September 20, 1970 and included a stone from Jericho. The new addition was finished in the fall of 1972, more than doubling the square footage of the Temple with spaces for all needs educational, social, and aesthetic: the Sam E. Smith School Wing; Leonard & Betty Shapiro Education, Youth and Administration Building; Greenberg Gallery; Freeman Family Lounge; Marlene Kaner Goldenberg Gallery; Garelick Museum Gallery; Geller Family Sanctuary Entrance; and Kaplan Bride’s Room. Still, the architectural integrity of Goodman’s 1956 building was retained.

The 1973 Yom Kippur War underscored the continuing struggle of Eretz Yisrael to exist amidst the Arab countries on its borders. There was a felt need to create stronger bonds between the Temple membership and the land where Judaism has its roots, to ensure its safe growth for our religion and Jews in the future.

The first Annual Temple Fundraiser was held June 23, 1973. Special events entertained our members while raising needed funds for programs.

In 1975, on the 30th anniversary of the Holocaust, Temple of Aaron assembled and recorded the names of Holocaust victims who were related or known to members of the congregation. But the Temple membership did not just look backward at our tragic past. Concerted efforts were made to provide generous scholarships to members of the Temple’s USY to become part of the USY Israel Pilgrimage. They were often accompanied by Rabbi and Laeh Raskas and the Aaronian shows them planting trees in Eretz Yisrael: a highly symbolic act of faith in the future of Israel and Judaism. To further cultivate the intellectual talent of our youth, a post-Confirmation “Madrichim” program was initiated to link high school students with those just starting their journey in Jewish education. Additional hours of

study were added to Religious School. These efforts to strengthen the commitment of our youth to a Jewish way of life were essential to ebb the tide of interfaith marriages. In 1977, the Conservative Movement's Minnesota Rabbinical Assembly issued a resolution opposing Conservative rabbis participating in interfaith marriages.

In November of 1975, the United Nations General Assembly passed an anti-Semitic resolution equating Zionism with racism. American Jewry and of course the Temple of Aaron had to respond in a way that proved them wrong and showed our pride in Israel. Unquestionably, then, the crowning achievement of the congregation programmatically during this decade was the Israel Expo in 1976. Under Rabbi Raskas' leadership and inspiration, the Temple of Aaron brought Israel to the Twin Cities with a major exposition of Israeli culture featuring portions of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the talent of Theodore Bikel. That summer, Rabbi Raskas brought 10,000 prayers from the Expo Temple Wall to Jerusalem where he presented them to Rabbi Mayer Yehuda Getz.

The Temple leadership never forgot the role and place of Jews and the synagogue in the United States. 1976 saw a surge of patriotic pride throughout America as the country celebrated our Bicentennial. The Temple of Aaron marked this milestone in a way typical of our unique tradition: with a Bicentennial Concert featuring the Temple of Aaron Choir and the University of St. Thomas Choir and Band playing music of outstanding Jewish-American composers such as Copeland, Bernstein, Janowsky, and premiering an original composition by the Israeli-American composer Uri Barnea.

Noting the strong interest by Christian groups about the Seder, Rabbi Raskas instituted the synagogue's first Ecumenical Seder in 1976, an event which now has grown to hosting 550 people each year, with many more on a waiting list.

The Temple of Aaron marked 20 years on Mississippi River Boulevard in 1976. It was an opportunity for the congregation to look back at its many achievements. A time capsule to preserve rededication mementos was part of the "20 at 616." Among many other activities that year, the synagogue commemorated Israel's 30th anniversary and dedicated new Torah covers.

Marlene Kloner edited a commemorative "memorabilia" book for the "20 at 616" celebration in which she wrote: "Since the move from the facility at Holly and Grotto, the synagogue has grown not only in structure and in numbers, but more significantly in scope and in quality. Beyond a citadel for spiritual and educational enrichment, beyond the aesthetic physical appointments, this synagogue gives its congregants inroads to express their creativity within the framework of Judaism."

This, too, is as true today as it was thirty years ago.

It was during this time that the conditions of anti-semitism experienced by Jews in the Soviet Union reached such a point as to threaten the survival of our religion in one of the world's largest Jewish populations. "Let My People Go"—a program to help Soviet Jews—was a special project of Rabbi Raskas. The remnants of the 1960s conflicts in Southeast Asia continued to vex America and the Temple of Aaron's Lifeline to Cambodians Give-A-Thon raised \$20,000 in 1979.

Temple of Aaron won the Solomon Schechter Award (1971) for excellence in publications, two Schechter Awards in 1977 for the youth program and Israel Expo, and a Schechter Award for Grandparents' Shabbat in 1979. Under the leadership of Youth Director Bob Fisher, TUSY won the "Best Large Chapter" award in 1975.

Loving art and ideas, Rabbi Raskas brought in many outstanding individuals during the 1970s, including the Chief Rabbi of Denmark, Bent Melchior (1970), artist Amnon Goldman, the Chief Rabbi of Sweden (Morton Narrow, 1971), artist Yankel Ginzburg, journalist Daniel Schorr, artist Aharon Bezalel, Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek (1977), diplomat Abba Eban and Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel (1978).

As the State of Israel celebrated its 30th anniversary in 1978 under verbal and sometimes physical attack from the world and Arab communities, the Temple of Aaron marked the occasion by creating our own Affirmation of Support for the State of Israel which reads:

"We affirm that Jewish history shall continue to write new chapters in its book of experience.

"We affirm our love and loyalty to the land and the people of Israel.

"We affirm our responsibility to world Jewry.

"We affirm our life as Jews in America, committed to our faith yet fully participating in the institutions of democracy.

"We affirm our pride in Jewishness and Judaism."



Operation Bedek Habayit, with a goal of \$380,000 for building repairs and renovations, was set in motion in 1979 and all members supported the campaign.

## **1980S: Opening Doors To New Americans And New Ideas**

On April 13, 1980, the Temple celebrated a milestone reached only once before in the history of the congregation: the burning of the mortgage, this time for the building dedicated in 1956.

Rabbi Raskas was a passionate spokesperson for Ethiopian Jews and world hunger, resettlement of Soviet Jews, reproductive rights, drug awareness, rights of women and minorities, Soviet refuseniks, and the plight of Israel during this decade, including its safety in an age of terrorism. He made sure that these issues were front and center in the Temple's programming and creatively integrated them into religious and ritual activities.

Rabbi Raskas received numerous awards in the early 1980s from the Jewish Theological Seminary and other Jewish professional and academic institutions for reinstating the Tashlich Service on the banks of the Mississippi, the Dor L'Dor Shabbat program, and a totally accessible service for persons with all kinds of physical disabilities. Also deserving of kudos were Betty Zats, Lynn Stacker, IdaRaye Chemin, and Eileen Bream who chaired a highly-ambitious and successful exhibit of the works of Israeli artist Yaakov Agam. This continued the Temple's tradition of focusing on contemporary art of Israel and American Jewry.

In this atmosphere, TUSY flourished with Youth Director Bob Fisher's guidance, winning the Emtza Region Creative Arts contest in 1981 and named "Best International USY Chapter" in 1982. A new siddur, a Siyum Sefer Torah during the 75th anniversary celebration, Kristallnacht Commemoration in 1988, and a Solomon Schechter Award for a Jewish Holiday Observance Program in 1981 all were ways to make the ritual life of the synagogue fluid and appealing.

The start of the decade also saw the start of a steady stream of Jews from the Soviet Union to the U.S. and to St. Paul. The Temple of Aaron made sure that our doors were always open to them. To build a stronger bridge to Soviet Jews, Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrants chose to "twin" their simcha with a 13-year-old youth in the Soviet Union who was prevented from observing this Jewish milestone by the repressive regime. On the other hand, the 1980s saw an acceleration of members moving away from the Highland Park neighborhood, dispersing to all parts of the Twin Cities metropolitan area, but particularly to Mendota Heights and other southern suburbs.

In May of 1985, the Temple began a 12-month celebration of our 75th anniversary as a congregation. The year was highlighted in typical Temple of Aaron fashion with an extravaganza of artwork: Swedish-Jewish artist Peter Freudenthal created two canvasses that have beautified the entrance to our sanctuary from the Greenberg Room; a new Huppa was designed by Faye Sloane and dedicated to couples married at the Temple of Aaron over its 75-year history by Honey and Larry Zelle who were the first couple married on the River Road; new Torah covers, made by Temple volunteers, were dedicated; and at the start of each new Jewish month, a new tapestry, also made by Temple volunteers, was unveiled.

There were concerts and other programs, including a Siyum Torah, to celebrate our history.

Amid all of these festivities, events in the Middle East, particularly the growth of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), grew ominous and were reason for new concern for Israel's survival.

The congregation welcomed Rabbis Jonathan Ginsburg and Julie Gordon in 1987. Rabbi Ginsburg took on rabbinical duties and Rabbi Gordon assumed responsibilities as Principal of the Religious School.

Adult education classes brought outstanding American Jews to the Temple of Aaron. Keeping the plight of Soviet Jewry in the forefront, one of the most famous "refuseniks" Anatoly "Natan" Shcharansky, spoke to 900 Temple members in 1987. One extraordinarily popular class in the fall of 1988 was "A Rabbinic Commentary on the Life of Jesus." "Our Jewish Foremothers"—which included Nobel Laureate Dr. Rosalyn Yalow—once again conveyed Rabbi Raskas' valuing of women's achievements as well as their potential. The Conservative Movement had studied the possibility of ordaining women as rabbis in the previous decade. It was perhaps women like Dr. Yalow who were influential in the Jewish Theological Seminary's decision in the 1980s to welcome women into the rabbinate.

The Temple of Aaron Sisterhood always enjoyed strong support from the congregation's women. In programming, in the gift shop, in the kitchen, in fundraising their efforts were unflagging and unfailingly successful. Besides USY, the Temple's Boy Scout Troop 53 led by Earl Freeman and Cup Scout Pack 2 led by Eli Levinsohn still had active members into the early 1980s. The "College Keshet" program was started in 1987, to keep connections strong

between young people raised at the Temple of Aaron who were now at universities across the country and to remind them of their ties to the Temple and Judaism.

The Men's Club went through periods of activity and dormancy, but always rose to the occasion when needed for special projects. Perhaps its revival in 1988 was partly due to the rise of a new basketball team in town: the Timberwolves; or perhaps their support was partly responsible for the worldshaking triumph of the Minnesota Twins in the World Series that year. The influence of younger clergy in the congregation was instrumental in the formation in January of 1989 of a Young Couples Club.

Jews from the Soviet Union became integrated into the congregation.

Instead of "twinning" a Bat Mitzvah, on August 26, 1989, Ilena Ginzburg became the first contemporary Soviet refugee to become Bat Mitzvah at the Temple of Aaron. In 1989, the St. Paul Jewish community was asked to sponsor 120 Jewish families from the Soviet Union. The influx of Soviet Jews had a remarkable effect on the Temple membership: a goodly portion of the 120 new households joining the Temple of Aaron that year were from this new wave of immigrants.

Continuing the Temple's pre-eminence as a center for Jewish art and education the Temple sponsored an Andy Warhol art exhibit, writer Irving Howe spoke, and artist Yaacov Agam exhibited dazzling works, as did artists Henry Moore, Aharon Bezalel, Peter Freudenthal, and Dan Rubinstein. Mpls-St. Paul Magazine gave a "Best of Twin Cities" award to Temple of Aaron for "Best Stained Glass Windows" and the sanctuary's "Kislev" banner garnered a top award from The Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art and Architecture.

The influence of Rabbi Raskas on the Temple of Aaron cannot be understated. Rabbis Kleinman and Cohen struggled to define the Temple of Aaron within an emerging paradigm of Conservative Judaism. Rabbi Raskas left his imprint on the congregation by developing its collective personality as socially progressive and religiously creative within the Conservative context. His nomination upon his retirement on May 21, 1989 to Rabbi Emeritus assured that his spirit would continue into the future.

### **1990s: Renewal And Continuity**

The transition from the Raskas years to a new era was smooth. Rabbi Ginsburg was elevated to the Senior Rabbi upon Rabbi Raskas' retirement, and Rabbi Gordon left the Religious School (now bearing the name of Rabbi Bernard S. Raskas) to become a co-equal leader of the Temple of Aaron. The transition from the 1920s struggle of women to be Board members to egalitarianism on the pulpit was complete

And Rabbi Raskas' legacy of social engagement for the Temple of Aaron was embraced and continued by the clergy and lay leadership. Never, since World War II's assault on European Jewry, was this kind of engagement needed as much as in the 1990s. Not only did the flow of Soviet Jews to the U.S. and Minnesota continue to increase, but the numbers making aliyah to Israel swelled, requiring increased resources for their absorption into Israeli life. The Temple of Aaron's New American members were able to reaffirm their marriages now in a Jewish setting with a group Huppah ceremony in 1991.

But another group of Jews was now threatened not only with spiritual extermination, but physical as well: the "Falashas" of Ethiopia. In 1991, in a miraculous 30-hour "Operation Solomon", 14,000 Ethiopian Jews were airlifted from their native land to Israel. These tremendous social challenges led to the Temple of Aaron's first attempts at forming a Social Action Committee.

With pressures on Israel, the congregation wanted to show our support more actively. As a result, during the 1990s, Rabbi Ginsburg led several congregational and community trips to Israel. The 1992 trip was focused largely on learning about the culture and needs of the Soviet and Ethiopian immigrants. Another group emerging in Israel also called on the Temple of Aaron and American Conservative Jews for support: the "Masorti" or "Mercaz" Conservative Jews. It was Rabbi Raskas who coined the term "Mercaz."

The life of most congregants, still, focused on activities in the Temple itself and they had much to choose from. Those interested in Adult Education could learn about "Business, the Environment, and Animal Rights in Jewish Ethical Thinking," hear outstanding speakers like Carleton College Professor of Jewish Studies Louis Newman hold forth on "Modern Jewish Thought," or engage with Scholar-in-Residence Barbara Spectre about "Belief and Doubt." Temple member Bruce E. Kuritzky initiated a grief support group in 1994. Rabbis Ginsburg and Gordon were recognized and rewarded for their work at Temple of Aaron by being selected as the first of only 22 rabbis in the nation to participate in the First National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership Rabbinic Leadership Retreat.

By 1992, the Temple had been on the River Road for over a quarter-century and showed the wear and tear of many activities and simchas. A \$1.4 million Capital Campaign was announced and successfully completed in barely two years with participation from every Temple member and the extraordinary efforts of the Sisterhood. The Joseph Fremland family took financial leadership, honoring the memory of one of the stalwarts of the synagogue. The result was the Fremland Family Grand Entrance, Effress Family Garden, and the Nilva, Frisch and Paster Families Great Hallway; the Fink Family Youth Lounge was reborn from the old auditorium and Harry and Addie Silverman improved its kitchen. Max and Jeanette Kurnow sponsored first floor renovations. A new Capital Repair Endowment Fund got a tremendous boost from a \$500,000 challenge grant from the Martin and Esther Capp Family Foundation, met by the congregation with gifts large and small.

The Temple of Aaron had a fresh, modern face to welcome members old and new. The rededication ceremony in September of 1995 preceded shortly the inspiring Rosh HaShana celebration of the establishment of Jerusalem as the Jewish Capital 3000 years earlier. Dr. Adolfo Roitman, Curator of the Shrine of the Book at the Israel Museum, joined the Temple members as Scholar-in-Residence as part of this celebration.

With the success of the Capital campaign, the synagogue physically was in shape to meet the needs of the congregation as we looked forward to the 21st Century. More and more, the rabbis and leadership started communicating with the congregation through the expanding use of technology. The Temple set up a web site and Rabbi Ginsburg started a daily Torah Study program via email.

Amidst this joy, tragedy struck. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was gunned down at a public gathering in November of 1995. The Temple of Aaron joined the rest of the Twin Cities Jewish congregation in a mass community-wide memorial service. The killings did not end with Rabin's assassination. In March, 1996, 64 Israelis lost their lives to Palestinian terrorist and the Temple was host to over 1,000 Jews from across the Twin Cities, mourning our loss and expressing solidarity as "Klal Yisrael Haverim."

To underline the continuity of Judaism, despite these horrors, and to honor those who were pioneers in the progressive history of the Temple of Aaron, in April, 1996, eight women were honored on the fiftieth anniversary of their joint Bat Mitzvah at the Temple of Aaron: Ethel Getzug Smith, Nancy Goldberg Calvin, Carole Goldbarg Epstein, Rita Jane Halpern Zeitz, Etta Fay Kozberg Orkin, Evelyn Rosen-Budd, Esta Rothstein Gold, and Lois Schwartz Brand.

Nancy Goldberg Calvin looks back today at that momentous event, 60 years ago, and says, "I can remember the excitement of preparing for that Friday night service: we all bought new dresses and got our hair done. Our moms all worked hard to prepare a beautiful oneg. I can still remember my special part: V'Ahavata. We studied hard, but we didn't realize how important our studies were at that time, nor what pioneers we were. It just seemed that Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies weren't all that important. But one of the lasting values of the experience was the friendship that was forged between our small group. We still meet monthly for lunch!"

Just as policies regarding gender equity continued to evolve, the approach of congregants toward being in the synagogue changed, too. Whereas attending Shabbat services had always been a "dress-up" occasion, more people wanted to feel "at home" in the Sanctuary; and more women were likely to come out for services on a cold Minnesota winter evening if slacks were permitted. And so it came to pass that the dress code was changed. Changing gender attitudes were also reflected in the celebration of the Temple first Women's Seder in 1996.

Another major change in 1996 was the purchase of the Talmud Torah building with a generous gift from Elliott and Myrna Belzer. It was already a physical part of the Temple of Aaron complex, but had been administratively separate since its construction. The Temple took upon itself a much more active role in the education of our members' children. To further demonstrate that the Temple could prepare its children for leadership, at Rosh Hashanah, the Teen Service was initiated, led and directed by the Temple USY members. In 1997, leadership started a Southern Suburbs Hebrew Program for grades 2-7 two evenings a week, since some driving distances in Dakota County made it extremely difficult for students to attend weekly classes in St. Paul. Within the next two years, the Temple would also form seven Havurot in suburban communities, as well as other Havurot for special-interest groups.

The congregation had proven itself ready and willing to undertake projects in support of Jews in other countries: Israel, the Soviet Union, Ethiopia, etc. But, in 1996, a new effort was launched to start a Social Action committee that addressed the needs of Jews and non-Jews right here in Minnesota. For over three decades, the Food Shelf project has long been a successful activity, sponsored by the Sisterhood and led by "Matzie" Miller and Joannie Davidson. The Social Action Committee, over the years and under the longterm leadership of Vic Rosenthal, took on new projects such as recruiting volunteers to cook and serve meals at the Ronald McDonald House and do legislative advocacy and hands-on work on issues such as homelessness, immigration, and gun control.

Another way of creating relationships with non-Jews in the community came through music. For the annual Martin Luther King Day Shabbat service, in 1996 the Temple hosted the predominantly Black Metropolitan Male Choir, which

has become a tradition. The Temple Choir's participation in the St. Paul community-wide Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, starting in 1995, has brought many non-Jews into the Temple and has taken our members into numerous Christian houses of worship for this annual expression of American patriotism and unity.

The leadership of Rabbis Ginsburg and Gordon was strongly felt in the mid-1990s. Several scholars-in-residence joined the congregation for Shabbat and weekend-long programs focusing on a variety of subjects from Archeology in Israel to Anti-Semitism in France. The State of Israel Bonds program honored them in 1997 with their "Golden Shofar" award for their outstanding work in support of Israel.

Not to be overlooked is the strong influence of Hazzan Mitchell Kowitz. Hazzan Kowitz has worked one-on-one with ninety percent of our Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidates since 1988, forming wonderful bonds. He encouraged numerous students to continue their studies to earn a Golden Kephah Award, signaling the ability to read Torah and lead services. A smaller percentage of students continue refining their Torah-reading skills and earn the Yad Hazakah Award. The congregation honored him with a full weekend tribute in 1997, as he celebrated ten years with the Temple of Aaron. That love and appreciation is still here at this time of Jubilee.

By 1999, the exodus of Jews from the former Soviet Union was nearly complete. Over 200 families from those countries had joined the synagogue between 1980 and 1999. Reflecting this sea-change, Bar and Bat Mitzvah candidates no longer had Soviet "twins," but started to designate charities to benefit from their simchas. Ironically, while violence toward Jews in the Soviet Union had diminished, violence toward American Jews took an upturn, reflecting heightened turmoil in Israel, a result of Palestinian unrest. Temple leadership decided to increase security at major religious services and for the Rabbi Bernard S. Raskas Religious School.

The Religious School continued to expand its programs at this time. A seventh-grade Hebrew class (at first called BOGRIM) was started, with Reenie Gitlin and Rhonda Fox as teachers. It also included programming focused on performance of mitzvot and prayer. As one of the first students, Laura Sloane, commented at the time, "The program has respected teachers and a great learning environment. Classes are fun and taught in a unique way."

The strength of the Temple's youth programs showed great faith in its future, but 1999 was a time to look back, since it marked the congregation's 90th anniversary. The celebration started at Selihot with the Choir singing a specially-commissioned work by noted composer Victor Zupanc under a program of the American Composers Forum. The voices of the Temple's children were also heard, since a Youth Choir had recently been reorganized and endowed under the L'Olam endowment program.

As 1999 drew to a close, the Temple could not ignore the turn of both the century and the millennium in the secular calendar. Even though the momentous New Year's Eve fell on Shabbat, the Temple found a creative way to have its "challah" and eat it too, with an extended Oneg Shabbat attended by more than 200 people.

Various controversies arose starting with the new century. The first was the decision of the Board to present a Hebrew School option to parents in competition with the St. Paul Talmud Torah. Lay members and educators jumped in to develop a new afternoon Hebrew School for students in grades 2-7. The curriculum was developed after surveying programs and techniques from nearly 750 Conservative synagogue education examples. Families could choose Talmud Torah's Day School or Hebrew School or attend Temple of Aaron's Hebrew School. An overwhelming percentage elected to attend the Temple's school to learn synagogue skills, Hebrew language, and to get to know our clergy better. The positive parental response led Richard and Rossy Shaller to make a significant donation to the Hebrew School, now named in their honor. One motivation for the Shaller gift was the positive impact of seeing our future generations studying and socializing every week at the Temple of Aaron.

Other kinds of education were in the spotlight, too. Dr. Peter Pitzele presented his innovative "Bibliodrama" program that uses modern improvisational theater to explain ancient Midrash. This met with tremendous enthusiasm; indeed, he returned two years later for another program addressing other Jewish topics. The Temple, under the leadership of Hazzan Kowitz, also started an innovative, modern, informal structure for Friday night services: Erev Shabbat Live! Many members enjoy the "soft rock" musical accompaniment and the upbeat tunes that call for the entire congregation's participation.

The Temple initiated its Yad Hazakah award for teenagers, with Naomi Divine as its first recipient. The award honors Torah readers who must pass an exam on Torah and have fluent trope cantillation, without using tapes.

Our rabbis all gained special recognition: In June, 2000, Rabbis Gordon and Ginsburg were recognized on their "bar mitzvah" of leadership in the Temple. Later in the year, Rabbi Raskas was named Rabbi Laureate for his fifty years of leadership at the Temple of Aaron.

During the High Holydays, the eyes of the congregation and Jews around the world turned to Israel as the Palestinian intifada escalated in violence. The violence poured over to the Twin Cities where acts of violence and vandalism were perpetrated on Jewish houses of worship.

In 2001, the Temple continued with its regular programming, unaware that it would receive two major blows to our stability. There were speakers on the Czech Torah Network that restores Holocaust Torah scrolls and finds new homes for them (a portion of one is in the Temple of Aaron museum). Other forums examined gun control, human organ donation, and Conservative Judaism in Israel. The Temple also started to take greater advantage of Jewish education resources in the community, especially those offered through the University of Minnesota, University of St. Thomas, and St. John's University.

Families celebrated simhas like b'rit milah and simhat bat, weddings, confirmations, anniversaries. Yes, there was concern over the violence in Israel. But our attention and our priorities changed on September 11, 2001 when Arab terrorists attacked and destroyed the World Trade Center in New York City, severely damaged the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. with the loss of thousands of innocent lives. More lives were lost, but others saved, when another hijacked airplane crashed in Pennsylvania. The Temple of Aaron mourned with all our fellow Americans and decent people around the world.

Rabbis Gordon and Ginsburg wrote in the October, 2001:

Aaronian,

*"Many people have been saying that America and the world will be different. When we are writing this, we have no clue exactly what's in store, but undoubtedly there will be unease in the nation and in the world for a long time. We hope and pray that the United States and allies will pursue the terrorists with full force towards eliminating the threat which is designed to rattle us, hurt us, and destroy us . . . We live in the greatest country in the world, the sole remaining superpower. Thank God, we are democratic and enjoy the freedoms of speech, assembly, press, and religion which are intrinsically intertwined into the fabric of our nation . . . We Jews, like many of our countrymen, understand that, as in all matters, our nation should be under God, the source of blessing, comfort and strength."*

The entire congregation agreed with their words and still does.

But other issues generated disappointment and emotionalism. Before the end of the year, the divorce of our clergy was announced and Rabbi Julie Gordon left the Temple of Aaron in 2002. Her departure left the synagogue without a full complement of clergy which caused a short-term strain on programs and operations. A search committee was immediately formed to remedy the situation and to rebuild confidence in the synagogue's direction and leadership.

The search committee was successful in attracting Rabbi Alan Shavit-Lonstein and his family to St. Paul to take the Assistant Rabbi position in 2002. The young rabbi and his family helped to show the community that the Temple of Aaron is dedicated to families, and the membership started to feel more secure in our future.

The Temple's focus on life-cycle events, strong youth educational and social programs, adult education, our strong Sisterhood, and developing Social Action committees made sure that the Temple offered something for anyone interested in membership. The Temple hosted Yefet Alemu, the first Ethiopian ordained rabbi by the Conservative Movement in Israel. Dozens of members pitched in to build not just a sukkah, but its first Habitat for Humanity house.

The October Aaronian carried a letter from the Habitat for Humanity director: "Thank you (for helping in the construction) of the Khandra and Mustafa Abokar family home in St. Paul . . . as Maryam Mahmed, a new home owner, said earlier this year, 'Being in a quiet, SAFE neighborhood has made such a difference in our lives. I finally feel happy and very settled.'"

While Temple of Aaron members might not have needed their own Habitat house, the impact of the September 11, 2001 events on the local and national economies was strongly negative. It touched many, many members of the congregation. In 2003, the membership responded by participating in a community network to help unemployed members find new jobs. With so many members losing their jobs, and others seeing their income and investments shrink, the Temple leadership realized that it needed to have a stronger financial base and began a long-term effort to secure larger endowments for personnel and programs—a contrast from previous campaigns that were for capital needs.

Members struggling with the emotional effects of the attacks on our country, and their own personal uncertainties appreciated an innovation in Neilah services at Yom Kippur that truly touched their spiritual selves: Members were invited to come to the bima at the end of services, and to offer their personal prayers before the open Ark. One young member summed up the healing power of this gesture in a letter to Rabbi Ginsburg:



*"Thank you so much for Yom Kippur. The new tradition of prayer before the Ark was so moving and inspirational. At first I thought it would be cool to do that more often, but now I think it is so unique that it should be saved for that special day. It was a very good day for me spiritually because of that."*

Such efforts to offer spiritual and economic assistance to members were positive. In 2004, some of the Temple programming focused on the 350th anniversary of the Jewish Community in America. Members contributed stories and pictures to create verbal and visual collages of the membership's place in this impressive history. While looking backward to affirm our future, the clergy concerns of the Temple's recent past refused to disappear, and this resulted in the departure of Rabbi Jonathan Ginsburg in August, 2004. It was the Temple's good luck that Rabbi Sylvan Kamens, who had served the congregation from 1969–1974 and subsequently served B'nai Emet in Minneapolis, was available to return to St. Paul to take the position of Interim Senior Rabbi until a new leader was found. Rabbi Shavit-Lonstein was elevated to the position of Associate Rabbi, as well.

Rabbi Shavit-Lonstein recognized that the Temple needed to make an unequivocal statement about the Temple's future to motivate and reassure the congregation. In a 2005 Aaronian, he wrote that his vision for the future of Judaism and the Temple of Aaron meant that it . . . "Should be energetic and spiritual. We should allow Jewish tradition to touch our souls as much as our minds . . . We must not, however, lose sight of how much Jewish texts touch our inner lives. Is dynamic and evolving, continuing to grow and change. This is a dynamic that has been with us from the beginning. The growth should continue in order to include all modern Jews, wherever they are, and whatever their style of practice. Remain rooted in tradition. Judaism does not change just for change's sake; we change because we have grown in our understanding.

Our tradition should challenge and push us to be better individuals, and more connected with each other. Should be complex and multi-faceted, yet based on timeless values, as articulated by Rabbi Hillel, "What is hateful to you, do not do unto others."

Rabbi Shavit-Lonstein's words reflected the efforts of the Social Action Committee that summer to host homeless families during the month of June. Over 80 members volunteered to supervise activities when the Fink Lounge was transformed into a shelter for dozens of homeless families. This took the Temple's efforts to help those in need in St. Paul to a new level, above the wonderfully-successful continuing program for the Merriam Park Food Shelf/Keystone Services. Hillel's enjoyment was especially appropriate, for 2005 challenged the Temple membership as a congregation and as individuals to respond to unprecedented disasters.

The most destructive tsunami in modern history struck South Asia that year, and the entire Twin Cities Jewish community created an aid fund for relief efforts. But it was in late August that the strength of America and our community was truly tested: Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, wiping entire communities from the map. The Jewish Community of the Twin Cities banded together to collect thousands of pounds of food and hygiene articles for victims of the storm. The Temple also reached out to storm victims who had emigrated to St. Paul by offering cash and household items to help them adjust to a new, northern environment.

The stability and sense of calm offered by the Kamens/Shavit-Lonstein/Kowitz team, along with a reorganized and re-focused Board, saw the Temple offer a wide variety of standard and new programming. The entire congregation was engaged in the selection of a prospective new Senior Rabbi. This engagement was important to achieve a strong sense of involvement in the most important decision for the congregation's longterm future. It also promoted continued healing and was important so that membership could understand its ownership in the Temple of Aaron as the [Jubilee](#) Year approached in 2006.

Dozens of members served on committees to plan and execute programs celebrating the Temple of Aaron's 50th anniversary on S. Mississippi River Blvd. Rabbi Raskas stepped forward with a creative, energetic vision and leadership recruited Sally Lorberbaum, Wendy Baldinger, and Gerry Frisch to chair a year-long series of events and programs to mark this milestone. Bruce E. Kuritzky was hired as Project Coordinator to keep things on track.

In June 2006, Rabbi Randall Kongisburg accepted the Temple's offer of the Senior Rabbi pulpit just before kick-off events for the Jubilee began in the late summer. The first of the events saw the Temple gain a "new" address, as Hartford Avenue between S. Mississippi River Blvd and Mt. Curve Blvd. was renamed "Raskas Road" in honor of Rabbi Raskas and his vision to build the Temple of Aaron building and his leadership not only in the Temple, but in the greater St. Paul community.

The Jubilee Event Calendar is long and ambitious: Throughout the 16-month celebration, weekly movies with Jewish themes have been offered by Ren'ee Kvasnik.

In 2006, events included a ceremony of thanks to former Board members at Selihot; the Saint John's Illuminated Bible Exhibit was led by Deborah Bachrach; we celebrated a Siyum Sefer Torah with the first female scribe to hold this position in two centuries; and a Gala opening event topped off the year.

The plans for 2007 included Scholar-in-Residence Weekends, Bar/ Bat Mitzvah and USY "reunions"; Shabbats for Sisterhood, Men's Club and Social Action; special celebrations for wedding couples, Confirmation Classes, those who wear the Golden Kephah, Russian Jewry, Hip Hop Night for teens.

Shavuot saw the dedication of new Torah bindings stitched with love by a group organized by Nancy Skadron including Ruth Ann Schumeister, Barbara Gitlin, Sis Goren, Chelle Katz, Robin Taple, Linda Eisenstadt, and Barbara Pogoler. The designs, in keeping with the Temple's history of contemporary art, were inspired largely by works from the Museum of Modern Art. A multi-generational Shabbat and Hanukah celebrations will round out 2007.

In 1910, our leaders expressed concern about the future of Judaism and adapting to demands of the 20th century. In 2006, our leaders express concern about the future of Judaism and adapting to demands of the 21st century. The Temple has maintained its membership level over 1,000 families for three decades, marking us as one of only 31 Conservative synagogues in North America to claim a large membership for so long. Lay leadership is strong. Education for adults and children is vibrant. Multigenerational families form a strong foundation. Committed clergy, knowledgeable support staff, stable finances, meaningful life-cycle events, active committees, and positive attitudes prepare us well for the future.

What lies ahead for the Temple of Aaron after the 2006-2007 Jubilee in our lovely home on the banks of the Mississippi? In 2010, the Congregation will celebrate its centennial. We know we will be going forward from strength to strength.