





BUILDING THE SACRED  
AND PROGRESSIVE  
A HISTORY OF TEMPLE SINAI'S FIRST 75 YEARS

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TEMPLE SINAI, BROOKLINE

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75  
לחיים  
to  
life!

Jews are particularly skilled at telling stories, maintaining a historical sensibility, and thinking deeply about the meaning of their past. Rabbis, biblical scholars, intellectuals, and ordinary Jews possess a keen sense of their ancestors and the key events that have shaped their lives. To get any two Jews to come to a consensus about the meaning of that past, however, is a difficult task. Jews may recount similar stories and agree upon the facts, but the essence of being Jewish demands that they analyze, contemplate, debate, and indeed argue about the significance of those events. The history of a synagogue should be no exception.

As Temple Sinai of Brookline approaches its 75th anniversary, how then does one tell the story of the congregation and do justice to the multiple points of view about its past? What events are worth remembering and which version of them ought to be written? What documents, if any, exist to piece this story together? Every history project demands reliable archival material that must be supplemented with additional research, secondary sources, and a little bit of historical imagination in order to fill in the gaps. The core archival material used for this project is *Sinai News*, which the Temple has published ten months a year in every year

since its inception in 1939. Inside these pages, one finds a narrative about the day-to-day practices, events, joys, concerns, and world view of its congregants. One learns a good deal about how this group of Reform Jews worshipped, educated their children, celebrated the life cycle, and made sense of their identity in an ever increasingly modern and secular world. Certain patterns become clear about the nature of the congregation and the many ways in which it changed over time.

The Temple newsletter details an official version of the congregation. This narrative has been complemented by other histories of modern Reform Judaism, Boston area newspapers, and three dozen oral histories from members possessing institutional memories of the Temple. The oral histories were enormously valuable in lending human voices and perspectives to the written text. This history is far richer for the qualitative experiences and viewpoints recounted by past and present members of the community.

Two aspects of Temple Sinai that render it a fascinating subject for historical study are its representativeness and exceptionalism. Reform Jews in Greater Boston and beyond surely will recognize their experiences in the history of

Temple Sinai. The congregation's past tells a familiar story about how one group of Jews lived, worshipped, educated, and thrived among American democratic institutions and capitalist freedoms. They faced the same joys and gut-wrenching challenges that came with world war, the Holocaust, the creation of Israel, anti-Semitism, assimilation, intermarriage, economic mobility, social justice movements, and political upheavals. Temple Sinai serves as a useful lens for understanding Reform Jews in the United States from World War II to the present.

Still, there are qualities that render Temple Sinai unique. First and foremost is its identity as a small, fairly independent-minded splinter congregation that began as the Jewish refugee crisis unfolded during World War II. Rabbi Beryl Cohon and his followers' bold move to break free from Temple Israel in Boston to start a new congregation during a national depression and world war reflected an individuality that would characterize the congregation for years to come. The relatively small size of its congregation likewise cultivated an intimate community that enabled it to meet the many challenging years ahead. Along with that intimacy came a rare blend of intellectualism, unpretentiousness, and warmth that marks the congregation to this day. Temple Sinai members have thought deeply about moral questions, the role of Judaism, the community of Brookline, state and national politics, and international affairs. While the leadership of the congregation

would be marked by the individual personalities and styles of its rabbis — Beryl Cohon, Benjamin Rudavsky, Frank Waldorf, and Andrew Vogel — its defining characteristics remained constant.

Every congregation aspires to create a comfortable and welcoming environment for its members, but one cannot help but be struck by the many observers who have consistently identified these qualities with Temple Sinai. One might expect a small and independent congregation to be clannish, judgmental, and provincial, yet Temple Sinai has remained accessible, accepting, and cosmopolitan. Rosalind Bernheimer best characterized the spirit of Temple Sinai when she explained:

*“It was a really warm, lovely place to be. It was very broad minded in terms of allowing one to be Jewish in one’s own way. To pick and choose. Not be judged. The whole idea of [the] Free Will [Annual Donation Campaign], to me, kind of encapsulated what this place is about. I love the fact, given that I don’t get dressed up that often, that you don’t have to. It is just a place where people seem to care. And I think, if it has a legacy, then it is a place that cared about people. I think it attracted people who care about each other.”*

To identify a caring and welcoming community is not to gloss over the many ways in which the synagogue has struggled with identity conflict, rabbinical change, shifting cultural norms, and individual crises. Like all congregations, the Jews of Temple Sinai have had to reimagine their place in an ever-changing world and to cope with the financial, intellectual, religious, and social challenges of holding together a small and, at times, fragile community. This congregation would face especially difficult times during the 1970s and 1980s when one rabbi was forced to resign in disgrace, a second rabbi endured an ouster challenge, the Torah scrolls were stolen, the synagogue was vandalized, and a fire destroyed the religious school. It was at this juncture that the members of the congregation recognized the value of the bonds that held them together, rose above the pettiness of minor divisions, and reified their commitment to Jewish spirituality, community, morality, and education. Rabbi Waldorf took heroic measures to unite the congregation and rebuild the Temple's foundation. From the ashes of those literal and metaphoric fires, Rabbi Waldorf healed wounds, restored the original spirit of the congregation, and laid down a new foundation for years to come. The restoration of the congregation's core values established an ethic of caring, intimacy, and support upon which to build for the future. That solid bedrock drew new families and a successor rabbi who would infuse the congregation with renewed vitality, vision, and ingenuity suitable to the 21st century.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Building the Sacred and Progressive: A History of Temple Sinai's First 75 Years* is the culmination of the work of many contributors. The History Committee was the domain of Abbe Cohen. He enlisted Hildy Neumann and her organizational expertise to sort, categorize, and otherwise make sense of the many newsletters, publications, photographs, meeting minutes, and assorted materials that occupied a dusty closet in the back of the sanctuary. Executive Director Linda Katz had a vision for a history book and recruited me for the project with an inquiry about whether or not one of my graduate students would be interested in writing about the Temple.

Knowing that the project was far more substantive than a graduate student could take on within a semester, and having a personal interest in the project, I agreed to make it my own. Fortunately, I have had the assistance of multiple graduate students who agreed to conduct interviews as part of our oral history seminar at Salem State University. My remarkable graduate assistants, Erik Bauer and Amanda Prouty, supported the logistics of the project, edited multiple transcriptions, and helped do much of the background research. Jeremy Wolfe and Linda Katz lent their institutional memory and unique intellectual and administrative abilities

to the project. All of the aesthetics of the book, including the layout and design, are the product of Rochelle Seltzer's creative talents. Rochelle's insights also informed the shape of the book's content and structure. Mel Stoler, Stephanie Erber, and Hildy Neumann proofread each chapter. Their careful eyes and thoughtful suggestions created a more interesting, coherent, and clear book. Hildy kept all of us on task and ensured that the book would be completed for the Temple's 75th Anniversary.

Finally, I am deeply indebted to those congregants who agreed to be interviewed for the project. It was a particular pleasure to interview three of the four Temple rabbis — Rudavsky, Waldorf, and Vogel — each of whom was tremendously generous with his time and enabled me to think about distinctive strands of the Temple history. I can only hope that this history does a modicum of justice to the service that these extraordinary men have lent to the congregation over the past seven decades.

## PART 1: RABBI BERYL COHON, 1939-1964

### FOUNDING FATHER, REASONED RATIONALIST

*“There is a long-standing fear that Jews in America are doomed to be assimilated, that they cannot survive in an environment of religious freedom and church-state separation. In America, where religion is totally voluntary, [...] religious diversity is the norm. Over and over for 350 years one finds that Jews in America rose to meet the challenges both internal and external that threatened the Jewish community, sometimes paradoxically, by promoting radical discontinuities. Casting aside old paradigms, they transformed their faith, reinventing American Judaism in an attempt to make it more appealing, more meaningful, more sensitive to the concerns of the day. I use the term assimilation sparingly, more often as a description of what Jews feared would happen to them in America than as depiction of what actually befell them.”*

**Rabbi Beryl Cohon** | *Judaism: Theory and Practice*, 1954

#### THE FOUNDING OF TEMPLE SINAI

The establishment of Temple Sinai was an audacious and hopeful act in the context of worldwide depression and war, particularly when one considers that it was the splinter congregation of a splinter congregation. For years no new synagogue had come to Boston, as Ohabei Shalom and Temple Israel had served the small Reform community of Eastern and Central European Jews since the mid-nineteenth century. Ohabei Shalom was founded in 1842, became a beacon for Boston’s Polish Jews, and would eventually be the longest-standing congregation in Massachusetts. In 1854,

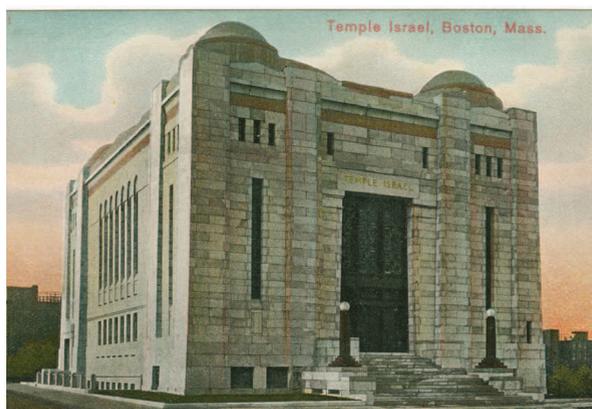
German Jews broke away from Ohabei Shalom to form Temple Israel, which went on to become the largest Reform synagogue in New England. In 1911, Temple Israel installed Harry Levi as its rabbi. For the next three decades he nobly cultivated Jewish values, education, and worship.

As Levi approached the twilight of his career in 1930, he hired Beryl Cohon as an assistant rabbi. Cohon came to Temple Israel well traveled and with a diverse set of life experiences. As a young boy at the turn of the twentieth century, Cohon had immigrated to the United States with his family from Lithuania. He would

receive his education in the public schools of Perth Amboy, New Jersey and Chicago, Illinois. He attended Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, where he also worked for his brother, Samuel S. Cohon, a Professor of Theology at the school. After graduating from Hebrew Union, Beryl Cohon served congregations in Pensacola, Florida and Cumberland, Maryland. In his early thirties, he arrived at Temple Israel and became head of the religious school during the trying years of the Great Depression. He and his staff were credited with providing high quality education to Temple Israel's children through Sunday school, debate team, drama club, choir, and glee club. Cohon was promoted to Associate Rabbi in 1937 and became the unofficial acting rabbi when Rabbi Levi retired the following year. In a short time, Cohon founded a joint program of religious education for social service at Boston University and established a three-year school to train Boston teachers in education and religion.

Cohon and many of his Temple Israel

admirers believed that his nearly decade-long service prefigured his destiny for the head position. However, when Rabbi Levi died in 1939 the board went in a different direction, conducted a national search, and effectively ruled out his candidacy. Temple Israel hired as its new rabbi the very accomplished, dynamic, and skilled orator Joshua Loth Liebman. Liebman went on to become an influential figure in modern Reform Judaism. His book *Peace of Mind*, a self-help manual that blended psychiatry and religion, spent more than a year on the *New York Times* best-seller list. With Liebman's hire, Cohon knew that his days at Temple Israel were numbered. He resigned later that year because he was unwilling to serve as an associate rabbi for a younger man whom he believed to be much less accomplished. About a third of Temple Israel's congregation was loyal to Cohon, felt he had been unfairly passed over for the head position, and encouraged him to start his own congregation. David Lurensky, a Temple Sinai founding father, remembered Adolph Giesberg comforting him in the wake of Liebman's hire: "Don't be discouraged, David. We're going to have a new congregation and we will hold on to Rabbi Cohon." In the spring of 1939 a preliminary group of Temple Israel defectors met in Harry German's home to discuss plans for what would ultimately become the Cohon-led congregation of Temple Sinai. The divisions in Temple Israel that led to Sinai's founding reflected larger demographic shifts and a general



Temple Israel, Boston Public Library, 1905.

call for more congregational intimacy. Temple Israel and Ohabei Shalom, Boston’s two existing Reform communities, had grown to capacity. The growth of Boston’s Reform community mirrored a larger national push for more accessible and affordable synagogues. The May 1939 edition of the *Hebrew Union College Monthly* touched on the trend in an article “A Partial Answer to ‘Why are There so Few Reform Synagogues?’” pointing out the need for more modest local congregations, lower dues schedules, and the desirability of a more intimate relationship between the rabbi and members of the congregation. Boston was specifically mentioned in the article as an area ripe for growth. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts subsequently issued a charter to Temple Sinai. The self-proclaimed objective of its founders was to “rouse and challenge the slumbering voices of Liberal Judaism to a more earnest effort.” Their platform called for a reinvigorated commitment to Reform Judaism, assistance to war refugees, cooperation with other faiths, and the strengthening of American democracy.

Despite the need for more Reform congregations in Boston, the older congregations took a rather dim view of Sinai’s creation. Reform leadership was opposed to a third temple opening so close to the two well-established Reform temples, fearing that the new congregation would divide and weaken the community. The local director of the American Hebrew Congregation was not permitted to bring the customary greeting to the new synagogue. Some commentators gave Sinai

**TEMPLE SINAI**

has been conceived and created  
*so that*

It may bring Jewish morale and dignity more fully into our lives;

*so that*

It may help strengthen our faith in the religion of our fathers;

*so that*

It may offer a Judaism which is comprehensible and comprehensive — that is a liberal, ethical and esthetic Judaism;

*so that*

It may help rear our children in a Judaism which will give them understanding of their traditions and courage in their every day life;

*so that*

It may help parents enrich their own lives and assist them in giving their children an intelligent understanding of their heritage;

*so that*

It may help the refugee in our midst; and by cooperation with people of other faiths, help strengthen and safeguard our American democracy;

*so that*

We may find within our group, sincere friendship, and the enrichment that comes from close association with each other as a community of friends and fellow workers in behalf of a sacred cause;

*so that*

We may draw strength and high hope from

**SINAI**

*“The Synagogue is the heart of Jewry”*

Reasons for Sinai Creation, *Sinai News*, November 1939.

six months to fail. Others accused Sinai of splitting Boston Jewry. A few congregants feared retribution. “I can recall one of our members asking us not to announce his name as a member of Sinai,” Cohon reported. “He was threatened with the loss of business if he joined us, for we were splitting the community. Quite a resistance developed against us.” David Lurensky had to cajole and appease timid members whose hearts were with the new congregation but lacked the courage to identify themselves. Such fears proved to be unfounded. In the years after the inception of Temple Sinai, at least a dozen new Greater Boston Reform congregations emerged, all of which flourished and did little to challenge the long-term health and vibrancy of Temple Israel or Ohabei Shalom.

In the summer of 1939 an initial group of twelve families met at the Coolidge Corner home of Albert and Grace Ehrenfried, the former of which they nominated as the Temple’s

first President. Saul Kaplan followed Ehrenfried in the lead position two years later and served in multiple roles on behalf of the congregation. Another seminal figure in ushering the community through these precarious first years was David Lurensky, whose administrative discipline and vision were essential to the survival of the synagogue. Lurensky was joined by a surfeit of musical talent among Cohon’s followers, including Temple Israel’s Director of Music, Janot Roskin; its organist, Evelyn Berovsky; and the brilliant singer William Kopans. Each would lend their distinct musical skills to Temple Sinai for decades to come. This group and a cabal of like-minded Jews congregated on September 10, 1939 in a makeshift chapel and schoolhouse at 16 Sidlaw Road at the corner of Commonwealth Avenue in the Brighton section of Boston. Contractors worked all day and night under the direction of Philip A. Kaye to resurrect the old stucco mansion. It remains a minor mystery how Kaye managed to finance the initial down payment for the home and pay for construction work in the lean summer of 1939.

The founding had not been undertaken lightly or impulsively, but as an act of faith to help rebuild Jewish idealism and morale. The first issue of *Sinai News* assured readers that the congregation would be dedicated to “a disciplined Jewish liberalism, intensely devoted to the life of the spirit, and within the financial reach of the average Jewish family.” Professor Samuel Cohon came from Cincinnati’s Hebrew



Founding President Albert Ehrenfried (1939–1941) and his successor, Saul Kaplan (1941–1948).

Union College to dedicate the new synagogue. From its first days, Temple Sinai identified itself as a Jewish religious congregation that was interested in “a progressive interpretation of our ancient faith.” This meant an ethical and moral Judaism grounded in God, Torah, and Israel, and one that was committed to the deepest and broadest interpretations. As Cohon explained, this was not “frozen, congealed or locked up in ancient bottles” but rather “vigorous, young, and forward looking.” Cohon did not want his congregation fixed in a rigid interpretation of the past or “suffering under feelings of exile” but functioning “as an organic part of the American nation.” Cohon swore away any political allegiances and called for a free and liberal Jewish congregation in which “no one dictates and no one dominates.”

The group was extremely small, had virtually no money, and possessed little influence within the larger community. The congregation was in such dire financial straits that when the oil truck pulled up to the old house in Brighton its driver was instructed to collect payment before filling its tank. They had no money for mailing and the U.S. Post Office would not even grant them credit. For the first month the congregation had only a box at the Post Office as an address. Yet they felt compelled both to start a new congregation and do whatever they could to worship as a community and mitigate the horrors of the impending war and refugee crises. Despite all these obstacles, within a

year the Temple would pass its Constitution and By-Laws, elect its officers, begin a religious school, and establish a Brotherhood and Sisterhood for social and community action.

## WORLD WAR II AND THE JEWISH REFUGEE CRISIS

Starting a new Temple in such troubled economic, political, and social times required inordinate optimism and courage. Looming in the background of the synagogue’s first few years was economic uncertainty, world war and the unfolding Jewish refugee crisis. By 1941 the community was caught in Pearl Harbor alarm; shrieking radios trumpeted the news of Hitler’s armies devastating country after country and crushing every Jewish community. Jewry was in the grip of fear. Ships loaded with Jewish refugees found every port closed to them. Palestine was under British blockade. Even the United States enforced an anti-Semitic immigration quota. “I remember huddling around a radio,” Cohon recalled, “listening to reports of Hitler’s march through Europe — an evil tornado leveling one Jewish community after another, demolishing synagogue after synagogue, pillaging, burning, and annihilating our communities. We listened, and the world did nothing. We were frozen with fear and alarm. And here we were, a handful of men and women determined to build a new synagogue.” Abraham Schiller summarized the act more succinctly: “We built a house of worship when so many houses of

God went down under the guns of war.” When American Jews had little power to prevent death and destruction overseas, what more hopeful act was there than to start anew?

Rabbi Cohon’s first Passover sermon reminded members of the congregation how fortunate they were as American Jews: “There will be no family reunions for millions of our people in blood-soaked Europe; the expatriated and dispersed the world over will only sigh for a dream that haunts them. We are the freest and most prosperous Jewish community in the world. Shall we not observe our festival of freedom as spiritually mature men and women, profoundly grateful for our rights and our liberties as free citizens? Agencies of mercy have been calling for our material support. Shall we not celebrate our festival of freedom by contributing our means to these various appeals?”

Cohon’s appeal for justice on behalf of the congregation’s Jewish brethren was echoed in President Ehrenfried’s call for steely resolve on the road to war. Like Cohon, Ehrenfried asked his fellow congregants to exercise their responsibility as those blessed with good fortune. “This is the time for all morally responsible, spiritually cultivated Jewish men and women to discharge their duties honorably,” proclaimed Ehrenfried. He even labeled as a traitor anyone who shirked his or her duty to the United States and fellow Jewry. Young men heeded Ehrenfried’s call and served on behalf of the U.S. Armed Forces. David Lurensky, a key Temple founder, would

vacate the Temple to become an Army Captain from 1942 to 1946. During the war years, the synagogue opened its doors to locally stationed men in the Army and Navy. Women used the second floor of the rented building to sew for the Red Cross. The Sisterhood sponsored and taught courses in home defense, first aid and nutrition. The Brighton Temple became an official meeting spot for Air Wardens on Thursday evenings during the war. Sinai members did what they could to integrate newly immigrated Jews from Eastern Europe, frightened men and

ANNOUNCING

**SINAI FORUM**

**“PROBLEMS OF A JUST AND LASTING PEACE”**

SUNDAY, JANUARY 7, 1945, 8:15 P.M.  
DR. GAETANO SALVEMINI  
THE SACRED COW OF NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

SUNDAY, JANUARY 14, 1945, 8:15 P.M.  
DR. HANS KOHN  
THE MIDDLE EAST, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PALESTINE

SUNDAY, JANUARY 21, 1945, 8:15 P.M.  
DR. S. H. CROSS  
THE SOVIET UNION AND THE POST WAR WORLD

SUNDAY, JANUARY 28, 1945, 8:15 P.M.  
F. W. FOERSTER  
WHAT TO DO WITH DEFEATED GERMANY

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1945, 8:15 P.M.  
VOLNEY D. HURD  
CEMENTING THE FOUNDATIONS OF A JUST PEACE

SUBSCRIPTION \$2.50 for Series Plus 50c Tax 75c Individual Admission Plus 15c Tax	AUSPICES BROTHERHOOD AND SISTERHOOD COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION TEMPLE SINAI
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*Tickets may be obtained by writing Sinai Forum Committee, 50 Sewall Avenue,  
Brookline, Mass., or calling Asp. 5888*

Sinai Forum on War and Peace, *Sinai News*,  
January 1945.

## WITH OUR SONS IN THE SERVICE

Joseph Byer, RM 1/c, is on the west coast. Marshall Byer, a/s, is piling up honors for himself at M.I.T.

Sheldon Caras, S/Sgt., writes from the Admiralty Islands.

Robert Ehrmann is continuing his medical studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

Richard Giesberg, Pfc., is with Patton's Army.

Melvin Gordon, Pvt., our friends will be glad to know, is making good recovery and is up and around.

Sumner Hoffman is continuing his medical studies at Tufts College.

Capt. Isadore H. Jaffee, from all reports, is at Manila, tending the wounded.

Richard A. Kaye, Sgt., writes from German soil.

Robert E. Kitsis, Sgt., writes he is on his way overseas.

Russell Kitsis, Cpl., is in western Europe.

Capt. David A. Lurensky is at Dayton, Ohio, working hard and making an enviable reputation for himself.

Earl Marvin, Ens., is now studying at Harvard.

Harold K. Morris, Lt., writes from Langley Field to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Morris, "You have contributed to the Temple and in so doing you have honored me." Lt. Morris wrote this in gratitude to his parents for having made contributions to the Flower Fund and Hospitality Fund in his honor.

Charles H. Peskin, Seaman 3/c, is stationed at Key West, Florida.

Samuel B. Peskin, Lt., recently at home on furlough, is at Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The Schiller family is scattered. William Schiller, Lt., is stationed in Utah; Robert J. Schiller, Lt. (j.g.), is in the Pacific; Capt. Leon Ryack is in Burma with the Tenth Air Force.

Samuel Sheinfeld, Lt., is in the far Pacific.

Harriet Shulman, Ens., is stationed in Boston.

Stanley Warshaw, Ens., after completing his studies at Cornell, has left for San Francisco and points beyond.

Capt. David Weintraub is an instructor at Camp Atterbury, Indiana.

Herbert Covner, Sgt., son of Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Weiss, is in France; Henry Myron Weiss, Chief Yeoman, is now in Oregon.

We are most anxious to keep in touch with the sons and daughters of our members in the service. We earnestly ask parents to keep us informed if there is any service we can render.

women who had somehow, miraculously, escaped Hitler's armies and found their way to Greater Boston. Twice a week in the early 1940s, Temple Sinai would host "Americanization" classes for Jewish refugees that included instruction in English and American history. This program was especially dear to President Ehrenfried, who took an active role in bringing Austrian Jewish refugees to the United States in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Dr. Otto Ehrentheil, his wife Josephine, and their children Honi and Suzi became adored members of the congregation after migrating from Vienna. Dr. Ehrentheil, a practicing psychiatrist and former associate of Sigmund Freud, became a source of information and inspiration regarding the unfolding war in Europe.

Temple Sinai became an intellectual center for Greater Boston Jewry, sponsoring lectures and reading groups on fascism, communism, war, diplomacy, anti-Semitism and the unfolding events in Palestine. At the heart of these conversations was respect for the democratic principle. On the road to military victory over fascism, Cohon and his supporters called for open debate, dialogue, representative government, and the kind of freedom that was at the heart of American ideals and Reform Jewish identity. For Sinai congregants, patriotism, democracy, and Jewish values were firmly intertwined, as evidenced by Rabbi Cohon's 1942 blessing on behalf of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Cohon wished the President "clear and bold vision" so that he could "pilot our ship of state safely through the tempestuous seas to

the harbors of peace.” The blessing avoided any calls for retribution but instead demanded an honorable defense coupled with healing and reconciliation: “Keep our land consecrated as the home of liberty, where honorable men may live honorably. Grant us all thy blessing of peace and good will.”

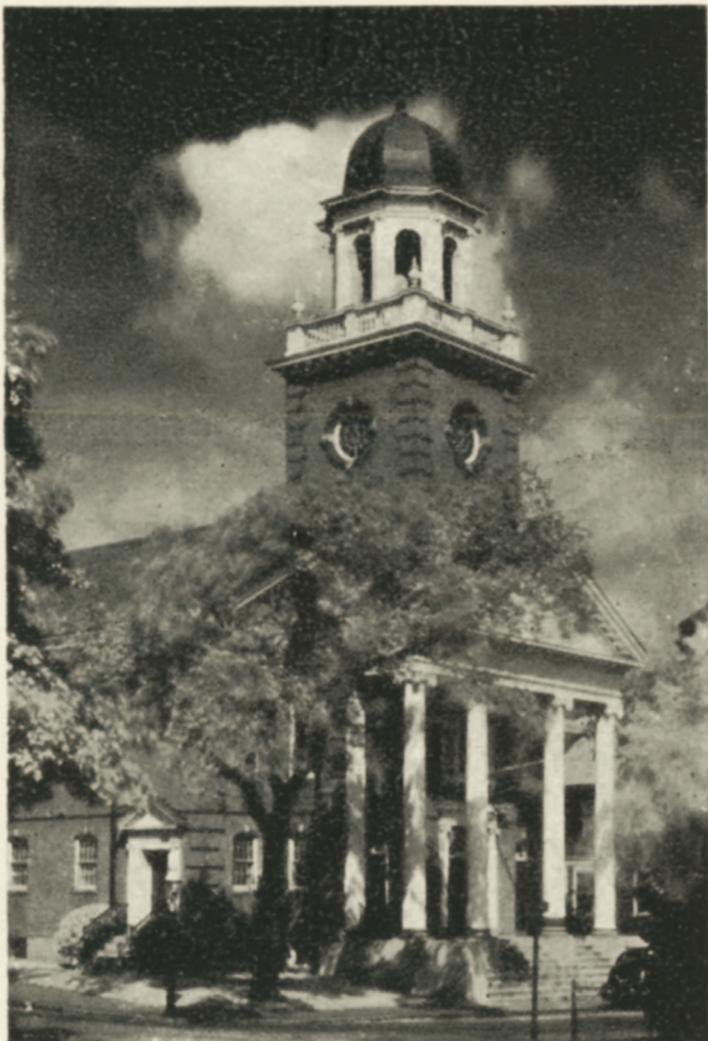
For Cohon, patriotism, self-defense, and a vigorous practicing of Judaism went hand in hand. His sermons identified Jews as the “martyr race” who had a particular responsibility to demonstrate themselves worthy of the heroism of their fathers. “We are on call. Whatever our country asks us we shall do — valiantly! Many millions of our people are serving as slaves in labor battalions of another country they hate. We fight as free men in the ranks of a free country — our country!” Yet he cautioned that the Jewish war effort was to be constituted of more than fighting on behalf of military forces. Sinai’s members could demonstrate their commitment to the war effort by volunteering on behalf of philanthropic Jewish organizations and ensuring a commitment to Judaism itself. For Cohon, this was a two-pronged war against fascism abroad and the corrosive effects of nihilism at home: “We plead with every Jew to fortify himself and his children with the faith of our fathers as fostered in our synagogue. Dare any responsible Jew withhold from his children the bracing influence of Jewish religious education?”

Rabbi Cohon was a stalwart leader who was prescient enough to see the dangers of an

overly jingoistic rhetoric. His sermons warned against the dangers of blind dogmatism. He reserved his harshest criticism for fascism, communism, and other forms of totalitarianism but warned of narrow thinking among Americans. World War II is often remembered for unity on the American home front, but Cohon and other astute commentators identified a burgeoning political polarization. “What does drive a deep wedge in our ranks and creates bitterness,” reported Cohon, “is the cruel intolerance among us — the name calling, the unfair misrepresentation of one another’s position.” He even referred to “irresponsible orators” who were steering Jews to “emotional orgies of intolerance against fellow Jews.” Cohon believed that the synagogue could rise above petty political divisions and bring the community together. “The synagogue,” Cohon pleaded, “must never become a tail to the propagandist’s kite.” In a 1944 sermon titled “What Shall we do with Our Enemies?” Rabbi Cohon dared to ask difficult questions such as “What shall we do with the Germans after we achieve victory?” and “Shall we perpetuate a system of vengeance forever?” The Sinai community would continue raising such challenging issues well into the postwar period.

## BROOKLINE HOME

Five years after breaking free from Temple Israel and a little more than three years after American entry into the war, Temple Sinai



OUR NEW HOME

New Home, *Sinai News*,  
February 1944.

moved out of its makeshift home in Brighton to its permanent location at the corner of Sewall Avenue and Charles Street in the heart of Brookline's Coolidge Corner. Back in 1916, the Second Unitarian Society had erected the stately and dignified colonial edifice and adorned it with white columns and a towering steeple. David Sears, a leading Boston merchant, supported the building of the nondenominational church so that it could be founded on the "spirit, not the letter" of Christianity. The structure became the recipient of multiple

architectural awards and later would be placed on the *National Register of Historic Places*.

Such a grand building did not come into Sinai's hands without a fight. As Temple representatives tried to close the deal, they found themselves in competition with an established Jewish real estate dealer who was bidding against them. When informed that the Unitarian authorities wanted the building to remain as a Temple for a liberal Jewish group rather than go on the market as a commercial venture

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

There are two matters that I want to report to the members at this time.

*First.* On the recommendation of the High Holy Day Arrangement Committee, of which Mr. Sidney Paris is Chairman, to alleviate the situation arising out of our limited seating capacity, it has been voted by the Board of Trustees that at the High Holy Day Services this fall we conduct two separate services on the night of Rosh Hashanah and on the night of Yom Kippur, an early service starting about six or six-fifteen and ending about seven forty-five, and a later service starting at about eight-fifteen or eight-thirty. Both will be conducted as full services in the Chapel by the Rabbi and Choir. The early service, it is hoped, will offer a special appeal to those who desire to have their young children worship with them in family groups. Further details will be given in subsequent notices.

*Second.* Because of our increased expenses, and to avoid, if possible, the recurrence of the operating deficits, we have experienced each year, and with the hope that we shall be able to balance our budget without appeals for funds to meet the deficiency between income from dues and expenses of operation, it has been voted by the Board of Trustees that, effective as of March 15, 1945, our membership dues shall be increased so that they will be as follows:

Family membership .....	\$75.00
Married couples, both of whom are under 30 years of age.....	\$40.00
Single individuals .....	\$40.00

Junior membership, for those between 18 and 24 years of age, remain at \$15.00 without increase. Likewise, there has been no increase in the Bar Mitzvah fees.

For present members these increases do not go into effect until the expiration of your present dues-paying year. In other words, if your annual dues start April 1 or May 1, the increase goes into effect then, and so on through the year. For most of our members, whose dues are payable on the basis of a year starting on September 1, the increase will not go into effect until that time.

A letter will be sent to you shortly stating more in detail the reasons for the increase. I know we have your sympathetic understanding of our position.

SAUL L. KAPLAN, *President.*

Temple Dues,  
*Sinai News*,  
April 1945.

the dealer replied, "Sinai? They really aren't Jews; they are only *Reform Jews*." That argument found little traction among the Unitarians, who saw common cause between their congregation and the Jews of Temple Sinai. Waitstill Sharp, Minister of the Unitarian Society of Boston, expressed sorrow for the loss of the building but elation that the building would be put to use by kindred spirits: "Unitarians everywhere rejoice that friends of an outlook on religion and ethics so close to Unitarianism have taken up the tradition of prayer and community service at the lovely brick temple." Julian Morgenstern,

President of Hebrew Union College, was present for the opening of the new site and noted with delight that "the congregation has received a permanent home, and one of such obvious distinction and beauty." Cohon thanked his Unitarian friends for being "enlightened, noble-minded Christians" who "dispelled racial and religious strife, thus championing the American way." Temple Sinai would continue to find common cause with like-minded faith communities for years to come.

The acquisition of the new sanctuary at Sewall Avenue and Charles Street was made

possible through the connections of Abraham Schiller, who would go on to be President in the late 1940s. The transfer of property also was facilitated by the close relationship between Rabbi Cohon and Frederick May Eliot, who had been President of the American Unitarian Association. In many ways, the colonial brick home has always been an architectural curiosity for Brookline's Jews. Why would Jews want to worship in a place that most observers would view as a church? Elliot Bachner, a synagogue President in the 1950s, explained that the Temple was only a physical entity, a mere "excellent example of a certain type of American architecture." But Sinai congregants had added to the physical structure a "spiritual something that has made it sacred, a symbol of our heritage of Jews and the higher aspirations of Judaism and mankind." As modern, progressive, and liberal thinkers, Sinai Jews were less caught up in fixed symbols and instead imposed their own meaning and values on their place of worship.

## POSTWAR GROWTH

As Europe reeled from the devastating effects of World War II and the Holocaust, American Jews replaced Eastern Europeans as the world's largest and most influential Jewish population. It was imperative that they nurture their home communities while ensuring that world Jewry, particularly displaced refugees, found a protective home. For Temple Sinai this would be a period of stable growth, both in terms of its own congregation and facilities and its efforts to address the broader issues of the day that affected Jew and gentile alike. Rabbi Cohon, always the deft thinker, challenged his congregation to consider the postwar peace from multiple points of view. When the brutal war reached its terrible crescendo in the summer of 1945, for example, many local rabbis focused solely on the establishment of the State of Israel. Rabbi Cohon instead turned his congregation's attention to the dangers of nationalism, violations of civil liberties, and especially the use of atomic power.

Rabbi Cohon (center), at Life Tenure Dedication Service, 1946. Also pictured (from left) Rabbi Samuel J. Abrams, Professor Samuel S. Cohon, Dean John M. Ratcliffe and Saul L. Kaplan.



His Yom Kippur sermon focused on the menace this new weapon posed “to ourselves and our posterity,” threatening to “reduce our earth to a dead cinder spinning in space in infinite futility.” For Cohon and his fellow travelers, the postwar period was a time of healing, both at home and abroad. The lessons of the war and the Holocaust were not merely about rebuilding Jewish life, but employing the universal principles of Judaism to create a better humanity, what his disciples would later come to call “*tikkun olam*.”

The postwar period also meant grappling with the twin forces of nihilism and assimilation. After so much death and destruction, there was potential for American Jews to grow cynical about spiritual matters. At the same time there was the additional pull of American

material culture and a wish for social acceptance among the majority culture of gentiles. In combination, these forces had the potential to lure congregants away from the synagogue and assimilate children into the larger culture. These trends were checked in the years immediately following war. The Holocaust loomed large in Jewish consciousness and served as a counterweight to assimilation.

The Holocaust prompted congregants to grapple with feelings of guilt and compassion, each of which could reinvigorate communal Jewish life. Sinai members became convinced that they could honor European Holocaust victims by contributing funds to the infrastructure of Temple life at home. In a 1947 open letter to the congregation, President Saul Kaplan reminded his congregants that the “total number of Jews in the world has been so cruelly cut down” and that the time was ripe for thought and action “among serious, conscientious Jews. We have lost one generation. If we lose any more we shall lose ourselves.” Kaplan more specifically wanted to address Temple Sinai’s meager classroom facilities, which were insufficient for the growing student population. Kaplan warned his congregation that when their children returned in September of 1947 there would be a sign on the door that read “No more Jewish children wanted!” Kaplan’s pleas were coupled with a capital campaign to which the community responded with great enthusiasm. While Sinai parents occasionally needed reminding



New School, *Sinai News*, April 1948.

about their own responsibility as participating members of the community, they often delivered on repeated calls to fund Jewish education.

While Saul Kaplan and David Lurensky provided the financial and administrative support for the religious school, it was Esther Starr Grossman, the school's principal, who hired and trained staff, created a dynamic curriculum, and established a rigorous education that drew many families to the congregation. For the first ten years Grossman nurtured an experienced coterie of public school teachers for the religious school. In 1948 the Brookline Superintendent of Schools joined Grossman in a ribbon cutting ceremony to usher in the new school. Isabel Berger, President of the Sisterhood, best encapsulated the sentiments of the 700 in attendance when she expressed appreciation that "with all the insecurity and chaos in the world we have the courage to erect a religious schoolhouse, which shall keep them loyal and steadfast in the faith of the fathers and in the cause of liberal Judaism." Student enrollment expanded so rapidly that a third floor was added to the schoolhouse and classes had to be held on both Saturdays and Sundays in order to accommodate the population. Child education was coupled with a vibrant adult program for Sinai members and the larger Jewish community, hosting forums on foreign affairs, civil rights, Zionism, and interfaith dialogue. Always the secular rationalist, Rabbi Cohon ensured that these conversations included multiple viewpoints and that congregants were given the opportunity

to assess issues objectively.

One of the issues that few Jews, including Cohon, were capable of evaluating objectively was Zionism and the creation of the modern state of Israel. Cohon had been staunchly opposed to Zionism, believing it violated the spirit of a more universal Judaism. In 1942, he joined the American Council for Judaism in opposing the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. The rabbis identified Palestine as "dear to the Jewish soul" but made clear that "in light of our universalistic interpretation of Jewish history and destiny, and also because of our concern for the welfare and status of the Jewish people living in other parts of the world, we are unable to subscribe to or support the political emphasis now paramount in the Zionist program." Rabbi Cohon, like many Reform Jews before World War II, was reticent to support a Jewish state in Palestine because he was unsure that it represented the best interest of the Jews. As a secular humanist, Cohon was skeptical of the kind of parochialism that came with a Jewish state. The horrors of the Holocaust and the postwar crisis in Palestine compelled many rabbis like Cohon to temper their views. As Sinaites completed the construction of the new religious school in the spring of 1948, Jews and Arabs were at war in Palestine following the United Nations partition plan. The U.N. mandate for an Israeli state had been the product of significant arm-twisting by American President Harry Truman, which itself was the outgrowth of enormous pressure

from the American Jewish lobby. By 1947 Cohon came out in favor of the U.N. commission report recommending the partition of Palestine into one Jewish and one Arab state. One of Cohon's successors, Rabbi Frank Waldorf, would clarify many years later: "I don't think Beryl ever became an enthusiastic Zionist, but he was a realist and a pragmatist enough to say, Jews have to have a place, some place, to go."

Cohon was not alone in his ambivalence about Israel, particularly when it came to siphoning American Jews for the Zionist project. In the late 1940s the American Jewish Committee threatened to withdraw support for Israel if the Jewish state's leaders did not stop calling for a massive immigration of American Jews to Israel. Cohon's 1949 Yom Kippur sermon insisted that Americans commit to building a Jewish life in the United States rather than one abroad.

Cohon granted that American Jews might find common kinship with Israelis but maintained that their primary allegiances ought to be with their adopted country: "Judaism is a moral, progressive revelation that on America's good earth our ancient and ever-new faith can flourish and realize itself best." He added that "our brethren in the State of Israel are Israelis and we are Americans. In the present state of the world's civilization, citizenship is limited to one state." Professor Samuel Cohon, Beryl's brother, echoed those sentiments at Temple Sinai's 10th anniversary rededication service and clarified the balancing act in which many Reform Jews would find themselves regarding Israel: "For years to come American Jews will have to stand by Israel and help it solve the urgent problems, political and economic, that press upon it." This support, however, did not change American

Rabbi Cohon Citation Dinner, April 23, 1950.



Jews' chief allegiances: "We consider America our beloved home. Our bond with the new state will be purely moral and spiritual. We may receive some cultural and spiritual stimulation from the revival of the land of the Bible. However, we Jews in America will have to look to our own spiritual needs and continue to shape our own conceptions of life and duty."

Another marker of the Temple's firm footing as it approached its ten-year anniversary was the establishment of the Sinai section in Sharon Memorial Park, a 317-acre Jewish burial ground in the towns of Sharon and Canton. When it first opened in 1948, the park was the first new Jewish cemetery to open in the Boston area in several decades. It was planned as a memorial park with no monuments so as to highlight the broad vistas of green for meditation and contemplation. The trustees of Temple Sinai embraced the new cemetery and became one of its co-sponsors, thus providing for the burial of its deceased without the costly investment required by a synagogue-owned cemetery. The management of Sharon Park set aside an area so that the Sinai community could be buried together. The Temple Sinai section was identified with the congregation's name emblazoned on a large fieldstone wall near the entrance of the park. The dedication of the marker on September 18, 1949 went a long way in legitimizing the synagogue as a viable temple in the Boston Jewish community. Ten years after its founding, Temple Sinai had finally arrived.



Top and middle: Passover, 1950. | Bottom: Purim, 1950.

## CONSOLIDATION, CONSENSUS AND CONFLICT

Compared with the trying years of depression, war, and genocide, the postwar period was one of stability, growth, and acceptance for American Jews and Temple Sinai. Revelations about the horrors of the Holocaust engendered a more hospitable environment and greater tolerance for Jews in the United States. Many Reform Jews would ascend to the middle class, break barriers in business and academia, and migrate to the protective communities of suburbia. Rapid social and economic mobility and the legitimization of American Judaism were not without their perils. Reform Jews in the United States were less encumbered by anti-Semitism and were free to pursue a host of social, cultural, and spiritual outlets. The postwar period would place Reform Jews in closer social contact with gentiles, no longer locking them within their provincial enclaves. Material success, social acceptance, intermarriage and declining Jewish identity were all part of the same package.

Rabbi Cohon's sermons, lectures, and essays over the next two decades were directed at mitigating the lure of secularization among his congregants. While a proud secular rationalist himself, Cohon feared the corrosive effects of American culture, particularly on the children in his congregation. What especially troubled him was the ways in which parents expected the religious school to take responsibility for their

children's Jewish education while they distanced themselves from Jewish practice and spirituality. A few parents even left their children unattended at Temple services while they tended to other matters. "If you want your child to grow up a self-respecting cultured Jew," Cohon lectured, "you will have to take the trouble to be self-respecting cultured Jews yourself. Do not take flippantly sacred Jewish traditions. You must know more than your children." Worse, for Cohon, was the way in which material success eroded Jewish adults' commitment to marriage and reproduction. He attacked the "irreverence and irresponsibility that comes from too much money and too little character, from too much unnecessary travel, too much hotel life, too little respect for marriage vows." Especially disheartening for Cohon were childless homes, which he referred to as tragic. "When some years ago a young couple said to me that they felt they had no right to bring children in the world, living as they did under Hitler, I could understand," explained Cohon. "But how shall we understand the refusal to have children because bearing them means less movies, less night clubs for a while, less running around for several years?"

For Cohon and other Reform rabbis, the key to combatting assimilation and loss of Jewish identity was to find appropriate accommodation points between American and Jewish culture. One strategy was to inculcate rituals that were oriented to children and the



The second confirmation class, May 1941.

home, such as lighting Chanukah candles and participating in a Passover Seder. Across the country Chanukah became an increasingly commercialized holiday to compete with the festive and material draw of Christmas. Similarly, Purim festivities became more of a focal point as the Jewish holiday that often landed closest to Easter. Cohon also drew members to the Temple by concentrating on Jewish ethics, values, tradition, and spirituality rather than strict ritual and prayer. “In some schools,” Cohon lamented, “nothing is taught but Hebrew as if Judaism were nothing more than Hebrew. Judaism is a personal, vital religion, motivating life, determining conduct, inspiring and sanctifying life. We don’t want to daven, we want to pray — intelligently, honestly, and beautifully.”

These approaches often were effective, but did not ensure children’s commitment to Jewish education beyond the elementary school years. A primary area of concern was the way in which many boys and their parents viewed the Bar Mitzvah as a culminating point of their Jewish education and subsequently withdrew from Temple life. Cohon also was troubled by the way in which Bar Mitzvah celebrations morphed into more lavish parties that robbed the event of its spiritual meaning. At first Cohon treaded lightly, reminding parents in 1950 of a “gentleman’s agreement” in which Bar Mitzvah boys would continue their Jewish education with him until Confirmation. He was pleased to report at this juncture that few parents and their sons broke their word, which would be “a distinct evil.” By 1954 Cohon would grow frustrated with the minority of parents who “took advantage” of the Bar Mitzvah opportunity to put an early end to their sons’ education. He would formalize the gentleman’s agreement into an actual contract, a “Bar Mitzvah Pledge,” in which the son, mother, and father would sign a document committing to education through Confirmation. The following year *Sinai News* would reprint an article from FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, “Should I Force My Child to Go to Sunday School?” Hoover’s answer, validated by Cohon, was “a resounding YES!” Church, and presumably synagogue, could serve as a mitigating force against “the dangers of juvenile delinquency and youthful rebellion.”

## Bar Mitzvah Pledge

Reform Judaism, in its early days, gave up *Bar Mitzvah* for two reasons: 1) *Bar Mitzvah* discriminated against girls. Reform sought to enfranchise women religiously, giving them the same rights and privileges and demanding the same responsibilities as were enjoined on men. 2) *Bar Mitzvah* had degenerated to a point where it defeated Jewish education. Parents had their sons drilled in the *Bar Mitzvah* blessings by way of so-called preparation, and discontinued Jewish education altogether immediately after the *Bar Mitzvah* festivities. The parties grew more and more lavish; Jewish education shrank more and more to the vanishing point. Hence the Reform fathers introduced Confirmation, which is meant for boys and girls alike, and requires the completion of the prescribed school curriculum.

Of recent years a good number of Reform congregations have re-introduced *Bar Mitzvah*, on the faith that parents today are thoughtful and responsible enough to make *Bar Mitzvah* an added educational incentive, rather than a defeat of education. They wish, further, to recapture the wholesome aspects of *Bar*

*Mitzvah*: traditional and family values. On the whole, this reintroduction is proving to be a good and positive practice. However, a number of parents are taking advantage of *Bar Mitzvah*. In a number of cases it is again an abuse of legitimate Jewish standards.

Temple Sinai has had, on the whole, a happy experience with *Bar Mitzvah*. The Rabbi has seen fine, constructive influences in the lives of families and in the Temple. This past year, however, a number of parents and their sons have taken advantage of the Congregation and the *Bar Mitzvah* opportunities afforded them. We are determined to preserve the integrity of *Bar Mitzvah*.

We accept candidates for *Bar Mitzvah* on two conditions: 1) they must be pupils in our religious school and meet all the school requirements; 2) they and their parents pledge themselves to continue in our school through Confirmation.

We earnestly ask all parents and their sons anticipating *Bar Mitzvah* at Temple Sinai to cooperate with us. We ask them to discuss this situation with their sons and sign and return to us the following pledge:

*We agree to the standards for Bar Mitzvah set by Temple Sinai, and pledge ourselves that 1) the Bar Mitzvah candidate will attend the school sessions regu-*

*larly and do his work creditably; 2) that he will continue through Confirmation. We give our word to the Rabbi and the congregation.*

(son)

(mother)

(father)

(date)

Bar Mitzvah Pledge, *Sinai News*, November 1954.

The corruption of morals among children and parents was a constant theme in Rabbi Cohon's sermons and writings. For Cohon, these were the evils that came with material success. He expressed concern for "over-privileged children with money but lacking in standards, conduct, and idealism." At the core of his pronouncements was a call to something higher than one's self, a desire to move beyond form to substance. "Love and happiness in our time are false corruptions for what is sacred," explained Cohon. "The love that is synthetic, glamor, sentiments, and slush is only promiscuous vulgarity. More important than personal happiness is goodness, truth, honor, and personal responsibility." Such pronouncements might have struck his congregants as preachy and overbearing

were they not coupled with a profound intellectual appeal and prescription for social action. Guilt and a heavy hand alone were not forces strong enough to continue to draw members to Temple Sinai and Rabbi Cohon.

Cohon was a nationally respected scholar who challenged conventional wisdom about his life and times and offered his congregation a means of making sense of the world around them. As the country wrestled with juvenile delinquency, vice, corruption, race riots, and international disorder, Temple Sinai served as a true sanctuary, providing intellectual and emotional sustenance. "When politics is played with a feverish intensity both at home and abroad and revolutions of all kinds are erupting all over the face of the earth," explained President Elliot Bachner, "here in this building under the gentle leadership of Rabbi Cohon, this congregation, for a few hours, finds divine peace." For many congregants, such quiet contemplation would extend beyond a few short hours in the synagogue, as the "peace permeates our innermost consciousness and stays with us through the year." More important, that peace and contemplation would be directed toward social good. Cohon's Sinai organized multiple interfaith dialogues and social action efforts to address civil rights, poverty, anti-Semitism, McCarthyism, the State of Israel, and the responsible development of science and technology. At a time when the United States celebrated its technological prowess, Cohon and

like-minded preachers asked their congregations to develop equivalent moral centers: “Because men achieve skill, build bridges, rear skyscrapers, split the atom, and produce powerful bombs we assume that they are wise and profound in the meaning of life and in the purpose of the Almighty. This is one of the basic confusions of our civilization. We are dedicating our brainiest young men to the achievement of know-how but where is the wisdom and goodness and moral imperative?”

In 1963 Rabbi Cohon would ask congregational authorities to relieve him of his active rabbinate at Temple Sinai, as he wished to devote himself to writing, and to serve the congregation on an informal and personal basis. President

Walter M. Cobe appointed a Rabbinical Committee to select a successor. On December 11, 1963 the committee, by unanimous decision, approved of the 36-year-old Benjamin Z. Rudavsky of Fairmount Temple in Cleveland Ohio. Rabbi Cohon would continue to thrive as a scholar, writer, and powerful force in the congregation until his death in 1976. His retirement included a stint teaching Judaism at Tufts University and the publication of a series of books and pamphlets in order to fill the void of such materials in religious schools. As the 1960s would explode with social and cultural revolution, both he and Rabbi Rudavsky would do their best to orient Temple Sinai in a just and reasoned manner.



Confirmation Class, May 23, 1963.

## RABBI BERYL D. COHON PUBLICATIONS

*Ethics of the Rabbis* (1932)

*The Prophets, Their Personalities and Teachings* (1939)

*Introduction to Judaism: A Book for Jewish Youth* (1942)

*Judaism in Theory and Practice* (1948)

*From Generation to Generation* (1951)

*Jacob's Well: Some Jewish Sources and Parallels to the Sermon on the Mount* (1956)

*Out of the Heart: Intimate Talks from a Jewish Pulpit on the Personal Issues of Life* (1957)

*God's Angry Men: A Student's Introduction to the Hebrew Prophets* (1961)

*My King and My God: Intimate Talks on the Devotions of Life* (1963)

*Men at the Crossroads: Between Jerusalem and Rome, Synagogue and Church* (1970)

*Shielding the Flame: A Personal and Spiritual Inventory of a Liberal Rabbi* (1972)

*Come Let Us Reason Together: Sermons Presented in Days of Crisis* (1977)



## PART 2: RABBI BENJAMIN RUDAVSKY, 1964-1974

### A TIME OF UPHEAVAL

*“It was a time of transformation from an assimilationist Reform congregation, a more Protestant-type style, to a more Jewish, self-affirming one that welcomed Jewish sources and Jewish influence, the richness of the culture. And, the idealism of the culture! You know, all of these things that were really lost in the kind of Reform that emerged out of central Europe and was brought here and carried out for years, for decades. The beginning of the change was in the '30s, [specifically] the Columbus Platform of 1936. From then on, into the '40s and the war and the Holocaust and Israel — everything changed. And I embraced it. I embraced all of that. And I think I represented it in what I taught and what I preached and in my personal relationships. So, you know, it's coming back to a wholesomeness and a fullness of Jewish identity that really wasn't there before.”*

**Rabbi Benjamin Rudavsky** | *Oral History*, August 15, 2012, Hingham, MA

#### LOOKING BACKWARD, MOVING FORWARD

In 1964 Rabbi Benjamin Rudavsky arrived at Temple Sinai as it commemorated its silver anniversary. The event celebrated the vision and commitment of Rabbi Cohon, who had built a stable, thriving, and modern congregation. Under Cohon's stewardship, Temple Sinai became a pioneer among Boston Reform synagogues: consistently conferring Bar Mitzvah; granting women equal membership and voting rights; assigning equal seating privileges for all members;

and encouraging family worship so that parents and children could pray together. These advances came to fruition because of the continuity, commitment, and innovativeness of Cohon and his two longtime partners, Musical Director Evelyn Borofsky and Religious School Principal Esther Starr Grossman. These founding figures steered the liberal congregation through gradual, patient and reasoned change that suited the life and times of their generation. Grossman retired from her position in 1966, and Borofsky passed away in 1967, but Emeritus Rabbi Cohon

remained as Rudavsky's not always welcome shadow. The political upheavals and social divisions of the 1960s would bring out profound differences between these leaders, as well as their respective followers.

## FROM BROOKLYN TO BROOKLINE

Rudavsky's childhood prepared him for a life of rabbinical study and to meet the special challenges of Judaism and Zionism in the 1960s. Born in 1927 and raised in Borough Park, Brooklyn, Rudavsky was a voracious reader surrounded by Jewish ideas, world politics, and Hebraic literature. His father, Jochanan Rudavsky, was an attorney and a prominent Zionist leader. Jochanan was the founder of the Brooklyn region of the Zionist Organization of America, and served as its President. He was also the Associate Secretary of the Zionist Council of Greater New York and helped to found the New York chapter of the United Jewish Appeal. Jochanan's politics led Benjamin and his two older brothers to a life of intellectual inquiry and engaged activism. "I can remember in 1933 when I was six years old," Rudavsky recounted, "a cauldron boiling with Adolf Hitler with one of his tirade speeches. It was just awful. I mean I remembered this at age six! And I followed the war. I started reading the front page of the *New York Times* probably by the time I was eight or nine."

Young Rudavsky did not need to read the *New York Times* to know that the Depression

years had been unkind ones to his family. His father's once prosperous law practice fell apart after the stock market crash of 1929, forcing the family to move half a dozen times to increasingly smaller accommodations. When the family stabilized toward the end of the 1930s, Rudavsky enrolled in the Flatbush Yeshiva where he excelled and graduated at the precocious age of 15. He followed his two older brothers to seminary school at New York's Jewish Institute of Religion (JIR). His Hebrew was so exceptional that it was superior to many of the faculty at the school. While at JIR, Rudavsky also enrolled at Brooklyn College, where he would eventually earn his degree. His initial joint enrollment had been with Cornell University where he had won a scholarship to the Agricultural School. "I wanted to become a kibbutznik," Rudavsky explained. "My dream was to go to Israel and become a farmer. That's how [deeply] my Zionism impacted me. When they offered me this scholarship to go to the Agricultural School, it was a no-brainer. But this is a boy from Brooklyn, mind you. I'd never been on a farm. As soon as I encountered the smells, I knew it was not for me. It was a reverie, but it was not realistic." Rudavsky was equally idealistic about the promise of American life, which led him to join many of the social justice movements of the 1960s.

With his JIR and Brooklyn College degrees in hand, Rudavsky headed to the University of Virginia in 1951 to be the Hillel

Director. Rudavsky's two short years in Virginia brought him to the attention of hiring committees at the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. He accepted the latter position where he headed the Hillel Foundation for six years. Rudavsky and his wife Malka were content raising their three young children in Champaign and likely would have stayed longer if not for a former mentor, Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld, who extended an offer to join Fairmount Temple in Cleveland as an Associate Rabbi. Rudavsky admired Lelyveld's commitment to Zionism, civil rights, and pacifist causes,

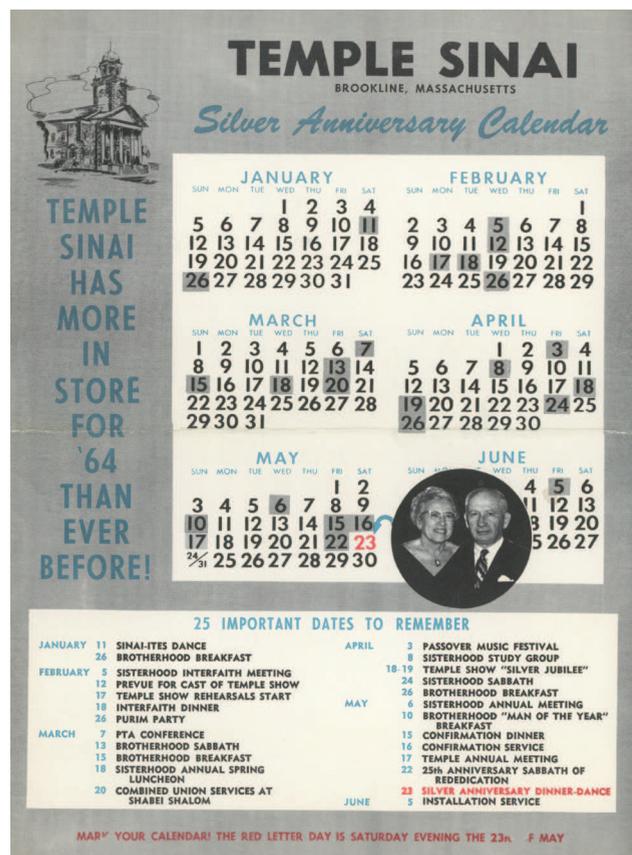
forming much of his worldview under Lelyveld's five-year tutelage.

When the position opened at Temple Sinai in 1963, Lelyveld encouraged Rudavsky to pursue it with the caveat that "Beryl Cohon is not like us," meaning that he was assimilationist, anti-Zionist, and quiet on political movements for social justice. From Lelyveld's perspective, the 1939 division in Temple Israel that led to the birth of Temple Sinai was between Jews who admired Joshua Loth Liebman "as one of the most articulate and influential Zionists in America," and Cohon's supporters, who were "an entourage of assimilationist-type Jews, a product of the Pittsburgh Platform." Anticipating potential friction with the 66-year-old Rabbi Cohon, Lelyveld counseled Rudavsky to "just treat him well. Be nice to him. Don't give him any reason to find fault with you."

### GENERATIONAL CONFLICT

Replacing a long-standing and beloved rabbi is never an easy task, but Rudavsky's challenge was heightened by Cohon's status as a founding father, his contrary approach to Judaism, and the fact that he did not fade into the background. "He was always there," Rudavsky lamented. "He was on the pulpit behind me every Friday night. And so he saw what I did." Still, Rudavsky could not help but be charmed by Temple Sinai and the warm community he found there.

Even the Baptist facade was enchanting. "The white pews and the red carpeting. It was all very



25th Anniversary Calendar with Rabbi Beryl and Sally Cohon, 1964.



Boys Club: Rabbi Rudavsky (bottom row, far left) and Rabbi Cohon (bottom row, far right) pictured with members of the Brotherhood, c. 1965.

sweet. I loved it there.” For many congregants that affection was mutual. They were attracted to Rudavsky’s superior oratory skills, political ideals, youthful vigor, and, by many accounts, charm and good looks. Rudavsky parlayed these strengths as a means of compelling his congregants to blend their spirituality with political activism. Whereas Cohon’s politics were wrapped up in World War II nationalism, Rudavsky was a man of the 1960s who questioned the power and authority of the federal government on a host of domestic and foreign policy issues. Unlike Cohon, Rudavsky was an outspoken advocate for civil rights and an anti-war protestor.

Minor differences in style between the two rabbis could often take on greater symbolism. Rudavsky did his best to slowly incorporate

new changes into the service such as greater use of Hebrew, the inclusion of Jewish folklore and music, and increased congregational participation. Temple Sinai introduced Sephardic pronunciation into its Hebrew instruction and morning program in 1966 and made it the synagogue standard by 1969. For Rudavsky, the movement from Ashkenazic to Sephardic pronunciation represented a more “authentic connection to the language of their brethren in Israel.”

Another symbol of generational rift had to do with the Kaddish prayer. Under Cohon the tradition had been for only mourners who had recently lost a family member to stand during the prayer. The idea was that everybody could identify the mourners, to whom they could extend their comfort and support. Many Reform rabbis in Rudavsky’s generation believed that the Kaddish prayer would be better practiced as a collective experience with the entire congregation standing. “I remember sitting through services where Rabbi Cohon was Rabbi Emeritus,” one longtime member recalled. “Rabbi Rudavsky would be leading the service and we’d get to that point in the service and the people who liked Rudavsky and wanted to follow him and do things his way would all stand up at that point in the service. And some of the older members of the congregation who were still enamored with Rabbi Cohon and didn’t like this new young rabbi would sit down and it was almost like a political showdown.”

## ISRAELI POLITICS

Rudavsky's Zionism and Cohon's ambivalence about the state of Israel came to the fore during the Six Day War of 1967. With the mobilization of Egyptian and Syrian troops on its borders, and unclear about the intentions of an increasingly hostile Jordan and Iraq, Israel feared an attack of apocalyptic proportions. Unwilling to wait for his country to be attacked, General Moshe Dayan led a preemptive strike against Egyptian forces on June 5. The other Arab nations rallied to Egypt's defense. Within a week Israel defeated its Arab foes and found itself in control of the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. While a great strategic victory for Israel, the newly acquired land and its Arab inhabitants would present challenges for future generations of Israelis. In the United States, the Six Day War heightened the Israel consciousness of American Jews, moving it from the periphery to the center



**Man in the Middle:** William Wheeler served as Temple President and benevolent mediator between the rabbis from 1965 to 1970.

of Reform Jewish concerns. In years to come, synagogues like Temple Sinai became more closely tied with philanthropy, political activity, education, and the cultural life of Israel.

Rudavsky's response was an immediate celebration of the victory with a call to press forward. "Let us not be complacent," warned Rudavsky. "Let us not forget the feelings on the morning of June 5th before we knew that Israel would be victorious. Let us keep before us the memory of the preceding week when the Arab world organized itself for an all-out war of annihilation against Israel. Let us remember how alone we felt as the entire world stood by and Israel was left to fight for survival without outside help." Invoking the memory of the Holocaust and imploring his American Jewish congregation to see common cause with the Israelis, Rudavsky explained, "We could not stand by. We had to respond. We had to be with them in their struggle, our struggle, for survival." The *Boston Globe* would later quote Rabbi Rudavsky referring to the war as "an apocalyptic and redemptive event in the most profound and religious sense." He even went so far as to compare the Six Day War with the Exodus story, "in some unexplainable, subterranean and mysterious way as nothing less than a God-ordained, redemptive event for Jewish history and for the Jewish people as a whole. After 2,000 years Jews have shown themselves to be ready to defend themselves with dignity against an enemy, and face an enemy sworn to annihilate them."

Rabbi Cohon had never been a great supporter of Israel, and only begrudgingly accepted its statehood in 1948. For Rudavsky, the rabbis' differences on Israel represented a larger split within American Jewry: "There were those who were diaspora lovers. Literally. They said the future of the Jewish people is in the diaspora and the others, of course, said the future of the Jewish people is happening in Israel, and I was with that group and Cohon was with the diaspora people." Rudavsky believed that, due to his Zionism, there was a small clique of Sinai members who "hated my guts and wanted to get rid of me." He did take some comfort in the knowledge that he was not alone in this generational conflict. Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn of neighboring Temple Israel had similarly ori-

ented his own congregation to a more intimate connection to Israel, as well as to greater social action. "We were not outliers in this respect," noted Rudavsky. "We thought it was a kind of revolution."

## VIETNAM AND CIVIL RIGHTS

That revolution was not just about Reform Jews and Israel, but the domestic strife unfolding on the American home front about the Vietnam War. One poignant moment of conflict was played out during the High Holiday services of 1967. What ought to have been a moment of collective worship and a unified celebration of the growth of the congregation devolved into a minor showdown between the two rabbis. Thanks to the groundwork laid by Rabbi Cohon,



Jim Kaye, member since 1953.

*"I remember Rudavsky and his wife [with whom] my parents were close. Their kids were about the same age as my three sisters and [me]. We shared Passover with them. We'd go over their place for some of the holidays. I remember him being much more passionate and interested in social action and doing things in the community than Rabbi Cohon was. So that was a real shift to me and probably reflects a broad change in Reform Judaism. Rabbi Rudavsky became very active in protesting the war in Vietnam and I think was arrested one or two times. I remember him as being much more passionate, socially conscious, and socially active, and active in the anti-war movement. As a consequence my parents got interested and active. There was a huge shift in American public thinking about the war and I felt like I was being led there by our spiritual leader."*

the congregation had grown to a point in which the synagogue could not accommodate all the families interested in worshipping on the High Holidays. For several years services were held in a suite in Boston's John Hancock building, where they would continue until 1981. Rudavsky hoped to use Yom Kippur services to communicate the evils of the burgeoning war in Vietnam, what he believed to be a collective call to the conscience of the congregation. "We had about 1,500 people attending and he [Rabbi Cohon] is sitting behind me," Rudavsky remembered, "and I gave this anti-Johnson sermon because of the war in Vietnam. And people loved it."

Rudavsky's sermon, titled "Who is Guilty?" was a more comprehensive critique of the shortcomings of American life. Rudavsky issued a damning indictment of his fellow citizens:

*We shut up millions of human beings in our central cities and take away their basic dignity in every way.*

*We take their manhood from the men by denying them [the] opportunity for employment.*

*We give their children sub-standard education.*

*We force them to live in run-down, rat-infested dwellings for the profit of corrupt, absentee landlords. They are closed tight in ghettos, victims of their own frustration and despair. Their justified anger and hostility explode into a chaos of violent destruction.*

*We arm to the teeth tens of thousands of nuclear bombs, billions of which could have been used to transform ghettos, to build homes, create jobs, provide decent schooling for all, and find [a] cure [for] cancer and heart disease.*

*In Vietnam we, and they, escalate in destruction and*

*brutality and callous disregard for life with sickening body counts.*

Cohon was livid with what he viewed as Rudavsky's interjection of partisan politics into the rabbinical sermon. When given the opportunity to deliver his own sermon the following day, Cohon contradicted almost everything that Rudavsky had said in an attempt to summon the patriotism of his congregation. To bring his point home, he had the congregation stand up at the end of the service and sing "God Bless America."

Rudavsky's activism was more in line with Reform rabbis at the time. As early as 1968, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations had passed a "Vietnam Resolution" calling for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, imploring President Johnson that justice would emerge "not by might and not by power, but by spirit." When it was clear that such pleas went ignored by Johnson and his successor, President Richard Nixon, many activists took to the streets. In May of 1972, both Rabbi Rudavsky and his wife Malka joined with several rabbis for a peace rally at the JFK Federal Building in Boston. The rabbis were eventually arrested when a group of police officers asked them to leave. As one rabbi joining the protest noted, "We do not expect our action to bring the troops home, but we want to remind people that there is still conscience in the land."

Cohon was not necessarily opposed to movements for social justice, and was cer-

# 29 arraigned after peace rally

By Frank Donovan  
Globe Staff

Twenty-nine demonstrators — six of them rabbis — were arraigned in US District Court yesterday evening on charges stemming from a prayer and peace rally at the JFK Federal Building in Boston.

The protestors were arraigned before US Magistrate Willie J. Davis for violation of a government regulation governing Federal buildings, which prohibits unusual noises and the impeding of employees and the general public from access.

All of the defendants pleaded innocent and were released on \$1000 bail without surety pending court appearance at 10 a.m. on May 31.

Magistrate Davis informed the demonstrators that they were being charged with a "petty offense and had no right to a jury trial."

The maximum penalty for the offense is 30 days in jail and or a \$50 fine.

Two 15-year-old juveniles, who were among those arrested, were told by the magistrate they would have to sign waivers to be tried as adults, and if they decided to do so their parents would have to accompany them to court on May 31.

The rabbis arrested are all members of the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis, and were among 20 rabbis who took part in the antiwar demonstration.

Those arrested were Rabbi Herman Blumberg, 37, of Temple Beth Elohim, Wellesley; Rabbi Daniel

Polish, 30, of Temple Beth David, South Shore; Rabbi Dr. Herman Pollack, 64, religious advisor at MIT; Rabbi Benjamin Rudavsky, 45, of Temple Sinai, Brookline; Rabbi Cary Yales, 30, of Temple Isaiah, Lexington; Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, 28, of Temple Beth El, Sudbury.

Among those arrested was Rabbi Rudavsky's wife, Malka, 47, and Arthur Alintuck, 42, president elect of Temple Beth Elohim of Wellesley. The others were mostly students from Brandeis, Tufts and MIT. The youngest arrested was 15 and the eldest, 64.

The demonstration began at 11 a.m. outside the JFK building where Rabbi Myer Strausfeld of Temple Sinai, Marblehead, conducted a morning pray-

er service for about 150 antiwar demonstrators.

Following the service the demonstrators blocked one of the two main entrances to the Federal building, songs were sung and literature was passed out.

Shortly after 1 p.m. the group split up and attempted to block both main entrances, and at 1:30 a group went inside the lobby and sat down.

At first Federal officers tried to push the demonstrators out of the building, and then they placed them under arrest.

As Rabbi Kushner put it: "We do not expect our action to bring the troops home, but we want to remind people that there is still conscience in the land."



PRAYERS FOR PEACE—Rabbis offer prayers for peace during antiwar demonstration outside John F. Kennedy Federal Building. (Globe Photo by Ed Farrand)

Rabbi Rudavsky arrested with other rabbis after peace rally against the Vietnam War, *Boston Globe*, May 18, 1972.

counter-cultural movement and the increasing radicalism of civil rights advocates. In a series of 1968 sermons that would later become a book collection known as *Living Words*, Cohon chastised the cynicism of protest movements as at odds with both American and Jewish traditions:

*We are heirs to Moses and the prophets and Psalmists and the martyrs; we are the heirs also to Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln. We cherish the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights. Ours is a double heritage, one fortifying and giving meaning to the Hebraic faith and American democracy. Freedom means personal obligations, and this means personal sacrifice. We cannot remain free men and women by evading obligations that have a just claim upon all members of a responsible community. There is no freedom in the jungle — only hazard and fear and*

*constant menace to life. When I hear youngsters in our own congregations sneering at the prayer for our country, I feel sick at the pit of my stomach. How can we transmit our super-intellectual sons and daughters, raised in an opulent, permissive society and enormous reality in the simple words, "our country and our nation?"*

For Rudavsky, such a "jungle" was the natural outgrowth of destructive national policies:

*If our moral life as individuals or as a society clashes with basic moral truths then we bring destruction upon ourselves. This is the meaning of the prophetic warning which was taken seriously, though not necessarily heeded by our people, that God would punish them for oppressing the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. An unjust society would be punished*

*because it scorned the moral truth that we owe every man respect for his basic dignity.*

While Cohon was troubled by racism, poverty and segregation, he issued a grave warning about the proposed resolution. Expressing an aversion to what would soon come to known as affirmative action, Cohon complained:

*In our own city Negro leaders are demanding only Negro principals be engaged for schools in black neighborhoods. Emphasis is not on competence, not on excellence, but on race. Why not black judges for black neighborhoods and white for white neighborhoods and Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, Puerto Rican, teachers and judges for their neighborhoods? Why not a Negro governor for the Negro citizens and a white governor for the whites and several presidents? That is an omen of catastrophe not only for our country but for our world. We Jews would be doomed to toleration as a racial minority as our parents and grandparents were in Poland. The Lord of mercy deliver us!*

Rabbi Rudavsky remained firmly in support of black civil rights and continued to put the onus for change on the white community. Rudavsky viewed the April 4, 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. as a time of reckoning:

*The assassination confronts all God-fearing people with awesome challenge as a nation and a people in search of its soul. We are now in danger of losing our soul to the irrational and demonic forces of hatred and violence which Dr. King sought to overcome. The white community must root out its racist attitudes for once and for all. The Negro must have his place as a human being in our midst. He must stand in our midst as a brother. There must be jobs and equal educational and housing oppor-*

*tunities for the Negro people and for all the poor and the downtrodden in our land. We must get ourselves a new heart and a new soul and a new resolve to bring those now in bondage to a new birth of freedom.*

By the late 1960s Temple Sinai would have a vigorous Social Action Committee that blended international Jewish concerns with local ones, including Jewish Affairs in Israel and Eastern Europe; interfaith advocacy; a consumer watchdog group; housing programs in Brookline and Newton; outreach to black groups in Boston; and tutoring programs in low income neighborhoods.

#### DEFENDING THE OLD MORALITY

The tensions between the rabbis did not entirely prevent them from working jointly on behalf of the congregation that they each cherished. One point of consensus was a shared concern about the gravitational pull of youth culture. Rabbi Rudavsky's sermons in the late 1960s reflected many of the same concerns Cohon had articulated a decade earlier. Rudavsky lamented that "many of your young people are in despair because they are rootless and faceless and drifting. We seem to be living at a time of aimless wandering and mass disengagement from everything but the most and private and selfish concerns." Cohon bemoaned the fact that "our streets, highways, [and] parks are crowded with roaming bewildered youngsters that seek immediate gratification, no thought of tomorrow, no yesterdays."

Rabbis Rudavsky and Cohon believed that the religious school could provide a spiritual and intellectual sustenance that would serve as a bulwark against the corrosive effects of American youth culture. In 1968 Brandeis Chancellor Abram L. Sachar joined Rabbi Rudavsky in a rededication service on behalf of the newly renovated Rabbi Beryl D. Cohon School. While Cohon's name adorned the front of the building it was Rudavsky and his new principal, Walter M. Lechten, who shaped the school's agenda. By the end of the decade Israeli study and advocacy became a centerpiece of the curriculum. For Rudavsky, the Israel connection became a means of anchoring Jewish children to a sacred and timeless tradition in an otherwise nihilistic world. "Jewish self-awareness, deepened by knowledge and broadened by bridges to Israel will provide for our children a

point of view, a sense of values, that will serve them in many ways throughout their lives," explained Rudavsky. "It will help to orient and stabilize their personal lives in this world of confusing materialism, accelerating change, and inevitable loss."

The tumultuous nature of the 1960s and the dizzying pace of change ultimately consumed Rabbi Rudavsky. In a prescient forewarning about the erosion of ethical values, Rudavsky was featured in an article in the *Boston Globe* titled "Defending the Old Morality." Rudavsky issued a series of attacks on the breakdown of morality, imploring his audience to social action: "We are in danger of the loss of our humanity, our God-given knowledge of freedom and responsibility and a concern for the fate of the world and people beyond ourselves and our most immediate personal needs and



Dedication of the Rabbi Beryl D. Cohon School, November 11, 1968.



Brandeis Chancellor Abram L. Sachar (middle) with Rabbi Rudavsky and Rabbi Cohon, 1968.

issued a series of attacks on the breakdown of morality, imploring his audience to social action: “We are in danger of the loss of our humanity, our God-given knowledge of freedom and responsibility and a concern for the fate of the world and people beyond ourselves and our most immediate personal needs and satisfactions.” Likewise, in a 1974 *Globe* article titled “Jews to begin year 5734 with Audit of Man’s Morals,” Rudavsky stood in judgment of President Nixon: “Watergate and its aftermath will preoccupy us for many months and years to come, but it is already inescapable that the very soul of America is being tested.”

Rudavsky’s public pronouncements about America’s morality came at a time of reckoning for his own inner soul. In the following year, Rudavsky would be embroiled in a scandal when the congregation learned of his affair with the relative of a Temple member. The episode was catastrophic for all involved. One member encapsulated what was surely a common sentiment: “What he did hurt me personally because he stood on the *bimah* under the Ten Commandments, one of which was “Thou shall not commit adultery.”” The Board dismissed Rabbi Rudavsky shortly after learning of the affair. The tragic fall of their idealistic rabbi was a devastating blow to the congregation. The disillusionment of the Rudavsky scandal, much like that of Nixon and Watergate, would take years to heal.



## PART 3: RABBI FRANK WALDORF, 1974-2004

### MEDIATOR AND MENSCH

*“American democracy is a fragile institution, quite unique both in history and the contemporary world. Democracy is founded on compromise, sharing resources more or less equitably. American democratic institutions grew strong during a two hundred year period of economic growth and expansion. But the American pie has been shrinking. Unable to stem the ebb of wealth, too many individual Americans have skirted the fundamental issue by attaching themselves to some single issue in order to deceive themselves into believing they have some control. Emotion runs high. Citizens feel they are ‘doing something’ although ‘victories’ fail to strengthen either democracy or justice. The process wreaks havoc on democratic institutions. So much time and energy of media and legislators become tied up in peripheral issues that the major, perhaps intractable, issues are never addressed. More unfocused movements of frustration emerge. If too many citizens begin to feel cheated and disenfranchised, our once-proud democracy can quickly proceed downhill toward a totalitarian tyranny which will dispossess us all.”*

**Rabbi Frank Waldorf** | “Whom Shall We Boycott Next?” *Sinai News*, April 1979

#### WALDORF TAKES COMMAND

Just as Americans elected the upright Jimmy Carter as the antidote to the excesses of the 1960s, members of Temple Sinai recruited the principled Rabbi Frank Waldorf with the hope that he could heal old wounds. Like Carter, Waldorf inherited a series of crises that proved difficult to mitigate. Rabbi Rudavsky had complained that Sinai’s founder was a constant

shadow, but this was only one among many challenges facing his successor. Rabbi Waldorf had to contend with loyal, at times oppositional, Cohon supporters, and inherited a congregation disillusioned by the Rudavsky affair and the divisive politics of the 1960s. These rifts had taken quite a toll. Temple Sinai’s peak membership of about 425 families at the beginning of Rudavsky’s tenure had dwindled to 300 shortly

after its end. Rabbi Waldorf had to reckon with this congregational discord and attrition, as well as future damage to the synagogue through theft, vandalism, and fire. These calamities required a rabbi of prodigious resolve, patience, and equanimity. Looking back on Waldorf's thirty-year run at the helm, one congregant expressed what came to be a common sentiment: "Rabbi Waldorf was even tempered. A gentleman. A thinker. He knew his congregants well. He had a great deal of integrity."

Waldorf, a decade younger than Rudavsky, was similarly shaped by the social movements of the 1960s, but his upbringing led him to a different view of activism and religion. Waldorf's family, though educated and successful, was not especially religious or political. Waldorf's father was a rationally-oriented electrical engineer, as was his uncle who taught engineering at Johns Hopkins University. Although Waldorf did attend religious school, attain Bar Mitzvah, and participate in Jewish youth groups, his parents stressed Judaism's cultural and ethnic dimensions over its spiritual ones. Whereas Cohon and Rudavsky's academic and political families inculcated their sons with rigorous, at times dogmatic, views of Reform Judaism, Waldorf's middle-class Baltimore childhood left him with fewer fixed ideas about Judaism. "The notion that I would take seriously religion," Waldorf laughed, "was off-putting to most of the members of my family. Sometimes I've joked that maybe [becoming a rabbi] was adolescent rebellion."

In 1955, 16-year-old Frank Waldorf enrolled at his uncle's university, where he had won a scholarship to major in chemical engineering. Both patriotic and concerned that he might be drafted as a private in the Army, Waldorf preemptively joined the ROTC chapter at Johns Hopkins in order to defer his military enrollment and ensure his future entry as an officer. His career as a chemical engineer, however, never came to fruition. "It was pretty evident to me at that time that I was not ready to be an engineer," Waldorf remembered. "In my freshman year the courses that I really loved and grooved on were philosophy, psychology, and economics." His gravitation toward the humanities and fond memories of Jewish youth group led him to rabbinical school.

Waldorf enrolled at Hebrew Union College in 1959 where he threw himself into five gratifying years of study of Jewish texts, philosophy, culture, and Hebrew. Although he generally avoided the activism of Rabbi Rudavsky, he could not help but be moved by the civil rights movement. He joined hundreds of thousands of others in the 1963 March on Washington, where Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. But this was largely the extent of his social protest and Waldorf was no longer in the United States when the civil rights movement took a more radical turn in the late 1960s.

Waldorf entered the U.S. Army in the Chemical Corps in 1964, but was shortly



Army Chaplain Frank Waldorf being promoted from 1st Lieutenant to Captain. With Beth Waldorf, 1965.

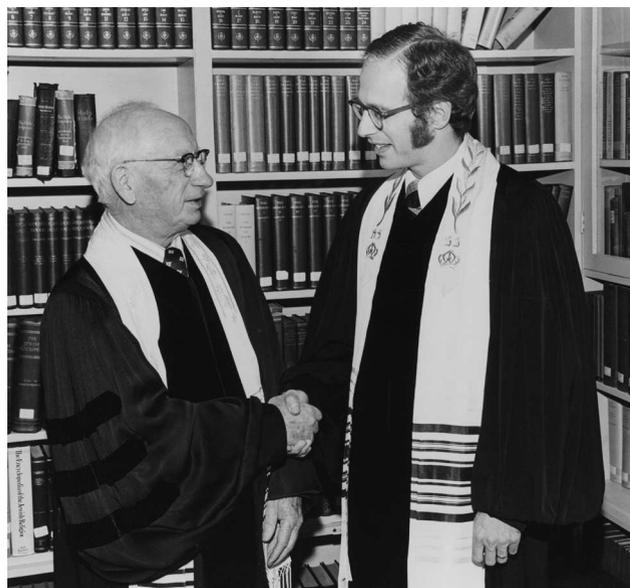
transferred to the Chaplain Corps. The Army assigned Waldorf to be the Jewish Chaplain at Fort Jackson, SC, where he led a congregation of draftees going through basic training. Within six months, the Army shipped Waldorf to Frankfurt, West Germany, where he led a small congregation from 1965 to 1968. Many enlisted Jewish Americans, still embittered by the Holocaust, felt uncomfortable with their German posts. “No Jew could go to Germany in 1965 without asking ‘How come I’m here?’” noted Waldorf. “I became a kind of Rorschach inkblot where lots of people would confess why they were in Germany. I had a number of counseling experiences where GIs were just so upset about being in Germany that we would arrange for them to be shipped off to France or Italy.” Waldorf’s sensitivity and trustworthiness as an Army chaplain were qualities that would benefit

those around him for years to come.

Waldorf completed his military obligation in 1968 and accepted an Assistant Rabbi position at Boston’s Temple Israel, where he worked under the tutelage of the “marvelous mentor” Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn. Waldorf received excellent training and found the defining ethos of Temple Israel similar to that which he would later encounter at Temple Sinai. However, the size of Temple Israel, with nearly 1,800 families, did not lend itself to intimacy. Waldorf discovered that he was not well suited to the impersonal environment of the “cathedral congregation.” In addition, Rabbi Waldorf knew he would never be a viable candidate for head rabbi at Temple Israel. After Cohon splintered Temple Israel’s congregation in 1939, the board passed a resolution that future assistant rabbis could be hired for only terminal three-year contracts. Having completed his term in 1971, Waldorf returned to Baltimore to take advantage of the GI Bill, enrolling in a doctoral program in sociology at Johns Hopkins and serving as a part-time rabbi in Winchester, Virginia.

It didn’t take long for the Waldorfs to become restless and long for a return to Boston. “We loved Boston from our three years here and the possibility of coming back was extremely attractive,” Waldorf recalled. In 1974 Waldorf was offered and accepted the rabbi position at Temple Sinai. Despite the residual animus of the Rudavsky scandal, Waldorf encountered enough

of the healthy spirit, cordiality, and intimacy that had characterized the synagogue throughout its history. One exception was Rabbi Cohon, who remained territorial about the congregation that he had founded. Waldorf recognized Cohon's protectiveness and could do little more than laugh at the fact that "he did not like me, and he did not like Ben Rudavsky." Cohon died in 1976, enabling Rabbi Waldorf to put his own stamp on the congregation. Eager to turn the page on the Cohon years, but mindful of honoring the Rabbi's service, Waldorf joined members of his congregation in establishing a speaker series known as the Beryl D. Cohon Memorial Lecture. Annually, around the time of Rabbi Cohon's *yahrzeit*, a guest speaker would be invited to Temple Sinai to deliver a thought-provoking lecture about an aspect of Jewish life related to one of Cohon's writings. Dr. Abram Sachar, Chancellor of Brandeis Univer-



Rabbi Waldorf shaking hands with founding Rabbi Beryl Cohon, 1975.

sity and a close friend of Rabbi Cohon, delivered the first lecture on May 13, 1977. In a time of change, Waldorf maintained this crucial link to the past.

## GATES OF PRAYER AND WOMEN'S EQUALITY

One of the first modifications Waldorf implemented was the replacement of the *Union Prayer Book* with the *Gates of Prayer*. The *Union Prayer Book* had been a staple of Reform congregations for eighty years, as well as the standard for Temple Sinai since its inception. In 1975 the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Central Conference of American Rabbis approved the new book, which incorporated more Hebrew and was updated to make it more accessible to modern worshippers. Other additions in the massive 779-page tome were services to commemorate Israel Independence Day and the Holocaust.

Rabbi Waldorf was mindful of the difficulty the new prayer book posed for those who had grown accustomed to the old one. One poignant example was a past president who grew up with the *Union Prayer Book* and had become blind in the early 1970s. "He loved coming to services because he still knew the prayers by heart," Waldorf recalled. "We started using this new prayer book and he couldn't worship. We had taken that away from him and it was a terrible loss for him. [Of course,] not everybody was blind. [Other people] could read the new book,

but [it] didn't feel as worshipful and reverent as the King James language of the *Union Prayer Book*, so lots of people felt alienated." The generational divide over the prayer book played out in a 1979 *Sinai News* forum. Walter Cobe explained his generation's criticisms: "I am orthodox in my Reform Judaism. I love the words of the *Union Prayer Book*. I dislike the *Gates of Prayer*. I prefer the lilt and cadence and familiarity of the prayer book I grew up with. The *Gates of Prayer* has too many choices, is too heavy to hold, and has too many options. By the time I find where the Rabbi is headed, he is off to another page. Gone are the hymnals. Gone is the personal Kaddish. Gone are the *Union Prayer Books*." Judith Freedman Caplan, writing on behalf of the younger generation, offered a counterpoint: "I am reform in my Reform Judaism. I find people are always more comfortable with something [with which] they are familiar. New things take time to get used to. My Reform Judaism is in the process of change."

Another difference in the *Gates of Prayer* indicative of the changing times was its more gender-neutral language, for example replacing "our fathers" with "our ancestors." Still, the changes were not comprehensive; the *Gates of Prayer* retained the masculine pronoun for God. Temple Sinai had been progressive on women's equality in several areas, but in some ways it reflected conventional gender norms. Since 1939, Temple Sinai's main social groups had been the Brotherhood and Sisterhood. The Brotherhood functioned as a kind of fraternity; they convened on Sunday mornings to socialize and take care of Temple business. The Sisterhood organized weekday luncheons to work on Temple programming, music, fashion shows, and planning of the Temple newsletter. The older generation of women who had been the backbone of the Sisterhood had grown accustomed to the luncheons so that they could be at home in the evenings when their husbands returned from work. As many women entered the workforce in

The Brotherhood of Temple Sinai  
**Brotherhood Breakfast**  
**SENATOR PAUL E. TSONGAS**  
*U.S. Senator from Massachusetts*



Senator Tsongas is author of the book "The Road From Here: Liberation and Realities in the 1980's". He is a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and other important committees.

Over this New Year's holidays, Senator Tsongas will visit Lebanon, Israel, and Egypt. He will discuss his impressions and make comments on his Middle Eastern trip.

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**Breakfast will be served at 9:30 am.**  
 Donations: \$5 each      Eventified Hall

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Temple Sinai's Brotherhood was a men's social group that invited such luminaries as Senator Paul Tsongas (1983) and Celtics star Dave Cowens (1986).

the 1980s, this arrangement was no longer tenable. Men also showed declining interest and were less available to attend the Brotherhood's Sunday morning breakfasts. In the late 1980s the Brotherhood and Sisterhood merged into the Adulthood, but this group would take years to recover the vibrancy of the earlier clubs.

Two positive changes for women included movement into leadership positions and recognition of their service. In 1977, Temple Sinai elected Lillian Shulman as its first woman president. It would take nearly twenty years for the congregation to elect Arlene Weintraub as its second female President, but these women served as long as or longer than any leader during the Waldorf years. It was also at this time that Temple Sinai changed its "Man of the Year" award to "Person of the Year," and later "Distinguished Service Award." Janet Pearlman was the first female recipient in 1978. Women made up half the award winners thereafter. Women, who had always served as pillars of support for the congregation, were now recognized leaders.

### BROKEN GLASS, BROKEN SCROLLS

Just as Temple Sinai began to thrive under these changes, a series of misfortunes rocked the congregation. The first incident took place on Friday, November 16, 1979, when two rocks crashed through the synagogue windows during a memorial service for a Holocaust survivor. Temple members were honoring Walter Kaufman, a leader of the congregation who had died in April.



Temple Sinai's first women presidents:  
Lillian Shulman (1977-1981) and  
Arlene Weintraub (1996-2000).

**TEMPLE SINAI BROTHERHOOD**  
will honor - **JANE WANGER**  
By presenting her with the  
**1987 DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD**  
for her devoted and unselfish service to Temple Sinai and the community

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**at 9:30 am**

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Sumptuous Breakfast

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Jane Wanger, winner of the 1987 Distinguished Service Award.

The Nazis had interned Kaufman at the Dachau concentration camp, from which he gained release, fled to Belgium, and eventually emigrated to the United States. For many congregants, the rock-throwing incident was reminiscent of Kristallnacht, the 1938 "night of broken glass"

in which Nazi-sponsored thugs and hooligans rampaged through Jewish-German businesses. “As you can imagine, in a group of 200 people in the synagogue, all kinds of historic memories were revived,” Waldorf explained. The breaking of glass “was a very dramatic kind of coincidence.” Police investigators eventually determined that the Sinai rock throwing had not been an anti-Semitic act, but rather “a rowdy thing. Kids just moving along.”

Another malicious, more deliberate, assault on Temple Sinai was discovered on Friday, May 28, 1981. At some point in the dark hours of the previous night, unidentified perpetrators passed through the bushes between the temple and the neighboring Sunoco station in order to enter the sanctuary. They removed an iron gate over a basement wall and carefully broke a tiny section of glass in order to unlock the window. After several unsuccessful attempts to pry open the window with a crowbar, they smashed a large pane of glass, pushed down a translucent plastic panel attached to the ceiling in Ehrenfried Hall, and entered the building. Unimpeded by further security devices, the perpetrators entered the sanctuary and emptied the ark of five scrolls valued at \$100,000. They looked in the cupboard underneath the ark and left scattered on the *bimah* the Torah mantles and sterling silver belts that were used for High Holidays. The fact that the thieves took neither these items nor the microphones, nor did any other damage to the facilities, indicated that the

burglars’ only aim was to steal the scrolls.

The break-in came to Rabbi Waldorf’s attention when he brought some papers into the sanctuary for the Friday evening service and noticed that a light had been turned on in the ark. He quickly discovered the damage and theft and immediately contacted the Brookline Police Department. His call initiated an investigation that uncovered an international crime ring based out of New York. Abraham Kushner, NYPD Lieutenant and Jewish Community Liaison, informed Waldorf that more than one hundred scrolls from across the country had been stolen during the past year. Most of the stolen scrolls were smuggled out of the United States to Europe and Israel where they were dismantled and reassembled for later distribution and resale.

Temple Sinai’s stolen scrolls held deep historical and spiritual significance for the congregation. In 1939, Rabbi Cohon purchased the original scroll for the synagogue and signed his name to the back of parchment to ensure that the dealer delivered the scroll he had selected. This was the scroll he used most frequently throughout his ministry. He adorned it with a special crown that his family had donated to the congregation in memory of his brother, Rabbi Samuel Cohon. In September 1944, when Charles Goldberg celebrated the Temple’s first Bar Mitzvah, his uncle Abraham marked the occasion by donating a breastplate for the scroll. On May 9, 1981, just two weeks before the theft, Charles’s son Jeffrey held the same breastplate

during his Bar Mitzvah ceremony. Another stolen item that held special significance was a scroll that Temple Sinai had obtained from the Pinkas Synagogue in Prague. Unlike most of the city's Jewish residents, the scroll survived the Holocaust, eventually made its way overseas, and was rededicated during Temple Sinai's 1976 Yom Hashoa commemoration. Many Bar and Bat Mitzvah students read from the scroll as a way of remembering the Holocaust and honoring the formerly thriving Jewish community. For Sally Cohon, the theft of the scrolls felt as if "a member of our family had died." Waldorf called the theft an act of "spiritual violation."

Waldorf's hope to recover the scrolls was buoyed temporarily on August 11, when an intermediary of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) contacted him. Ruth Shaffer, Honorary Secretary of the Memorial Scrolls Committee of Westminster Synagogue, sent Rabbi Waldorf a letter that INTERPOL was trying to trace a Torah scroll that possibly matched the one stolen from Temple Sinai. An NYPD representative devastated Waldorf's hopes the following afternoon when he reported that a pedestrian passing a vacant lot in Brooklyn's Coney Island discovered a pile of Torah mantles that had been dumped there. The investigators searched in vain for fingerprints but found none. The NYPD recovered a number of the Torah mantles and some fragments of the rollers containing inscriptions in memory of Sinai's Albert Ehrenfried. Not a single piece of parchment paper was recovered

in the find. Members of the congregation were crestfallen to learn that the scrolls would not be recovered. Waldorf solemnly noted that "people had the feeling that something very personal had been stolen from them."

A positive outcome of the theft was the outpouring of support from the local community. Several months after the break-in, Steve Pettipet, the owner of the neighboring Sunoco station, organized a collection on behalf of Temple Sinai. One morning as Pettipet and Rabbi Waldorf walked by one another and exchanged their usual morning greeting, Pettipet passed along an envelope containing dozens of financial contributions from Brookline neighbors. "When I saw what the envelope contained, my eyes welled up with tears," Waldorf reported. "Never in my seventeen years as a rabbi had something so moving and inspiring taken place." This would be neither Temple Sinai's last tragedy nor the final act of graciousness on its behalf.

## COUP

An alarm system was installed. New scrolls were purchased. An invited scribe ceremoniously completed a new acquisition. Nevertheless, the increased security and collective efforts at healing did little to erase a residual malaise among members of the congregation. A small cadre of Cohon supporters was dissatisfied with Waldorf, who, like Rudavsky, could never live up to their beloved Cohon. Some congregants

were frustrated that Temple Sinai had not recovered the membership losses accrued during the Rudavsky years. Others faulted the amiable Waldorf for not doing a better job of policing the politics of the congregation. “He was willing to let congregants do things whether he agreed or not,” one member explained. “He got into trouble once or twice because there was a congregant who was pro-Palestinian and he allowed him to use the facilities to hold meetings with his group. We lost members over that. People were very upset, but Rabbi Waldorf felt that since they were members of the Temple and it was free speech, they could do whatever they wanted.” Trying to make sense of their frustration, Waldorf observed that there was a “sense of impending doom that things were just in decline and membership was stagnant and they couldn’t see the growth that they felt that they had earned and deserved and were destined for.”

This discontent culminated in the Executive Committee’s recommendation not to renew Rabbi Waldorf’s contract when it was due to expire at the end of 1982. The news came as a shock to the rest of the congregation, many of whom held great affection for Rabbi Waldorf and were up in arms over the undemocratic decision. “The older members who founded this Temple thought they owned it and they wouldn’t let the younger people take responsibility,” Michael Blau recalled. “They thought they knew what was best for everybody.” Arlene Weintraub described the move as a coup. “They had done this behind everybody’s back,” Weintraub explained. “There were a large number of us who were very upset and we marshaled together. We confronted the Board.” The younger generation of Sinai members blocked Waldorf’s dismissal until his leadership was put to a congregational referendum. After much politicking on both



Ted Steinman, Temple President 1983–84, was part of a new generation of congregants who arrived during Waldorf’s early years.

*“I could relate to Frank one-on-one, whereas I could not relate to any other previous rabbi in a hierarchical relationship. There was something about Frank that my wife and I liked immediately. The children’s experience was so vastly different and superior to what I experienced growing up. It opened my eyes that religion doesn’t have to be austere, secretive, hierarchical, and that God deemed me worthy of coming to synagogue, whatever [my practice] may be. So Frank made it real, palpable, friendly, and easy to identify as being Jewish.”*

sides, Waldorf supporters won in a landslide. Seventy-eight percent of the congregation voted to extend his rabbinate with a three-year contract. In the following year, representatives of the old guard, who had held key positions, stepped down or left the congregation entirely. A new generation of leaders emerged to replace them.

The people had spoken on behalf of Waldorf, who could finally turn the page on the Cohon and Rudavsky years. Waldorf supporters cited the rabbi's decency, accessibility, and familiarity as the determinative factors in their vote. Michael Blau used the word *haimish* to describe Rabbi Waldorf. "He was a very down-to-earth rabbi who knew every child and adult," noted Blau. "He knew everything about everybody and remembered everybody's name, which always blew my mind. You could meet him in the street and he would say not only 'How are you?' but he'd mention your kids. 'How's Jon? How's Mirelle?' He knew everybody. He was somebody you could talk to." Even former President Lillian Shulman, one of the architects of the coup who later made amends with the rabbi, conceded that he was "a wonderful man. He's warm. A great family man. You can go to him and discuss anything. His door is always open. That type of man."

A humbled Rabbi Waldorf thanked his congregation for the support, reached out to the dissenters, and viewed the ouster movement as an opportunity for reinvention. "In many ways, I am a brand new rabbi introducing himself to a brand new congregation," he wrote in *Sinai News*. "This

is a time for me to examine the roots of my ministry and the philosophy which underwrites my daily activities."

## A PHOENIX FROM THE ASHES

The greatest test of Waldorf's resolve came on June 6, 1987, when a two-alarm fire blazed through the religious school. In a twist of fate, Cantor Roy Einhorn of Temple Israel was among the first to arrive on the scene. Einhorn happened to be driving by the school while on a date with his wife and noticed a plume of smoke rising from the building. Not knowing whether or not the fire would spread to the synagogue, Cantor Einhorn escorted firefighters into the



Courtesy Boston Herald

Temple Israel's Cantor Roy Einhorn assisted firefighters in the rescue of Temple Sinai's scrolls.

sanctuary in order to rescue the Temple scrolls. “They really didn’t know what was happening yet. I told them to save the Torah scrolls,” Einhorn explained. “We had to use an axe on the door of the ark. It was pretty scary. Who knew if the axe would hit a scroll? Luckily it didn’t.” The firefighters were able to extinguish the fire in 90 minutes and prevent it from spreading to the synagogue, but not before it wrecked the religious school. The fire completely gutted the auditorium and back stairwell. Smoke heavily damaged the sanctuary, the rabbi and principal’s offices, the resource center, and eight classrooms. Four pianos stood in ruins. Portraits of the founders were charred beyond recognition. Extensive damage to the second floor could be seen through holes in the auditorium ceiling. The total financial loss was \$450,000.

Congregants initially worried that the fire was the result of arson, a potential act of anti-Semitism. Rabbi Waldorf carefully suspended

judgment. “We live in a community that rejoices in diversity,” Waldorf reminded an anxious congregation. “When they said that the fire might be of suspicious origin, I thought, ‘That’s not the Brookline I know.’” His equanimity was well founded. Fire investigators ultimately determined that the fire was caused by electrical problems in an organ that had been dormant for several years. Someone had switched on the organ, which later short-circuited, caught fire, and ignited some adjacent curtains.

Newly-elected President Howard Weintraub was well suited to the task of grief counseling. Past presidents typically had been doctors, lawyers, or businessmen who brought administrative and financial talents to the position. Weintraub was a psychiatrist known for his therapeutic and unifying abilities. Congregational leaders immediately vowed to rebuild the school as a symbolic act of healing. On June 21, congregants placed prayer books and other damaged holy items in a casket as part of a funeral procession that led to Sharon Memorial Park, where the possessions received a proper burial. Weintraub worked with Music Director Mark Kagan and Congressman Barney Frank to organize a benefit concert on behalf of Temple Sinai that attracted the finest local musical talent, including the Boston Symphony, the Boston Bar Orchestra, and the Brookline Chorus.

The fire purged the congregation of its previous divisions, facilitating a congregational consensus that was previously unimaginable.



Ritual burial ceremony for damaged holy items, June 21, 1987.

President Weintraub noted that the fire, “though tragic, galvanized a lethargic membership into action by alerting them to the true importance of our Temple. Only when we are confronted with a real loss, or even the near loss of a valued object, do we then start to become aware of the true nature and depth of its importance to us.” Arlene Weintraub explained, “In times of crisis you either fall apart or it makes you stronger. This made us stronger.” Rosalind Bernheimer recalled that the fire “was horrific” but became “a rallying cause for the membership. So, out of the ashes, the phoenix rising. I think it did a lot to make the Temple more secure. The seminal moment was people saying, ‘This is the place we want. Let’s find a way to make it what it was but even better.’” Michael Blau said the fire ended up being a “good thing” since “it brought people back together. The young versus the old and everything that had been going on was forgotten. Everybody realized we had to work together for the survival of Temple Sinai. Even the fact that we had to raise a lot of money unified the congregation. The fire definitely turned things around.”

## FINANCIAL STABILITY AND SCHOOL MERGER

President Weintraub and Rabbi Waldorf received unanimous support to start a capital campaign to rebuild the school and further diversify the synagogue’s cultural and educational offerings. Treasurer Michael Blau was critical in helping to establish a more routinized means of fundraising.

In the past, annual deficits would be covered by hosting a breakfast for some of the wealthiest and most generous members of the congregation. “We got about twenty percent of the budget from the most affluent ten percent of the population,” Blau explained, “and a big chunk came from voluntary contributions, so by becoming aware of the budgetary stuff rather than it being an emergency system, it became a problem to solve and it became routinized [which took away] a lot of the anxiety.” This became known as the “Free Will” campaign, a reference to a passage in Exodus 36:3. During the construction of the Tabernacle, donors showed such an excess of enthusiasm and brought so many daily gifts that the workers had to tell them to stop. Sinai’s Free Will campaign operated on the principle that all gifts would be completely voluntary and that those with the resources would give substantial sums to keep the synagogue vibrant and thriving. Blau introduced computers, spreadsheets, and a proper budgeting process that rationalized the Temple’s finances and enabled it to function on firm footing for years to come.

In the short term, Temple Sinai had to decide how best to provide religious instruction for its displaced students. A heavily debated solution was to merge the religious school with neighboring Ohabei Shalom, where Sinai staff taught their classes after the fire. Both synagogues had endured declining enrollments in the 1980s. In the past, the merger question

could have divided the congregation, but a newly cooperative atmosphere and strong leadership prevented it from threatening the greater good. Jeremy Wolfe, who headed the Education Committee and served as Youth Advisor, mediated among conflicting opinions. In an essay in *Sinai News*, Wolfe reminded his readers that “loyal and dedicated members of Temple Sinai hold different views on this matter and it serves no purpose to make this issue a litmus test for love of Temple Sinai, love of Judaism, intelligence, financial commitment, or anything else. It serves a vital purpose when we undertake our discussion in a spirit of mutual respect.” The debate was resolved by such collegiality and the

practical fact that Ohabei Shalom had physical space in its religious school when Temple Sinai had none.

The two synagogues established a joint school board in 1990, which created opportunities for collaboration and sharing of resources, but also a clash of cultures. Lillian Shulman explained how the merger was an interim solution to the space issue, but one with little long-term viability: “What was happening was that kids were losing their [identification with] their temples. Even though they were in school at Ohabei Shalom, they knew they didn’t belong there.” Howard Weintraub noted how parents, staff, and children “all suffered the stress of be-



Rabbi Richard “Rim” Meirowitz led Temple Sinai’s Religious School during its merger with Ohabei Shalom from 1992 to 1996.

*“It was a complicated school to run because there were kids from both synagogues and there were two rabbis with whom I met every week to talk about the kids and the curriculum and they met sometimes [at Temple Sinai] and sometimes at Ohabei Shalom. The [kids] got to meet two very different rabbinic personalities, and they got to be in two different buildings for prayer. All of that was really great. Some of the things that were hard were that when there would be a service, say that the fifth graders would run, and it would be at Temple Sinai and Frank would be on the bimah leading the service; it was harder for him. Or vice versa; if it was at Ohabei Shalom and Emily [Lipof] was on the bimah leading the service. Each rabbi knew that they were speaking to kids who were only [partially] their constituency. While the kids got a chance to see different kinds of rabbis, the rabbi’s influence on each school was diluted, I think, looking at it from a rabbinic point of view.”*

ing an alien people in an alien land” and laid plans for the merged school to return to Temple Sinai in a refurbished school building. Jeremy Wolfe concurred that, ideally, it was useful for the congregation to have the kids and families bound to the particular congregation, but “from the outside vantage point it really worked pretty well. The kids who grew up in that era got, I think, a better education than they would have gotten in the teeny school — in either of the teeny schools — that would have been the separate schools.”

The combined school grew from 140 to over 210 students, emblematic of the overall health of Temple Sinai. In 1994, Ohabei Shalom received an unexpected donation that convinced Rabbi Emily Lipof that her religious school could function without a merger. While the separation surprised members of Temple Sinai, by 1994 their school was strong enough to survive on its own. Shortly thereafter, President Blau delivered a glowing report on four years of stability and growth. Membership had increased by ten percent. The Temple had a budget surplus and was able to pay off the remainder of its mortgage. The Board had revised its by-laws and hired an administrator. Meetings were well attended and productive. On the basis of these developments, the Board granted Rabbi Waldorf a lifetime contract.

## A CONGREGATION OF CLASSICAL MUSIC

One constant that buoyed Temple members during the many years of transition was the synagogue’s magnificent music. Temple Sinai was renowned for classical music performances inspired by master composers. In 1950, Music Director Evelyn Borofsky-Roskin had established an annual Passover Music Festival that attracted an audience from the Greater Boston community. The music was imbued with some Jewish content and meaning, but rarely made use of Hebrew. Musical themes were universal, focusing on brotherhood, peace, and social justice. Some of that changed during the Rudavsky years. “When I came to Sinai, the music was great,” Rabbi Rudavsky remembered. “They had a wonderful quartet. But they sang. They used



The Passover Music Festival featured an array of talent from a multitude of genres, including the Sephardic ensemble Voice of the Turtle and the classical composer Yosef Yankelev.



Proud Partners: Rabbi Frank Waldorf and Music Director Mark Kagan, June 11, 2006.

music that was not traditional [Jewish] music. It was more like Protestant hymns. The people who gravitated toward me were happy to get closer to traditional Jewish music.” Rudavsky incorporated Hebrew and folk traditions into the music program, while Borofsky-Roskin diversified the genres in the Passover Festival. Her successor, Delores Fox Corley, presented Pass-

over programs that included performances of major oratorios on Jewish themes, with chorus, orchestra, and soloists.

Fox Corley hired the talented Mark Kagan as a cantorial soloist in 1974 and groomed him to be Music Director, a position he took over in 1978. “Temple Sinai had the strongest music program in New England,” Kagan recalled. “They had a quartet of professional singers and Delores was a brilliant director. The quality and sophistication of the music was much higher than surrounding synagogues.” Kagan collaborated with Fred and Jane Wanger to present a wide array of programs including Misha Alexandrovitch: the Russian Tenor and Cantor; The Western Wind from New York; Boston’s Klezmer Conservatory Band; Bloch’s Sacred Service with the Brookline Chorus;



Robin Sparr, Temple Sinai Cantorial Soloist, 1995 – 2006, and now Rabbi, describes Temple Sinai’s diversity.

*“In the Reform movement every temple will tell you [it is] committed to social action [but] Temple Sinai put their money where their mouth was. The people who belong here tend to be a higher percentage of people who are in the helping professions, which is beautiful. I really loved the cultural diversity of the children we had. Even when I began here in 1993, there were a number of gay couples [that] had kids. [There were also] a number of couples who had kids that were adopted from Korea and other parts of Asia. We had a number of mixed race families. We had all these multiethnic children at the school, and it was great to see this rainbow of kids in the religious school, and among adults as well.”*

Sholem Aleichem, a musical directed by Mary Wolfman; Voice of the Turtle; and retrospectives of music of Broadway by Jewish-American composers.

Although musical styles changed over the years, Kagan sustained a classically-oriented tradition that many members cherished. Abbe Cohen admired the professionalism of the choir that drew crowds from afar and was “simply marvelous.” He did recognize, however, a generational split on classical music. “The [classical music] was the number one reason we were there, but if you didn’t love [that kind of] music you were kind of bored.” In 1995, Kagan hired Robin Sparr as a cantorial soloist while he focused on the duties of Music Director and his work with the quartet. Sparr described a divided music program with a professional quartet and an organist that played at the High Holiday services, many of the Friday evening Sabbath services, and about half of the Bar Mitzvah ceremonies. Families of Bar Mitzvah children could choose to hire Sparr if they preferred a cantor and a guitar service or opt for an organ and quartet service. “A big challenge was that the community was sort of a divided house because there were people who would only come to services if they knew that quartet and organ were going to be on,” she explained. Always the unifier, Rabbi Waldorf encouraged his congregants to be “musically ambidextrous.”

## SOVIET JEWRY

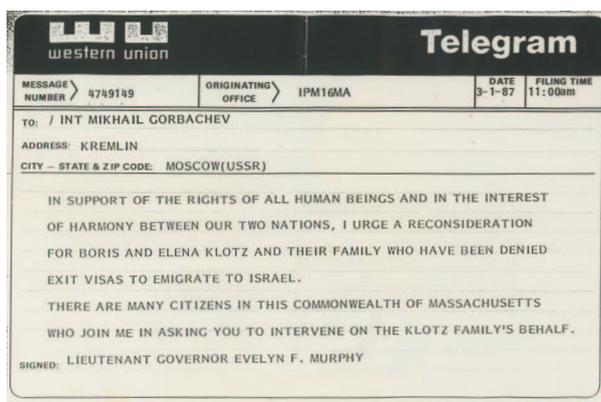
Temple Sinai’s penchant for social justice, sensitivity to diverse populations, and history of working with displaced refugees led Waldorf and his congregants to advocate on behalf of Soviet Jews detained behind the Iron Curtain. Well before the national movement to free Soviet Jews reached its crescendo in the 1980s, Temple Sinai advocated for the rights of Soviet Jews. During Rabbi Rudavsky’s tenure, Temple Sinai had participated in the Soviet Jewry Fund and Adopt-a-Family Program for Jews who had emigrated from the Soviet Union. As the Soviet Union cracked down on Jewish dissidents and prevented their emigration in the 1980s, Temple Sinai stepped up its efforts to reach out to this community. Russian Jews who did secure exit visas and found their way to Brookline were often cut off from their spiritual roots. “In our neighborhood,” Waldorf told his congregation, “there are dozens of Russian immigrant families who have no idea what synagogue life is.” He implored members of the congregation to better integrate them into the larger community. Sinai volunteers met with Russian partners twice a month to help introduce them to Jewish Brookline. In November 1983, Temple Sinai and Temple Israel co-sponsored a Hebrew-Russian-English Shabbat service.

The fate of Soviet Jewry was a personal issue for Rabbi Waldorf and one that called to the conscience of congregant Dianne [Deena] Blau. In 1980, Waldorf was part of a delega-

tion that presented the International Human Rights Award to Jimmy Carter on behalf of the President’s advocacy for Soviet Jewry. In 1988, he journeyed to the Soviet Union to meet with Jews who had informed the Soviet government of their desire to emigrate to the United States. Waldorf travelled to Moscow, Leningrad, and Minsk to meet with Jews who had personal contacts in the Boston area. Deena Blau, who founded Temple Sinai’s Soviet Jewry Committee, became a tireless advocate on behalf of Jews

in the Soviet Union, and helped to establish a resettlement fund for any new émigré with ties to members of the congregation.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Sinai members were in the forefront of the movement to resettle diaspora Jews. That process included an introduction to basic elements of Judaism. Before coming to Boston, many Russian immigrants had never seen a Torah. Barbara Palant, the Russian Resettlement Coordinator for the Synagogue Council of Massachusetts proclaimed: “Demagogues come and go. Stalins can come and go, but as long as there is a Torah, Jewish people will survive.” Although Soviet Jews lived under a communist system that stifled Jewish culture, Simchat Torah was one of the few times Soviet Jews were bold enough to hold a religious service in public. At Temple Sinai they could celebrate without fear of reprisal. In October 1995, Rabbi Waldorf conducted a Simchat Torah service for 200 Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union. The Jewish holiday marking the completion of the reading of the Torah held special significance for the émigrés, for whom Jewish prayer had entailed the risk of harsh punishment. “We were slaves in the land of Egypt, and we were slaves in the Soviet Union, and God set us free,” Waldorf told the congregation. Golda Brimm, one of the attendees, explained, “to be able to be here and be happy and sing songs without worrying about getting in trouble with the government is just incredible. This is beauti-



Sinai members worked with Lt. Governor Evelyn F. Murphy to pressure Mikhail Gorbachev to allow emigration of Soviet Jews.



Soviet émigrés with Lt. Governor Evelyn F. Murphy and members of the Soviet Jewry Committee.

ful. I am glad to be Jewish and am especially glad to be Jewish here. There is Jewish food. There is Jewish music. This is the best thing about being here — the freedom to be Jewish.”

An outgrowth of Rabbi Waldorf’s 1988 pilgrimage to the Soviet Union was a reinvigorated patriotism and more nuanced view of the world, politics, and Judaism. At the heart of this change was his recognition that he was “painfully bound to late 20th century, liberal, upper middle class milieus” which led him to question the universal principles to which he was committed. “In the USSR,” Waldorf reported, “no one can live on a monthly salary. Everyone needs a gimmick, a secret life to make ends meet. Television and newspapers tell what the regime wants to broadcast. Have whatever thoughts you will, but express them at your peril! Returning to the United States, I intone ‘God Bless America’ with a fervor I never knew I could muster.” This renewed appreciation for the privileges of American Jewish life included a greater propensity to question inequality. In his sermons he ruminated on the protected shell in which he, and presumably his congregation, operated. “As much as I feign sophistication, liberalism, and tolerance, my world is narrow and constrained,” Waldorf conceded. “Despite living in Germany for three years, extensive travels, and unrelenting exposure to [many] forms of print, television, and radio, I am ignorant of how most of the world lives. What do I know of farms and rural American towns? The plight of the unemployed and the poor in this country eludes



Sinai members participating in Operation Exodus to resettle Jews from the former Soviet Union, 1996.

me. And what of the multitudes in the Third World?” He explained that he was “full of gratitude [about the privileged life] but profoundly frustrated” that he did not know how to bring the benefits he enjoyed to “a broader circle.”

Cognizant of how Rabbi Rudavsky’s political sermonizing had divided the congregation, Waldorf refrained from using the pulpit as a vehicle for his political beliefs. Like Rudavsky, Waldorf reached out to Boston’s black community, advocated on behalf of civil rights, and participated in interfaith services. But whereas Rudavsky provided his congregation with specific prescriptions for society’s ills, Waldorf posed a set of moral quandaries for his audience to contemplate. After the Los Angeles riots, for example, Waldorf asked his congregation, “What excuse can we offer that our system permits some citizens two homes while consigning

others to cardboard boxes? How can we explain that we provide Head Start to only twenty-five percent of the eligible girls and boys who would benefit from its proven success? Who can justify a two-tiered medical system in which some are offered life-extending operations, while others do not get basic inoculations?" Closer to home, Rabbi Waldorf organized monthly meetings between local rabbis and black ministers to initiate conversations about urban violence, Jewish racism, and black anti-Semitism. "One of the real difficulties," Waldorf acknowledged, "is the geographic separation in the Boston area. There are not many natural occasions for Jews and blacks to come together. It's almost as if we need an appointment to talk, as opposed to meeting at the grocery store."

Waldorf's questioning of universal ideals that led him to investigate issues of race and poverty likewise enabled him to take a more nuanced position on the state of Israel. Waldorf represented that vital center between Cohon's anti-Zionism and Rudavsky's unequivocal support for the Jewish state. Certainly, the Yom Kippur War, the Arab oil embargo, and the United Nations resolution condemning Zionism as racism had hardened the position of many American Reform rabbis. Waldorf warned of the dangers of "Arab sheiks who wish to black-list us" and the "Arab propaganda machine" but reminded his congregation that "hiding ourselves in a racial ghetto will not save us. The kind of Judaism that thrives only in isolation,

intellectually and spiritually walled-in, is not the kind of Judaism we want for ourselves and our children." Waldorf urged his congregation to support Israel but said that it "could not serve as a surrogate for us as Jews. Israel will not make our children worthy, faithful Jews."

Waldorf's evolution was on full display after the horrific attacks of September 11, 2001. Like many spiritual leaders, Waldorf expressed empathy for the victims and guided his congregation through the attack's turbulent aftermath. While much of the country was wracked by fear-mongering, Rabbi Waldorf used the event as an occasion for introspection on a host of national and international issues. "I am made edgy by the knowledge that diabolical men wish America and Jews ill," Waldorf conceded. Yet he would not allow that fear to prevent him from trying to understand the roots of the evil lurking behind such villainous acts:

*My [view] comes from the prophetic sense that America does not deserve its present prosperity, nor do we use our advantages to promote justice at home or abroad. The disparity between our richest and poorest grows. Forty million Americans are without health care insurance. In our relationships with other nations, we show an arrogant face. We assume a go-it-alone posture with regards to Iraq. We resist an international war crimes court, forgiveness of Third World debt, and global warming accords. Even our allies are wary of our intentions. Who outside our borders would not rejoice to see the United States brought low?*

These were remarkable words for a deeply patriotic man who served so many years as a neutral arbiter among a sea of politicized voices. Although Rabbi Waldorf may not have spoken on behalf of the entire congregation, he captured a common desire to speak out against injustice. It is no coincidence that this would be a key characteristic of his successor.



## PART 4: RABBI ANDREW VOGEL, 2004- SACRED JUDAISM, SOCIAL JUSTICE

*“Judaism gives us a context for our political work: to see ourselves within a religious tradition that values the multiplicity of ideas, the universal experience, the obligation, and the mitzvah to alleviate suffering as a goal of social institutions. That is what it means to be religious Reform Jews. I believe if we declare these our moral values, through our acts of g’milut chasadim and our social justice work, we will find others — including non-Jews, perhaps even a majority of Americans — with whom we have a great deal in common.”*

**Rabbi Andrew Vogel** | “On Moral Values,” *Sinai News*, January 2005

### PASSING THE TORAH

For three decades, Rabbi Waldorf melded Rabbi Cohon’s founding vision of sacred Jewish learning and Rabbi Rudavsky’s call to social action with an ethic of healing, unity, respect, and tolerance. Satisfied that Sinai was on firm footing, Waldorf announced in 2003 that he intended to retire. Harry Shulman headed a search committee to identify a successor who embodied the values of the congregation and could reinvigorate it with new energy and purpose. The committee reviewed numerous applications and personal statements, read countless sermons, and conducted multiple interviews. It examined references, reviewed responses to interview questions, and narrowed the field to a few final

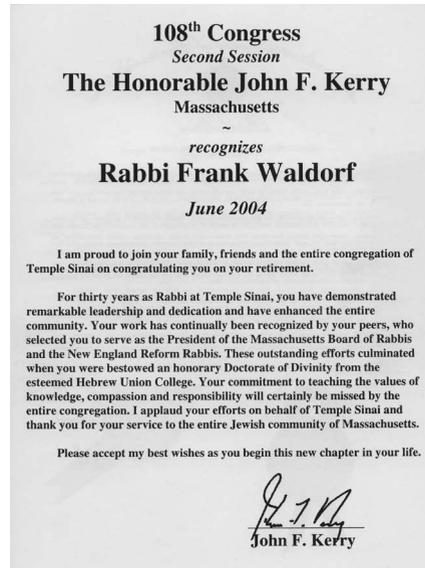
candidates. Committee members attended Shabbat services and Torah studies led by the candidates. The search took them to Long Island, Dallas, and across the state of Massachusetts.

In August, the committee announced its selection of Rabbi Andrew Vogel. Waldorf commended Vogel as a man of “intellect, caring, and devotion.” The committee identified Vogel’s social justice record as uniquely positioning him to capitalize on the dynamism of the multi-generational congregation. It pointed to his advocacy on behalf of the state’s poor and disadvantaged and his role as a member of the Rabbinic Advisory Committee of Rabbis for Human Rights as key factors in the hiring decision. “His passion for the work of *tikkun olam*

will energize our efforts in this area,” Shulman reported. “Rabbi Vogel has much to teach us, whether we are old students or newcomers to the study of Judaism. The challenge for any rabbi at Temple Sinai will be to help us infuse meaningful Jewish content into our busy and otherwise secular lives.”

Having secured a successor, members of Temple Sinai joined Bostonians from all walks of life in a March 2004 ceremony honoring Rabbi Waldorf’s thirty years of service. Even Senator John F. Kerry took time away from his busy presidential campaign to pen a letter of recognition to Waldorf that honored the rabbi’s “knowledge, compassion, and responsibility.”

Rabbinical transitions are rarely smooth. Congregations grow accustomed to the style, outlook, and practices of their leaders. Generational shifts lead to competing allegiances. Emeritus rabbis, hoping to protect their legacies, unwittingly meddle in congregational affairs. Each new rabbi at Temple Sinai had grappled with ghosts from the past and the politics of the present. Rabbi Cohon was embittered by not being selected as Rabbi Levy’s successor at Temple Israel, and later had difficulty relinquishing control of the congregation that he had founded. Rabbi Rudavsky bequeathed an unresolved generational divide and the aftershock of a scandal to his successor. Rabbi Waldorf inherited this baggage, and during his tenure dealt with vandalism, fire, theft, and a coup. He was determined that Vogel not be saddled with similar burdens.



Senator John Kerry’s recognition letter to Frank Waldorf was one of many letters honoring the beloved rabbi.

As Rabbi Waldorf neared retirement, he focused on Vogel’s success rather than his own personal legacy. Waldorf counseled Vogel but pledged to step back from Temple Sinai so that the new rabbi could develop his own relationship with the congregation. The two men met regularly before the transition, struck up a friendship, and identified several points of mutuality. Their camaraderie was on full display during Rabbi Waldorf’s penultimate Shabbat service in June 2004. At the close of the service, Waldorf invited the congregation to form a circle around the perimeter of the sanctuary. He removed the Torah from the Ark, passed it to the congregant standing next to him, and had each subsequent member pass the Torah until it reached Rabbi Vogel at the end of the circle. This final act communicated Waldorf’s

approval of Vogel and the interconnectedness of the Temple community. Following the service, Waldorf took a nine-month hiatus from Temple Sinai, affording Rabbi Vogel the space and time to put his own stamp on the congregation. One difference between the two rabbis was Vogel's greater personal attachment to Jewish rituals like keeping kosher, more regular use of Hebrew, and wearing a *kippah* and *talit*. Waldorf rarely wore a *kippah* when serving as rabbi, but chose to wear one when first returning to Temple Sinai for Purim services in March 2005. It was yet another symbolic gesture to demonstrate his blessing of the transition and support for the new rabbi.

### ONE GOOD DEED

Rabbi Vogel found a kindred spirit and stalwart supporter in Frank Waldorf, but the younger rabbi's penchant for social justice, Jewish learning, and traditional practice was in some ways more reminiscent of Rabbi Benjamin Rudavsky. The link between the men was the towering figure of Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld, who headed Cleveland's Fairmount Temple from 1958 to 1986. Lelyveld, a celebrity rabbi of sorts, was known for his civil rights advocacy, Zionism, and social justice work. He served as President of the American Jewish Congress, National Director of B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation, and President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Lelyveld hired Rudavsky as his son's Hebrew tutor in 1950, selected him as his



Rabbi Frank Waldorf and his successor Rabbi Andrew Vogel, December 6, 2013.

Associate Rabbi at Fairmount Temple in 1959, and helped him land the rabbi position at Temple Sinai in 1963. In 1964, when Rabbi Rudavsky was in his first year at Temple Sinai, Lelyveld made national news when white segregationists in Mississippi beat him with tire irons for helping to register black voters.

Lelyveld's intellect, courage and integrity provided a similar model for Andrew Vogel, who grew up in Cleveland's Beachwood suburb in the 1970s and 1980s. "I was asked by one of the rabbis at [Fairmount Temple] — who apparently had an earlier career as an electrician — to be the guy who was at the back of the sanctuary, modulating the microphone," an animated Vogel recalled. "I used to sit at the back of the sanctuary and before [Lelyveld] would deliver one of his passionate sermons on social justice he would motion to me sitting at the back with his thumb up in the air to indicate, 'pump up the volume,' because he wanted to be heard."

The influence of Lelyveld’s powerful oratory, coupled with Vogel’s summers at Union Camp Institute in Zionsville, Indiana, fostered a rich and potent Jewish life for the future rabbi. Summer camp afforded Vogel the opportunity to “live within the Jewish community, sing Jewish songs, hang out with Jewish kids, learn Hebrew, and [feel] proud of being Jewish.” While at summer camp, the teenage Vogel wrote the song *Mitzvah Goreret Mitzvah* (“One Good Deed Will Bring Another Good Deed”), which eventually became a musical staple in Reform Jewish camps around the country.

Vogel’s interest in Jewish ideas, culture, and activism led him to Brandeis University in 1986. He majored in Judaic Studies, but his cosmopolitan and social justice orientation drew him to a broad set of causes. Vogel was an active member of Hillel, advocated for Soviet Jewry, protested against South African apartheid, and engaged in progressive Zionist politics. After graduating in 1990, Vogel traveled to Washington DC to work for the Jewish Peace Lobby, an advocate for progressive Jewish politics. In 1991 Vogel joined the Reform Movement’s Kibbutz Lotan, located in southeastern Israel. Although he relished Israeli culture and Jewish learning, his ineptitude as a kibbutz mechanic resulted in him “breaking more tractors than [he] maintained.” In 1993 he returned to Cleveland to intern at Fairmount Temple before entering Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in Jerusalem. Vogel then spent four years at the New

York City campus of HUC-JIR. He served as President of his Senior Rabbinic Class and was ordained in May 1998.

Vogel’s first position after completing his rabbinical degree was as an Assistant Rabbi at Temple Kol Emeth in Marietta, Georgia (1998-2000). The city of Marietta was a heavily Christian evangelical community where Jews constituted less than one percent of the population. Kol Emeth was a mixture of native Georgians and transplants from the Northeast who had relocated to “the New South.” Vogel had fond memories of the tight-knit community, in which hundreds of congregants attended a typical Shabbat service. The pull to Boston, however, remained strong for Rabbi Vogel and his wife Martha Hausman. In 2000, Vogel accepted a position as Associate Rabbi at Temple Shir Tikva in Wayland, Massachusetts. “In Marietta I felt like I was providing an important service to the community, but being in Boston felt like coming back home,” the liberal Vogel explained.



Andrew Vogel on Israel’s Kibbutz Lotan, 1992.

“My congressman changed from [the neoconservative Republican] Newt Gingrich to [the far left Democrat] Barney Frank.”

#### FOUR PILLARS

Vogel’s fruitful years as Assistant Rabbi at Temple Shir Tikva validated his return to the Boston area. He worked with Rabbi Herman Blumberg to create innovative Shabbat practices, expand adult learning, and develop the youth program for teens. When the lead position at Temple Sinai became available, Vogel consulted with Rabbi Waldorf and then jumped at the opportunity. “Brookline was booming. The Jews had not moved away,” Vogel explained. “I had a strong sense that there was a lot to grow on. My kids [Rosa and Hallel] were four years and one year old, and I had a feeling that people with young children were going to gravitate to a synagogue

with a rabbi who also had young children.”

What he did not anticipate was the healthy pool of residents who were fifty-five and older. “This was a function of our unique congregation. Many people were downsizing from all around Boston. They [were] moving around Brookline and Boston, starting a new chapter in their lives. And they [were] looking for community. What better place to find your community than in a synagogue?”

Vogel’s goal was to integrate this diverse lot of long-time locals and transplants, young and old, as well as mixed race, interfaith, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) families, all of whom were looking for spiritual connection, Jewish education, and community. In the past, Temple Sinai’s defining mission had been implemented by only a few of the synagogue’s leaders. Rabbi Vogel hoped to develop that mission through a more broad-based “congregational conversation” among Temple members, which began in 2006. After two years of study, four primary commitments emerged from these grassroots discussions. These commitments correlated with the principles enumerated in a second century text titled *Pirke Avot* (The Sayings of Our Ancestors), and incorporated Temple Sinai’s mission as a caring community: Torah study and life long learning; Jewish ritual and prayer; commitment to social justice and acts of loving-kindness; and community anchored in respect and tolerance. A 2008 booklet titled “Achieving Temple Sinai’s Vision”



Rabbi Vogel and Martha Hausman with their daughters Rosa and Hallel, 2004.

explained the four pillars that constituted the congregation's vision:

**Torah: Engaging in life-long Jewish learning in community.**

Temple Sinai will be a community that values life-long learning. Our members will be continually engaged at all ages in *Talmud Torah*, Jewish learning that challenges us to grow intellectually, spiritually, religiously, and emotionally, whatever our level of Jewish learning or prior experiences. Through our sacred study of Jewish beliefs, history, literature, ethics, language, practices, culture, values and the State of Israel, our members feel empowered, in the spirit of Reform Judaism, to make their own informed decisions, deepen their commitment to Judaism and the Jewish people, and live fully as Jews in the wider world.

**Avodah: Seeking holiness in community through Jewish ritual and prayer.**

Temple Sinai will be a spiritual home where Jewish ritual and prayer bring us to experiences of holiness and meaningful relationship with God, however we may understand or wrestle with our conceptions of God. Our creative and evocative communal and personal observances of *Mitzvot* such as *Tefilah* (prayer), *Shabbat*, and *Chagim* (holidays), and other sacred rituals, will lead each of us to a higher sense of self and community. In the spirit of Reform Judaism, we will be open to re-examining, renewing and re-interpreting

ancient and modern Jewish rituals, and our congregation will encourage explorations of personal spirituality and Jewish spiritual growth.

**G'milut Chasadim/Tikkun Olam: Working in community to bring justice, caring, and healing to the world.**

Temple Sinai will be a community that works to bring *Tikkun Olam* (repair of the world) through acts of *G'milut Chasadim* (loving-kindness) in the spirit of Judaism's prophetic tradition of seeking justice, healing, and peace. Our congregation will pursue social justice work that helps the Jewish people and the wider world community. As we perform acts that better the world in which we live, we also seek to transform ourselves as individuals and as a community.

**K'hillah shel Hesed: Being a caring community that is inclusive and welcomes all who seek Jewish life.**

Temple Sinai will continue to be a *K'hillah* (community) where members are connected and committed to one another through relationships based on *Hesed* (caring and compassion). Members of our congregation will be encouraged to take on personal commitments to one another, to our Temple Sinai community, and to Jewish living. While *Torah*, *Avodah*, and *G'milut Chasadim* are the primary expressions of our sacred work, *K'hillah shel Hesed* affirms and celebrates the diversity of Jewish living through our mutual respect and pluralism.

The four pillars provided the congregation with a roadmap for prayer, education, and social action, even if the details were not fleshed out. “We know what we want to do. We know where we want to go,” Vogel elucidated. “It’s just a question of how we are going to get there. What’s the best way for us to create a vibrant and meaningful Judaism? The question is always: Is it in alignment with achieving our mission?”

### TRANSITIONS IN MUSIC AND EDUCATION

The four pillars were not necessarily an expression of a completely new orientation, but an articulation of principles that had always been at the core of the congregation. The pillars did, however, reflect changing demographics, shifting philosophies, larger trends in Reform Judaism, and the agenda of the new rabbi. Greater stress was put on traditional practices and ritual, social justice, adult education, connection to Israel, and more accessible and contemporary forms of music.

For Sinai’s first fifty years, classical music performances reflected the high art aspirations of the congregation. Jewish folk music and cantorial soloists were added during the Rudavsky and Waldorf years, but Temple Sinai remained one of the few Reform synagogues where classical music, an organist, and professional choir music survived into the new millennium. These multiple musical practices coexisted, but the

congregation hoped to choose between them. “Two thirds of my interview was about prayer and Jewish music,” Vogel recalled. “A hot issue at the time was [whether] we would make a change from the style of worship that had been around since the beginning of the synagogue, with an organist and quartet of singers, to something more contemporary.”

Vogel believed a cantor could create accessible and contemporary forms of music, and implement a more cohesive, unified, and inspired vision for worship. The Reform movement had shifted away from the meditative mode of worship to a more participatory style. For Vogel, a trained cantor could serve in partnership with the rabbi to accommodate a growing population. The job description, penned in April 2005, included responsibility for musical prayer leadership for Shabbat, Festival, and High Holy Day services; working with pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah students’ Torah and Haftorah portions; selected teaching in the Religious School; leading adult learning courses; and participating in committees.

In 2006, Temple Sinai hired Rosalie Toubes, who had served for the previous three years as the Cantor for Temple Beth Shalom in Peabody. Raised in Overland Park, KS, Toubes, like Vogel, was a transplanted Midwesterner. She received her graduate degree from HUC-JIC in New York, and was similarly drawn to the vibrant Jewish community of Brookline and warmth of Temple Sinai. Toubes hoped to draw

on Sinai's tradition of musical excellence while taking on a broader set of duties to accommodate the changing needs of the congregation. "[Music Director] Mark Kagan was spectacular and knew so much. The voices were beautiful. The music was beautiful," Toubes explained, but "when we had a Music Director and a choir [the music] was their only role." Toubes worked with the Religious School in planning music programs and started a Junior Choir. As an ordained cantor, Toubes could take on more significant clergy roles such as officiating at weddings and funerals, paying *shiva* calls, and visiting sick members in the hospital. When Rabbi Vogel went on sabbatical for six months in 2011, Toubes was able to perform

all of the lifecycle events and handle the emergency issues that came up in his absence.

Cantor Toubes and Rabbi Vogel's implementation of the four pillars was facilitated by the ingenuity of Presidents Jeremy Wolfe, Harvey Cotton, and Michael Klau, as well as Linda Katz who became the synagogue's first Executive Director in 2002. Katz took over Temple Sinai's administrative, financial, and communication duties. "I am the chief paper pusher," Katz joked. She became responsible for payroll, billing, building rentals, committee support, membership, and newsletters. Her efficiency, responsiveness, and organizational skills freed up Rabbi Vogel to focus on spiritual matters.

*"I grew up Conservative. The cantor at my bat mitzvah training said girls couldn't become cantors. In the Reform Movement they had started, at that point, having women cantors, but not in the Conservative Movement. I got the wrong message in the beginning. I didn't consider it until much later. I'm married to a woman and we have two children. When I applied to cantorial school, I had been subbing for cantors in the Reform Movement. I wasn't married yet, but I was dating the person I am married to now, Melissa. There was no choice for me. I couldn't hide who I was. I could not imagine applying to a school where I would have to hide my life. And I knew, generally speaking, the Reform Movement was okay with it. Things weren't perfect, and they still aren't perfect, but I knew that it was the only place where I could attempt that. Overall I was very well accepted, with a few exceptions. I chose the movement because of its progressive nature."*



Cantor Rosalie Toubes reflects on gender and marriage in the Reform Movement.



Top: Religious School Musical Performance, c. 2009.

Bottom: Cast of the annual Purim Spiel, "Get Back, Haman!" 2012.

Katz was supported by the Temple's longtime secretaries Linda Sherman and Harriet Feuerman, and by custodian Mario Calderon, who lovingly maintained the building for over 30 years.

Heidi Smith Hyde, first hired as the Jewish Life Educator in 1999, came to Temple Sinai with a wealth of experience as a religious school instructor, family educator, and college administrator. In 2003 she became Director of Educa-

tion and built upon the groundwork laid by her predecessor Leann Shamash. The school hired talented instructors who could offer an array of K-12 educational programs on Jewish prayer, history, politics, culture, ethics, and social justice. The curriculum centered on Jewish themes, but teased out their universal moral dimensions and their applicability to the modern cosmopolitan world. Smith Hyde wove these themes into four renowned Jewish children's books. In 2006 she and her family became members of the synagogue after many years of belonging to a Conservative congregation.

During the period of Smith Hyde's tenure, the religious school experienced a period of growth and strength. In 2003-04, the first year she served as Director of Education, 85 students were enrolled in grades K-12, but by 2014-15, that number had doubled, to about 165. The classrooms filled on Sunday mornings, and the school had to seek overflow space. Smith Hyde emphasized engaging whole families and parent learning. She instituted retreats and experiential learning. The academic offerings for teenage and high school students expanded to include social justice work, a partnership with the newly opened Brookline Teen Center, and tutoring opportunities at a charter school in Boston. In addition, past president Michael Klau spearheaded a multi-year campaign to encourage students to attend New England's Jewish summer camps, especially the two URJ camps in the Berkshires, Eisner and Crane Lake. Attendance soared from



Temple Sinai drew on the rich pool of Boston area educators to create a dynamic Religious School, 2013.

one camper in 2004 to over 35 campers in 2014, which distinguished Temple Sinai as having one of the highest percentage of participants among all Boston congregations.

The Religious School was complemented by a robust array of reinvigorated adult education programs that engaged Temple members at different points in the lifecycle in multiple conversations on a host of Jewish themes. Rabbi Cohon had referred to Temple Sinai as a “teach-

ing synagogue,” a place where Jews could draw from the “well of Jewish learning” by pursuing higher Jewish education well into adulthood. In 2005, Rabbi Vogel initiated a Thursday morning Torah study group, which attracted a regular group of two dozen adults. He brought in talented scholars to offer additional adult classes on Torah, Israel, Jewish ethics, history, and politics. Some classes were reserved for Sunday morning slots so that parents could attend

*“I feel very much at home at the Reform synagogue. I find the services are very participatory. Sometimes in the past, I used to go to services, and I would feel more like a spectator, and an observer. But, here, I am actually participating in the life of the Temple. So, it has to do with the fact that I work here, and I know everybody, and I am comfortable here. I like being in a Reform setting. I feel like it is more accepting of people, philosophies. We have so many different philosophies here at Sinai. Everybody here is accepted. It is a big cross section of people, both those who are wealthy and those who have little money. We have people who are Jewish. We have people who are non-Jewish. We have people who are straight. We have people who are gay and lesbian. Everybody is accepted.”*



Director of Education Heidi Smith Hyde discusses the Reform Movement’s ethic of tolerance and acceptance.



Adult women from the B'nai Mitzvah class, 2013.

while their children were in Religious School. Other programs and speakers ran on various weeknights to further pull adults of all ages into conversations about Jewish life. One testament to Jewish learning was the increased number of adult Bat Mitzvahs, particularly among women who converted to Judaism or did not have that opportunity when they were younger.

## JUDAISM'S RELIGION IS POLITICS

Temple Sinai maintained its tradition as a progressive Reform congregation, even if there was not always a consensus about what constituted an apt platform for social justice. Rabbi Vogel arrived at Temple Sinai during the height of the 2004 Presidential campaign that pitted Massachusetts Senator John Kerry against incumbent George W. Bush. After Bush's victory, Rabbi Vogel delivered a sermon titled "On Moral Values," in which he commented on the determinative role religion and morality played in the election. He pointed out how Republicans

captured political victories by laying claim to religious values and casting Democrats as devoid of moral vision. Rabbi Vogel recognized that not all members of the congregation were liberals and believed it was imperative to put a premium on open dialogue. "Members of our congregation have expressed their pride to me in their libertarian and conservative political views," Vogel explained. "I respect their opinions and our congregation can enjoy a lively political conversation that includes multiple [viewpoints]." The key was not to quash minority opinions, but to identify a shared moral vision grounded in Jewish values. "The basic teaching of Judaism that we find over and over in our sacred texts," Vogel said, "is that I am responsible for another person's welfare."

A central issue during the presidential campaign had been the preemptive war in Iraq that many believed was launched under false pretenses and landed the United States in a moral and military quagmire. Temple Sinai was one of six Reform synagogues from across the country that sponsored a resolution on the war in Iraq that was ultimately adopted in November 2005 by the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ). The URJ joined the NAACP, National Council of Churches, Sierra Club, Physicians for Social Responsibility, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church to promote the "Win Without War" principle. These groups called on the Bush Administration to announce a plan to end the occupation. They demanded target

dates for troop withdrawal; transformation of the military occupation into an Iraqi-led, regionally-backed, and internationally-supported effort to achieve stability and representative government; and funds to support Iraqi-directed reconstruction and humanitarian need.

“On every level, the war has been disastrous. It has taken a terrible toll,” a disheartened Rabbi Vogel reported to his congregation during his 2007 Yom Kippur sermon. He expressed sadness that Americans in general and Jews in particular had not paid enough attention to the war and had disengaged from its horrible consequences. “As an American and as a Jew,” Vogel conceded, “I feel shame that the war in Iraq continues in my name. I feel shame that my country and my leaders have been so reckless in using our nation’s resources to bring such destruction. And I feel ashamed that I have done so little to stop it.” He ended his sermon with the words “*V’al kulam Eloha s’li’chot*: For all these sins, O God, pardon us if we can advance beyond them, forgive us if we now move to action, grant us atonement if we can do better.”

For many members of Temple Sinai, even those who shared Rabbi Vogel’s sentiments, relief efforts and local politics provided a more viable forum for social action than the murky world of U.S. foreign policy. Congregants forged greater consensus on actions such as participation in the relief efforts for Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the Haitian earthquake of 2010. The Social Action Committee sponsored educational programs and

advocacy on childhood health care, prevention of ethnic cleansing in Sudan, Palestinian rights in Israel, AIDS research, Jewish-Muslim dialogue, and homeless rights. In 2005, Temple Sinai’s Rainbow Committee was formed to provide a welcoming atmosphere for LGBT members. The committee sponsored speakers, dialogue, and

**Please join us for a Social Action Shabbat on Friday, February 3**

Our guest speaker that evening will be Temple Sinai’s own Charlie Homer. Dr. Homer is President and CEO of the National Initiative for Children’s Healthcare Quality, an action oriented organization headquartered in Cambridge, MA exclusively dedicated to improving the quality of health care for children. He is an associate professor of the Department of Society, Human Development and Health at the Harvard University School of Public Health and an associate clinical professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School. He was a member of the third US Preventive Services Task Force from 2000-2002 and served as chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics Steering Committee on Quality Improvement and Management from 2001–2004. Prior to his position at NICHQ, he was director of the Clinical Effectiveness Program at Children’s Hospital, Boston, and served as program director of the first federally supported fellowship training programs in pediatric primary care and health services research.



**CAN WE STAND IDLY BY?**  
*Social Action Program, Friday Evening  
January 12, 2007*

The world’s worst humanitarian crisis continues to escalate in Sudan’s western Darfur region. Over 2 million civilians have been uprooted by a violent campaign of ethnic cleansing. It is impossible to be unmoved by the plight of refugees who so often appear on our television screens and in our newspapers these days.



**CAN WE STAND IDLY BY?**  
The Rev. Gloria E. White-Hammond, M.D. the Co-Pastor of Bethel AME Church in Boston, a pediatrician at the South End Community Health Center, and currently the Co-Chair of the Massachusetts Coalition to Save Darfur who has recently returned from that region will be our guest speaker on Friday, January 12, 2007. She will give us a first hand account of the situation in Darfur where ruthless militias continue to terrorize innocent villagers.

**CAN WE STAND IDLY BY?**  
Individuals of all faiths, races and ethnicities have joined in demanding an end to a genocide that has taken the lives of over 400,000 men, women, and children since February 2003. The government-sponsored genocide has driven 2.5 million civilians from their homes and left more than 3 million individuals reliant on international humanitarian aid. The situation in Darfur is growing more desperate every day.

**CAN WE STAND IDLY BY?**  
On Friday evening, January 12, 2007 we will have the opportunity and privilege to hear directly of this tragic genocide and what we can do to help. Make this a must on your calendar. Invite your neighbors and your friends to join us. Together we can make a difference.

**WE CANNOT STAND IDLY BY!**  
—THE SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE

rainbow committee

**Don’t Miss This One. Mark Your Calendar Now!**

Being among the first to hear the earliest story about the Children’s Hospital’s GeMS, Gender Management service when Dr. Norman Spack will be the Rainbow Committee’s erev Shabbat speaker on Friday, April 4, 2008. His talk is titled “TRUE SELVES: The transgendered in our midst”. Dr. Spack is a cofounder of GeMS, an interdisciplinary clinic for Disorders of Sex Development (Intersex) and Transgenderism.

Dr. Spack is a Senior Associate in the Endocrine Division at Harvard Medical School. He grew up in Brookline, the son of a nationally acclaimed Jewish educator. An alum of the Hebrew College Prozdor and of Camp Tevya, he graduated from Williams College in 1965 and from the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry in 1969. In

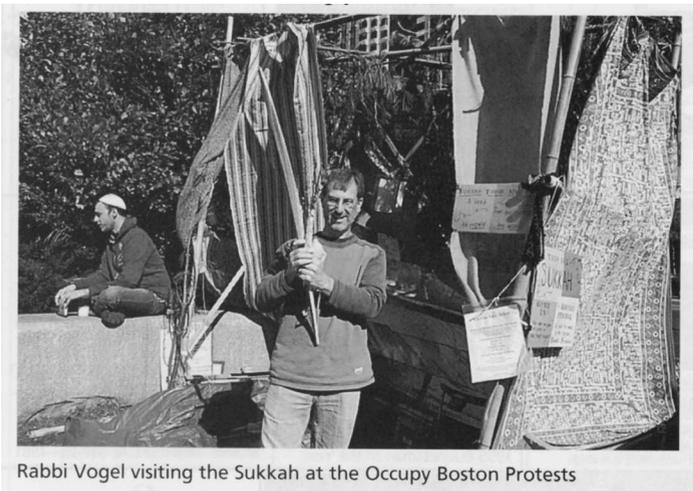
1978, Dr. Spack co-founded the first community based private practice of Adolescent Medicine in New England. In 1998 he became Clinical Director of the Endocrine Division at Children’s. He serves on the Admissions Committee of

Harvard Medical School and the Peer Review Committee of the hospital.

Norman Spack’s interest in patients with gender problems was kindled at a volunteer on the medical van of Bridge Over Troubled Waters in 1974. In recent years he has become a nationally recognized advocate for transgendered individuals, from children to mature adults. In December 2007, he received the Lewis Millender Community Service Award from the Combined Jewish Philanthropies Health Professions Team.



Sinai members found multiple ways of engaging in social action and expressing kinship with victims of economic inequality and oppression.



Rabbi Vogel visiting the Sukkah at the Occupy Boston Protests

Rabbi Vogel, in Dewey Square as an observer at Occupy Boston, expresses concern about economic inequality, 2011.

outreach to the larger community.

At the heart of these projects was the concept of *tikkun olam*, which Rabbi Vogel described as responsibility for “the relief of human suffering, the achievement of peace and mutual respect among peoples, and the protection of the planet itself from destruction.” A new initiative was undertaken to identify a series of causes around which the congregation could collectively rally. In 2011, Temple Sinai began a series of intimate “community organizing” conversations in congregants’ homes to identify shared values, priorities and interests in social action. Congregants made a collective decision to focus on healthy food for all citizens, early childhood education, gun violence legislation and raising the minimum wage. The grassroots campaign, which included more than one hundred members, launched a community-organizing project known as *Tzedek@Sinai*.

## IMPERFECT, BUT STILL A DREAM

No issue posed a greater challenge to consensus than support for Israel. Most members of Temple Sinai held great attachment to the Jewish state, but felt unease about its politics and the ways in which it struggled to create a democracy. Jodie Kliman’s 2002 column in *Sinai News* described these tensions. Kliman affirmed her love of Israel while rejecting the aggressive campaign against Palestinians by the Israeli government. “This does not mean I support Palestinian violence against Israeli civilians,” Kliman clarified, “but we must weep for the innocents who have died on both sides of this terrible conflict.” Kliman urged her fellow congregants to put their support with the many groups working for Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation and dialogue “rather than with wholesale support of the government of our beloved Israel, which is behaving so badly.” Harvey Cotton, a member of the synagogue as a child, who returned to become its President from 2007 to 2010, explained that “American Jews support Israel, but not in the same manner as [the] very liberal Reform Jews who are members of Temple Sinai. This is a congregation that will challenge Israel on some of its policies if it feels that they are questionable. This congregation believes in the rights of all people.”

While Rabbi Vogel shared ambivalence about the *actions* of the Israeli government, he was unabashedly Zionist. He called the State of Israel “the most important project of the

Jewish people in the modern era.” In addition to previously joining Kibbutz Lotan, living in Israel during his junior year of college, and attending Jerusalem’s HUC-JIR, Vogel studied at the Hartman Institute and moved his family to Haifa for a six-month sabbatical in 2011. For Vogel, the State of Israel represented “the rebirth of a people, and fulfillment of two thousand years of longing to return to a position of power.” But the goal was to “make the religious teachings and modern values we have as a people be fully realized in that State.” When Vogel first arrived at Temple Sinai, congregants were divided about whether or not to add an Israeli flag to the American and Massachusetts flags already hanging on the *bimah*. Vogel consulted with the Ritual Committee, and ultimately decided to remove all of the flags. “Putting any flag on the *bimah* was going to be divisive because people were going to interpret the symbolism in many different ways, including as a symbol of nationalism. Rather than fight about symbols, I had the strong sense that people wanted to engage in meaningful conversations about Israel.”

In December 2004, about a dozen congregants convened to form the Israel Education and Action Committee. The group’s mission statement acknowledged the divergent views on the State of Israel and established a guiding principle that the committee would create a safe and respectful atmosphere for members to pursue Israel advocacy from a range of positions. Caryl Hull and Karen Stoler served as the first co-chairs and carefully mixed in educational presentations from

a diverse set of organizations and leaders. The group sponsored Israeli movies, book groups, and cultural events. Speakers were invited from across the political spectrum, but the focus tended toward issues of social justice within Israel, including women’s rights, economic equality, and progressive Judaism. Invited speakers included Anat Hoffman, the Executive Director of the Israel Religious Action Center, and Nancy Kaufman of the National Council of Jewish Women.

As Israel approached its 60th anniversary in October 2007, Rabbi Vogel delivered a sermon titled “An Imperfect Place, But Still a Dream.” The sermon conceded the elusive nature of a progressive, tolerant, and pluralistic Israel and the need to be honest about its shortcomings. Despite this challenge, Vogel implored his congregation that the dream of Israel was worth their personal investment. He reminded them of the ideals articulated by David Ben-Gurion in Israel’s Declaration of Independence: “The new nation will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture.” Vogel acknowledged the many ways in which Israel fell short of its ideals, but did not view Israel’s fallibility as grounds for American Jews to reject the Jewish state. He instead encouraged his con-

gregation to hold Israel accountable to the ideals of its founding documents.

Rabbi Cohon had always privileged his American identity over any connection with Israel. For Vogel, the projects of American and Israeli democracies were intertwined. He felt that members of his congregation would be able to appreciate that interconnectedness by traveling to Israel. “Visiting Israel transforms you,” Vogel explained. “It changes you in powerful ways when you visit. You strengthen the Jewish people by building meaningful connections between Jews who live in these two major centers of Jewish life, America and Israel.” In 2009 and 2013 he organized the first Temple Sinai trips to Israel so that members of the congregation could interface with Israeli culture, politics, worship, and history. Travelers explored the ancient and modern dimensions of Israel while focusing on questions of social justice and democracy. After being escorted via jeep by veterans of the Israeli military through the Golan

Heights and interacting with Palestinians in the West Bank, fourteen-year-old Ethan Jampel noted that the experience made him “think about the world in a different way. It made me think about Israel and Palestine, and I realize it’s complicated.” For Vogel, the goal was for American Jews to “stay engaged with Israel,” while being mindful of “all the subtleties and shades of gray.”

Vogel urged his congregation to embrace Israel’s ambiguities rather than reject the country outright for its questionable policies or accept it uncritically because of ethnic or religious attachment. He stressed the importance of Israel education and dialogue about the meaning of a Jewish state. The goal was not to come to a consensus about Israel or to provide a specific platform for action, but to engage in meaningful conversations. Congregants might draw antithetical conclusions about the state of Israel, but not without the benefit of informed discussion.



Temple Sinai  
Israel trippers in  
the Golan Heights,  
2014.

Israel was only one of many Jewish topics of conversation that would involve “shades of gray.” Vogel’s tenure was marked by vigorous, yet respectful, debates about worship, prayer, music, social justice, and domestic and global politics. Temple Sinai, like hundreds of Reform congregations across the country, faced a myriad of religious, social, and cultural issues that were interpreted from a multiplicity of perspectives. As Reform Jews in one of the nation’s most vibrant, progressive, and intellectual communities, Sinai members did not simply accept inherited wisdom, but reasoned with one another about the ways to conform it to modern realities.

Temple Sinai’s mission statement was the glue that held the congregation together in the early twenty-first century. In previous years, spirited debates threatened to fracture this intimate community, but the four pillars of Temple Sinai’s mission furnished the congregation with a new ethic of inclusion, dialogue, tolerance, and caring. Temple Sinai proved strong enough to house

a diversity of viewpoints, even those that were muddled or contradictory. A shared vision and common values equipped the congregation with the fortitude to move forward in a contested and murky world. This strength in diversity was a testament to Rabbi Vogel, the Temple’s astute leadership, and the general good will of the congregation.



Ethan Jampel, with his father Jeff, being escorted by armed Israeli veterans through the Golan Heights, 2014.

## REINVENTING TRADITION: 75 YEARS AT TEMPLE SINAI

The history of Temple Sinai is a remarkable record of continuity, adaptation, and innovation. None of the founding generation survives, yet the institution is vitally alive in ways that would be easily recognized by its founders. Temple Sinai continues to function as a warm, intimate, and welcoming environment for independently-minded Jews. The current demographics and political orientation of the congregation may differ from those of 1939, but its members still heed Cohon's call to "rouse and challenge the slumbering voices of Liberal Judaism to a more earnest effort." Each generation of leaders and congregants embraced innovative ways to build a sacred and progressive Jewish life amidst the competing forces of nationalism, war, oppression, and assimilation. Postwar American Jews found a safe haven in the United States and thrived in Reform congregations like Temple Sinai, but their acceptance, material success, and assimilation paradoxically threatened the survival of Jewish identity. This was as true of Temple Sinai during its inception in 1939 as at its 75th anniversary in 2014. Rabbi Cohon counseled Reform Jews to "study ancient texts and grapple with the wisdom of their forefathers, but

refuse to be hypnotized by the past." The risk for some Reform Jews was that liberation from the past could threaten to untether them from Judaism entirely. Cohon, Rudavsky, Waldorf, and Vogel endeavored to preserve the sacred and the progressive amidst the powerful forces of American society, culture, politics and consumerism.

In 1964, *Look* magazine published its seminal article "The Vanishing American Jew," which prophesied the disappearance of American Jews by the beginning of the 21st century. Two decades later, Alan Dershowitz published a best-selling book by the same title that expressed similar concerns about the fate of American Jewry. In 2013, the Pew Research Center report titled "A Portrait of Jewish Americans" presented data that likewise called into question the sustainability of Jewish identity. The study found that American Jews, when compared with earlier generations, were much less connected to Jewish organizations and less likely to raise their children Jewish. Of particular concern was the rate of intermarriage to non-Jews, which was about sixty percent since 2000.

Rabbi Vogel conceded, "American culture

is really powerful. At any point any person who wants can just walk away [from Judaism].” Yet he was clear in his approach. “Rather than repeat the negative messages about why Jews should remain Jewish — that the Jewish people will die without them, or that there are external forces trying to eliminate us — I hope to engage our members in the beauty of Judaism, its ethical values, its spiritual truths, and sense of community. I don’t believe in a judgmental Judaism, or in guilt as a motivator. I believe in empowering people with a Judaism that can address what is holy in their

lives.” If the central question for American Jews was how to sustain a spiritual life amid the enticements of American society, the answer was reflected in the radically changed composition of Temple Sinai 75 years after its founding.

Temple Sinai is illustrative of the timeless Jewish and American tradition of reinvention. Under Rabbi Vogel’s stewardship, the congregation embraced the Reform movement’s “forgotten mitzvah” to welcome and love strangers in its midst. It embraced

*“Nearly a third of our congregation are new members that just joined in that last five years. It’s evolving. But certain things remain the same. It’s relatively casual. People don’t care how you’re dressed. There isn’t a lot of judgment around what your decisions are, your dietary choices are, whom you marry, or what you do. There is a conscious effort to not judge other people. For me, being Reform gives more autonomy to the individual, and that is actually very important to me given my [Fundamentalist Baptist] upbringing. I have a very hard time with religions that are top down, where there is an authority figure somewhere, some rabbi or teacher, who says, ‘This is how it has to be and you have to do it this way.’ I’ve been there and I don’t want to do that again. I think it’s too easy. Being Reform doesn’t mean you get to say, ‘I don’t have to care about the rituals or the rules.’ I have to rethink them. I have to reimagine them and make them my own.”*



Robin Orwant at her Bat Mitzvah, with her daughters Amelia and Penny, March 2011.

interfaith couples and Jews-by-choice. It supported same-sex marriages and created a welcoming environment for LGBT members. It accepted the affluent and the less fortunate. It opened its doors to Jews from the city and those from the suburbs. It celebrated racial diversity, including Asian, African-American and Latino Jews. It reinvigorated itself with a new mission of social justice, while remaining open to Jewish voices from across the political spectrum. It revisited ancient practices and conformed them to modern realities. The music, dress, diet, rituals, politics and public face of the congregation may have looked different from those of previous generations, but the struggle to embrace the sacred and the progressive remained the same. Rather than becoming a fortress of insular and stagnant Judaism, Temple Sinai became a place where people of dissimilar backgrounds, political views, and paths to spirituality could worship together. This microcosm of American society was both a “big tent” and a small, intimate, Jewish family.





CONFIRMATION CLASSES THROUGH THE YEARS



Rabbi Cohon and the class of 1964.



Rabbi Rudavsky and the class of 1973.



Rabbi Waldorf and the class of 1981.



Rabbi Vogel and the class of 2010.

PRESIDENTS  
OF THE  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Albert Ehrenfried M.D.	1939 – 1941
Saul Kaplan	1941 – 1948
Abraham Schiller	1948 – 1950
Elliott Bachner	1950 – 1955
Hyman J. Torf	1955 – 1956
Oscar Turran	1956 – 1959
Walter M. Cobe	1959 – 1965
William N. Wheeler	1965 – 1970
Marvin Sparrow	1970 – 1972
Benjamin Goldfarb	1972 – 1977
Lillian Shulman	1977 – 1981
Jay P. Sage	1981 – 1983
Theodore I. Steinman	1983 – 1984
Gerald H. Abrams	1984 – 1987
Howard Weintraub	1987 – 1990
Michael A. Blau	1990 – 1994
Harry Shulman	1994 – 1996
Arlene C. Weintraub	1996 – 2000
Marc L. Cooper	2000 – 2003
Jeremy M. Wolfe	2003 – 2007
Harvey D. Cotton	2007 – 2010
Michael D. Klau	2010 – 2013
Pauline E. Gerson	2013 –

RECIPIENTS OF  
THE HARRY WHEELER  
DISTINGUISHED SERVICE  
AWARD

1956	Saul Kaplan
1957	David Lurensky
1958	Elliot Bachner
1959	William Kopans
1960	Henri Schwartzberg
1961	Henry Van Dam
1962	Harry Wheeler
1963	Walter Cobe
1964	William N. Wheeler
1965	George Sparks
1966	Julian Solinger
1967	Aaron H. Sibley
1968	Max Tobin
1969	Alvin Caplan
1970	Dr. Joseph Franklin
1971	Bernard Lemlein
1972	Benjamin Berkowitch
1973	Marvin Sparrow
1974	Benjamin Goldfarb
1975	Harold Gorin
1976	Richard A. Kaye
1977	Walter Kaufman
1978	Janet Pearlman

1979	Lillian Shulman	2002	Dianne Blau
1980	Mollie Sibley	2003	Donald Solomon
1981	Dr. Yale Berry	2004	Janet Wagner
1982	Eleanor Lewis	2005	Judith Ferber
1983	Richard Hackel	2006	Mark Kagan
1984	Abbe Cohen	2007	Dennis Cerrotti
1985	Judith Freedman Caplan	2008	Rochelle Seltzer
1986	Ernest Starr	2009	Cathy Cotton
1987	Jane T. Wanger	2010	Zippy Ostroy
1988	Jerold A. Gilmore	2011	Harvey D. Cotton
1989	Dr. Howard Weintraub	2012	Enid Greenberg Shapiro
1990	Dr. Michael Blau	2013	Michael D. Klau
1991	Dr. Theodore I. Steinman	2014	Alex Cooper
1992	Harry Shulman		
1993	Dr. Robert L. Thurer		
1994	Dr. Jeremy M. Wolfe		
1995	Arlene Weintraub		
1996	Jack Stevens		
1997	Sheila Shulman		
1998	Roz Bernheimer		
1999	Marc Cooper		
2000	Rabbi Frank Waldorf		
2001	Rose Beth Mandelbaum		

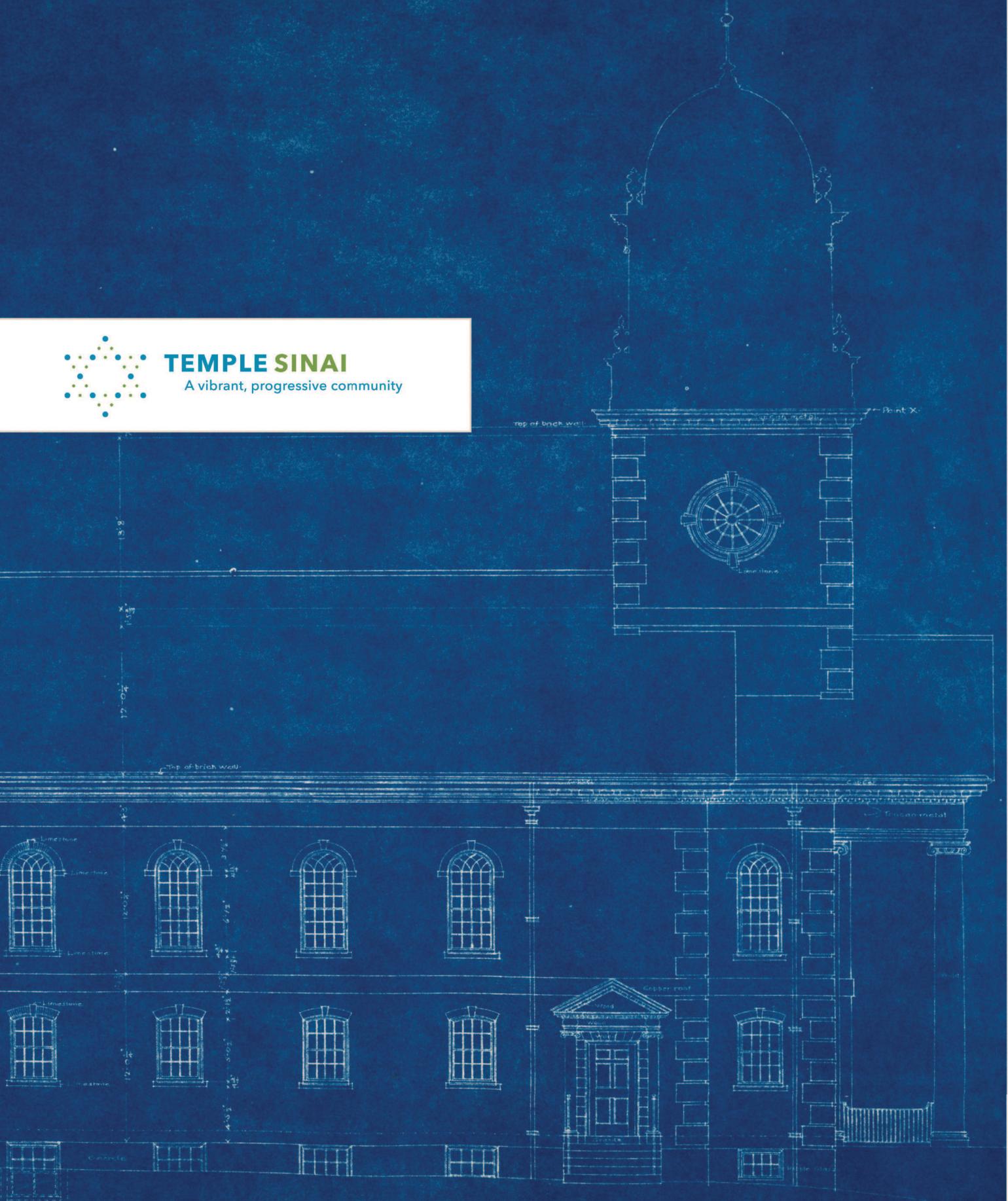






# TEMPLE SINAI

A vibrant, progressive community



South Elevation