



SOUTHERN JEWISH HERITAGE

VOL. 20, NO. 1

FALL 2007

Purim Balls, Pinochle, and All-Night Poker . . .

Rex Club Was Organized in 1905 As Exclusive Jewish Social Club

By Harriet Stern

As early as 1861, the Jews of Memphis formed their own clubs and organizations around which they centered their social activities. Among these were the Rex Club, the YMHA, and the Junior YMHA, all profiled in this newsletter.

Imagine an elaborate debutante “coming out” party, a festive Purim Ball, a beautifully appointed ladies’ luncheon followed by whist, and the camaraderie of male card games such as pinochle and all-night poker—you will have the Rex Club at a glance. Historically, although welcomed as members and leaders of fraternal organizations such as the Masons and Elks, the Jews of Memphis were excluded from non-Jewish social clubs. In March, 1905, a group of Memphis Jews organized the Rex Club as their own exclusive social club in order to enjoy a corresponding style of social life.

The Rex was not the first club of its kind. The Southern Club was the oldest Jewish club in Memphis, founded in 1861. In 1863, the occupying general for the North in the Civil War objected to the name, and it was changed to the Memphis Club. In 1869, the club’s officers were listed as Isidor Rosenbach, president; Lazar Kremer, vice president; L. Wertzfelder, fi-

nancial secretary; E. Lehman, D. Langsdorf, and L. Iglauer, trustees; and S. Hirsch, librarian. The social prominence of the Memphis Club was evidenced by an article on November 5,

1894, in the *Commercial Appeal*: “The grand ball opening the social season for 1894-95 of the Memphis Club was held last night at the clubhouse on Union Street with a blaze of splendor. The ball also marked the debut of nine young ladies.” The Club also was recognized in the Memphis Blue Book of 1903 with 95 members and as honorary members, Rabbi Max Samfield and Sol Hesse.

Eventually, however, according to Selma Lewis in *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt*, dissatisfaction with the

Memphis Club led to the founding of the Rex Club. A historical account of the Rex Club is documented in the 1915 edition of the *Jewish Spectator*, a regional newspaper of the time, with officers listed as Ralph Bernhold, president; David Halle,

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The YMHA-Rex Club Building at the corner of Madison and Dunlap

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MEMPHIS AND THE MID-SOUTH - FOUNDED IN 1986
c/o MJCC 6650 POPLAR AVENUE, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE 38138

President's Message . . .



Gilbert Halpern

Greetings:

As we launch the 2007-2008 year of activities, it gives me great pleasure to bring you some of our plans for the coming months. I would like to point out that I'm always open to your suggestions for adding or improving our programs and projects and urge you contact me.

First, our program committee, in partnership with Bornblum Judaic Studies, University of Memphis, chaired by Dr. David Patterson, has put together another outstanding year of renowned speakers.

Second, our archives committee, chaired by Margery Kerstine and Hallie Elliot, will be hosting the JHS board for a tour of the archives at Temple Israel, where the JHS historical materials are sorted, cataloged, preserved and stored.

Third, our travel committee will be reinstituted for a bus trip proposed for the spring of 2008. I'm seeking a chair for this committee.

Fourth, The Selma Lewis Scholars program will be announcing plans for this year's program. This will be announced in the coming months.

Fifth, I have personally taken on the responsibility of our Oral History program. Sumner Levine, Harriet Stern, and I recently met and discussed improving the quality of our recordings by converting to a digitized format. We also plan to set up the web page so that our members can access these histories.

Sixth, our website, www.jhsmem.org, will soon have a monitored feedback zone for you to offer ideas, comments, or general information to our membership.

Seventh, our cemetery committee, chaired by Greg Siskind, has reached some important milestones in this important project. Information for access to this information will soon be available on our website.

We have many more plans coming, so stay tuned.

Gilbert Halpern

Save These Dates! (More to be Announced Later)

Sunday, December 2, 2:00 pm, MJCC:
Simcha Jacobovici: "The Ten Lost Tribes," film and talk

Sunday, January 27, 2:00 pm, MJCC:
Alan Berger: "Children of Holocaust Survivors"

Sunday, May 18, 2:00 pm, MJCC:
Perre Magness: "The Jews of Memphis"

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**Of Blessed Memory*

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Marcia Levy

December Program Will Feature Simcha Jacobovici, Producer-Director

On Sunday, December 2, Simcha Jacobovici will present a film and talk titled "The Ten Lost Tribes. The program will be at the Memphis Jewish Community Center at 2:00 PM.

Jacobovici is the recipient of numerous awards, which include a Gold Medal from the International Documentary Festival of Nyon, a certificate of Special Merit from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles, a Genie Award, three U.S. Cable Ace Awards, two Gemini Awards, an Alfred I. Dupont-Columbia University Award, a British Broadcast Award, and two U.S. Emmy Awards for "Outstanding Investigative Journalism." In 2007 he won the Edward R. Murrow Award from the Overseas Press Club of America.

Recent films include *Impact of Terror* (CNN), *Sex Slaves* (CBC, C4, and PBS Frontline), and *The Exodus Decoded* (History Channel), which he co-produced with James Cameron. *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*, also co-produced with James Cameron, continues to garner worldwide attention.

His first book, *The Jesus Family Tomb* (Harper Collins 2007), co-written with Dr. Charles Pellegrino, is a companion book to the documentary film. It is an international bestseller.

An Israeli-born Canadian, Jacobovici has a B.A. in Philosophy from McGill University and an M.A. in International Relations from the University of Toronto.

vice president; William L. Loeb, treasurer; I. Dinkelspiel, Ike Gronauer, Albert Dreyfus, Gilbert M. Schloss, and Milton Binswanger, Board of Commissioners; Harold H. Roth, Milton B. Silberberg, and Milton A. Sternberger, Entertainment Committee. The *Spectator* account is as follows:

"One of the most prominent and important factors in the social life of the Jews of Memphis is the Rex Club. Although comparatively one of the youngest Jewish organizations in point of years in this city, it has come to be recognized as one of the staunchest.

"The Rex Club of Memphis sprung from a small beginning, when, in March, 1905, a few Jewish young men organized the Rex Club with a limited membership of fifty. They had no regular meeting place for a while and met at the residences of various members, finally leasing temporary quarters in the old Princess Skating Rink, corner of Washington and Main Streets. Prior to that, they met in Witzmann's Hall. The first officers of the club were: Emile C. Rawitzer, president; Emanuel Pincus, vice president; P. Jacobs, secretary; A. Rosenstein, treasurer. (A contradictory article from the Commercial Appeal lists founding members as President, Elias Gates; Vice President, I.D. Block; Secretary, Harold H. Roth; I. Dinkelspiel; Merrill Jacobs; Gilbert M. Schloss; Albert Dreyfus; and Saul Isenberg. Entertainment committee: Edward Goldsmith, A. Arthur Halle, Leo Goodman.) The first anniversary celebration was a superb ball and banquet at the Gayoso Hotel on Thursday night, March 25, 1906, there being 75 guests present.

"The club continued to improve financially, and the membership limit was raised to 125, when, in November, 1908, the Memphis Club, an old landmark of Memphis, disbanded and the Rex Club took over the membership of the organization, which comprised some of the most prominent and wealthy Jewish residents. On November 20, 1908, the Rex Club, thus strengthened, leased the elegant quarters over the Lyric Theater, the opening debutante ball taking place on November 25. The Rex Club remained in these quarters for two years, when the growing demand for more commodious quarters and with a civic pride to improve the social conditions of the

Jewish people of Memphis, the club, together with the Young Men's Hebrew Association (see related article on page 7), built a magnificent club house—one of the most complete of its kind in the South."

On January 17, 1910, "a distinguished gathering" of approximately 100 Jewish residents of Memphis witnessed the laying of the cornerstone at the corner of Madison and Dunlap of a new three-story building to be shared by the YMHA and the Rex Club.

In his "short but eloquent" address, Rabbi Max Samfield declared that the building "will stand for decades to come as a testimonial to the energy and patriotic love for religion and nation of the young men who have labored in this cause." The Rabbi was a particularly appropriate dedicatory speaker. Twenty-five years earlier, three men of the Jewish community had come to him to turn over a sum of \$30 for his charitable use. Having raised only this paltry amount in an attempt to found a local YMHA, the men felt too discouraged to continue. Rabbi Samfield declined the money and encouraged and assisted them in their efforts. The building now being dedicated gave witness to their success.

At 3:00 PM, the cornerstone was lowered. It contained a strongbox, whose contents included a pamphlet naming the officers of the YMHA and the Rex Club, as well as the building and joint arrangements committees.

Otto Metzger, president of the YMHA, also delivered remarks in which he stated that this marked "a new epoch in the history of the Jews in Memphis." Rabbi Dr. A. Brill of Greenville, Mississippi, pronounced the benediction, after which Abe Cohn, Rex Club president, paid tribute to the YMHA and recognized the Salon Circle, a social and literary women's organization, for its support.

The 1915 Anniversary Edition of the *Jewish Spectator* included detailed descriptions of the YMHA-Rex Club building after its completion. Placed on a small lawn above the street level, the edifice, with its exterior of yellow pressed brick with white stone trim, rose three stories to a roof available as a patio garden if later desired. Attractive electric lamp fixtures graced each of the three Gothic style entrances, one

Please see REX CLUB, page 4

New Exhibit, *Bagels & Barbeque: The Jewish Experience in Tennessee* to Open in Nashville

November 11-13, 2007: Gaylord Opryland Hotel Resort and Convention Center during the United Jewish Communities General Assembly. The graphic version of the exhibit will be open to the general public, no registration necessary.

December 9, 2007-February 3, 2008: Tennessee State Museum, Nashville. This expanded exhibit will include artifacts from the museum and private collections. For more information, go to www.tnmuseum.org.

Additional venues for the exhibit are being scheduled through 2010 at museums across Tennessee, including Memphis.



Rex Club Debutantes, 1911 (Photo from Temple Israel Archives)

REX CLUB, continued from page 3

on Madison and two on Dunlap. "The building is to be the center of Jewish activity of this city in the future," the *Spectator* stated, reiterating the hopes of the two organizations. "The Rex will serve more as a social center, whilst the YMHA is to carry out the purposes of the organization and promote educational, physical, and moral advancement of the Jews of Memphis...The YMHA will also give informal dances and informal affairs. Each organization will occupy a sphere of its own and they will in no way conflict with each other..."

Inside were many fine spaces. "Historical periods—the elegant adornments at kings' palaces—are the inspiration of many of the exquisite effects...The ladies' parlors on the first floor portray a striking conception of the Louis XIV style, overdraperies of heavy maroon velour, antique golden trimmings, with curtains of Anatolia lace." The third floor auditorium with a stage seated 300. There were bowling alleys, a swimming pool, a fully equipped gymnasium, and shower baths. The assembly room was finished in fumed oak with Spanish leather furniture. A billiard room offered two pool tables and a billiard table. The table, piano, and bookcases of the library were all of mahogany. The club's banquet hall could hold 24 tete-a-tete tables, and the kitchen was "thoroughly equipped" with "all modern kitchen appliances." A ratskeller in German style was "most unique in all its appointments, including German ta-

bles and pictures, steins, and other fittings..." The ballroom, used jointly by the Rex and YMHA, was decorated in old rose throughout, with elegant velour draperies hung beneath the colonnades.

The new building became the scene of numerous social events. In 1911, the *Commercial Appeal* noted a "matron's luncheon." Mesdames Sol Cahn and

Sol Isenberg entertained, the former gowned in peach-colored marquise over satin and the latter in blue chiffon over satin. A six-course meal was served at tables with place cards like fireworks, from which a favor popped out. Among the guests were "Mesdames David Sternberger, Ben Ashner, J. Weinberg, Simon Strauss, Abe Goodman, Henry Oppenheim, and Miss Felsenthal of Chicago." In March, 1916, Mrs. A. Arthur Halle, Mrs. Julius Goodman, Mrs. Elias Gates, Mrs. Nathan Wellman, Mrs. Arthur Seessel, and Mrs. Grace Posert were in charge of the Rex card party.

The Rex Club was gratifyingly highlighted in a 1919 *Commercial Appeal* article entitled: "Rex Club's Debutantes Ball An Unusually Brilliant Event." Seven debutantes from Memphis and elsewhere (the out-of-towners presumably having a Memphis connection) were presented: Marguerite Lowenstein, Mildred Ehrmann, Florence Gates, Bertha Tobias of Shreveport, Mildred Jacobson of Baltimore, Lucille Hiller of Little Rock, and Marjorie Mook.

"The debutante march was skillfully led by Mr. Harold Roth, chairman of the entertainment committee, dancing with Miss Mildred Jacobson..." The article described the ballroom's décor and its decorations of garlands and ferns and elaborated upon the attire of each debutante and female guest: "Miss Marjorie Mook, exquisitely gowned in pink tulle over

pink chiffon with a bodice of pink panne velvet, trimmed in pearls and silver beads...Miss Sadye Goldsmith, charmingly gowned in rose colored Georgette satin embroidered in opalescent beads, the girdle caught with a bow of apple green satin and wearing diamonds. Escort, Mr. Marcus Benham...Mrs. Sidney Felsenthal of Jackson, Tennessee, wearing French blue taffeta with panniers trimmed with silver paillettes and pink rosebuds, with a corsage cluster of pink roses, wearing diamond ornaments..."

Equally flowery were the words of Memphis poet Max Boshwitz (an early Boshwit), which appeared on the program of a subsequent debutante ball:

*"You sweet buds like springtime's roses, beauty bright
Blushing 'mid the tender poses, in the light.
'Tis your first, where Cupid prances
On the field of golden chances, day and night."*

The duration of the Rex Club in its elegant surroundings proved to be brief. The reasons are not clear. Perhaps the Rex and YMHA had overreached themselves. Perhaps the emphasis on social events shifted with the advent of World War I. By 1917-18, the elegant building was mostly given over to the Red Cross for its headquarters and sewing rooms.

In 1920 the YMHA, although it counted over 400 members, became defunct. The Rex Club, however, continued in another location, the Gayoso Hotel, which was owned by Goldsmith's Department Store, where it rented a lower floor on Front Street. Jack Goldsmith, now living in Florida, has recollections suggesting that the Purim Ball was a major event. Once, Goldsmith's store built a large cage for the Purim party and Jack and a friend occupied it dressed as wild animals.

Polly Cooper describes the Rex Club as a Reform club, popular when it was "beyond the Pale" to socialize with the Orthodox. She recalls weddings at the Dunlap and Madison location, including that of a relative, Marie Schloss, who married when Polly was four years old. Helen Dinkelspiel recalls there being a "natatorium" at the club where at age ten she taught herself to swim. Charles Wurtzburger's mother, Dolly, had her debut at the Rex. Charles thinks of it as a "good time club."

Ralph Levy remembers the Rex Club of the 1930s, when,

as a teenager, he went to dances there, notably Christmas dances, along with his buddy Arthur Katz, Jr., the two of them guarding a private "girls' book," listing on file cards the names of girls with their personal comments on each. The men, he said, played poker, gin, and "High, Low, Jack, and the Game," also known as "Pitch." What went on at the Rex Club, according to Ralph, was "everything that was involved in Reform Jewish social life."

Probably as early as 1915, a group had met to organize a Jewish country club. In the spring of 1919, this was a project undertaken by some Rex Club members who, perhaps, had grown tired of waiting to play at the Overton Park Municipal links. Especially eager for the golf links were Charles Haase, president in 1919, Leo Goodman, Elias Gates, Milton Binswanger, Saul Isenberg, Abe Goodman, Joe Hattendorf, Nathan Weldman, Ike Gronauer, Abe Frank, and Courtney Lewis. After searching around the city they formed the Ridgeway Land Company and purchased 155 acres of land at 5854 Poplar for \$25,000.

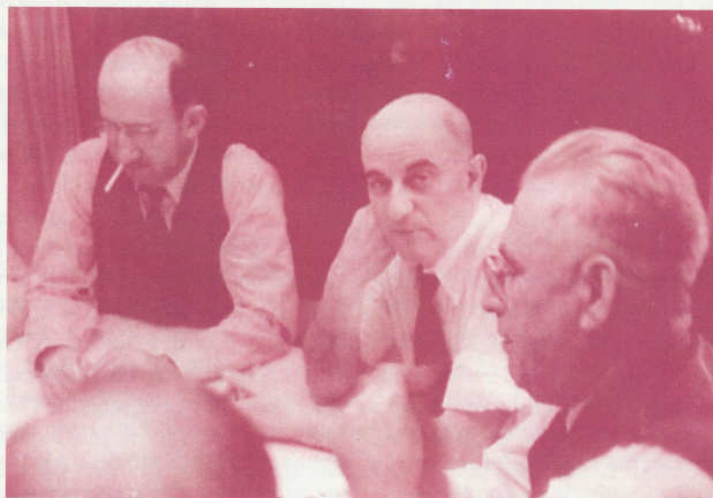
In 1920 "it was a golf layout...if you could avoid the snakes and the brambles." A nine hole golf course, two tennis courts, and a clubhouse were constructed.

The first clubhouse was a one-room shack thrown together through subscriptions from members; a year later it was expanded. The Rex Club officially took over the Ridgeway Land Company, and on August 21, 1921, the name changed to Rex Ridgeway.

In 1925 a large clubhouse was built, an additional 50 acres were bought to accommodate the expansion of the golf course, and by the 1930s a pool had been added.

Meanwhile, the original Rex Club-YMHA building remained vacant until 1933, when the University of Tennessee Medical Units, having assumed ownership, converted it into a university and student alumni center.

Although there is some conflicting information regarding the history of Rex-Ridgeway, according to Ridgeway's current manager, Joseph Moore, the corporation name changed to Ridgeway Country Club on December 27, 1944. The club, which celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1961, is the third oldest country club in Memphis, after Colonial and Memphis Country Clubs. In 1970 Ridgeway paid more than \$500,000



Milton Sherman, Syd Lerner, and Babs Jacobs playing cards at Rex-Ridgeway, 1941 (Photo courtesy of Charles Wurtzburger)

Please see REX CLUB, page 6



The old Ridgeway Country Club clubhouse, built in 1925 at 5854 Poplar Avenue

REX CLUB, *continued from page 5*

for property farther east on Poplar near Houston Levee Road, the site of its present facility. The grand opening took place in 1972.

A year later, in 1973, Dr. Joe Johnson, Chancellor of the UT Medical Units, and Ed Stahl, superintendent of buildings and grounds, were among eight individuals who excavated and opened the 1910 Rex-YMHA cornerstone before the once-proud building was demolished and replaced with a new general education and science building.

The following account of the opening of the cornerstone appeared in the *Commercial Appeal*: "In the tightly sealed metal box chipped from the stone was an introduction to 1910, when William H. Taft was president of the United States and Edward H. Crump was mayor of Memphis. A 1910 copy of the *Commercial Appeal* featured an article telling of Crump's preparing to rid Memphis of crime, a cartoon depicting the GOP in the White House captioned 'Let us have peace,' and an item about a women's organization in the country preparing to crusade against high food prices."

Other items in the box were contemporary coins and stamps, including a Red Cross Christmas seal of 1909, one of the earliest Christmas seals. Also enclosed was a paid bank note for \$1000, donated by Jacob Goldsmith and placed in the cornerstone in honor of his generosity. A number of these items may be seen today at the Temple Israel Archives.

The dances and social life of a country club have lived on, but over the years, social mores gradually have changed. There is now a Jewish presence in a wide variety of social events in the Memphis community. Today's Ridgeway has no restrictions of race or religion, as written in the bylaws of 1977, although its membership selection is "a private process." The Memphis Jewish Community Center also is open to all, and has served to unify the Jewish community, bringing together members of all congregations for athletic, cultural, and social activities. Even so, despite its transitions and transformations, the spirit of the old Rex Club continues to exist—in faded newspaper clippings, cherished photographs, and happy memories. ☆

YMHA, *continued from page 7*

After the fire, the structure was rebuilt, and a third floor, which could be used for dances and entertainments by the YMHA, was added. The second floor was also designed to conform to the use of the organization, and it remained at that location until 1897, when it moved again, this time to the corner of Second and Adams.

Before long, a number of YMHA enthusiasts looked toward the building of a home of their own, a place that would prove a rendezvous for every Jewish organization in Memphis, as well as for the Jewish population, young and old, of the city and for visitors to Memphis. This place would become the YMHA-Rex Club building, dedicated in 1910, at the corner of Madison and Dunlap.

In its heyday, the YMHA sponsored lectures, the first general concert of the Beethoven Club, a city soccer league, annual Purim Balls, gym classes, an 1891 meeting to consider paving streets, an 1889 free lecture for women on "Female Beauty: How Preserved and Why Lost," and for men, "How to Select a Wife," and an 1886 moonlight picnic by invitation only at Lakeview, with a band for dancing and rowing on the lake for "the cream of Jewish society." After moving into its new quarters, however, the Memphis YMHA lasted only ten more years. In 1920, although it counted more than 400 members, the local organization became defunct. ☆

YMHA Formed for Social, Moral, and Literary Improvement of Jewish Youth of Memphis

During the summer of 1881 a private basket picnic was given by several Jewish young men and young ladies of Memphis. It was at this social gathering that the idea of forming an organization for the social, moral, and literary improvement of the Jewish youth of Memphis was first broached. Recognizing that in "union there is strength," and imbued with a desire to foster a spirit of sociability among the Jewish residents of Memphis, several of the gentlemen in the party resolved to undertake the movement.

Among these young men were Hardwig Peres, David Gensberger, Edward E. Becker, Jake Sternberg, Max Boshwitz, Louis Rosenthal, and Sam Mook. A few days later an impromptu gathering took place, and Dave Gensberger was elected as the first president of the Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA) of Memphis. (The first YMHA organization was set up in 1854 in Baltimore to provide help for Jewish immigrants.)

During its first months the new association did not make much progress. The outlook for continuing the work of the YMHA became so discouraging that during the latter part of 1882 several of the young men interested in the movement brought the funds of the association to Rabbi Max Samfield. After telling him of their efforts to keep the organization alive and of their failure to arouse enough interest in doing so, they said they had decided to disband and asked him to give the money from their treasury, a total of \$30, to some charity. Dr. Samfield declined the money and encouraged the men to make some energetic efforts, and they finally succeeded in enlisting a large membership.

For a few months, meetings were held in the Sunday School rooms of the Temple, at that time called "Children of Israel," located at the corner of Main and Exchange. A series of other meeting places followed: in the Mozart Hall, in the Mendelssohn Hall, and over E. Witzmann & Company's music house. During the last part of 1882 and most of 1883, the association occupied the top floor of what was then known as the Cole building, at the southwest corner of Second and Union.

However, during 1883, this structure caught fire from an adjoining building, the Greenlaw Opera House, and was reduced to ashes. All the records, along with furniture, carpets, scenery, etc. were destroyed and not protected by insurance. Through the efforts of Dr. Samfield and a few other members, the piano and a few pieces of furniture were saved.

Please see YMHA, page 6

Junior YMHA Organized as Auxiliary for Younger Members

In October, 1910, the Young Men's Hebrew Association of Memphis adopted a new set of bylaws which included a clause providing for an auxiliary membership to be composed of Jewish young men between the ages of 16 and 21. These young men were to be admitted at a small reduction in the regular membership fee.

The original YMHA organization was for Jewish men who were age 21 and over. For some time there had been a strong desire among the younger Jewish element to lend their aid and services to this organization, but because of a lack of suitable quarters, the association was prevented from accepting these younger men as members. After the YMHA moved into the new building which they shared with the Rex Club, an auxiliary organization became feasible.

As soon as the new bylaws were adopted, a number of young men who were eligible for this auxiliary membership met in the new YMHA building and joined together in a group to be called the Junior YMHA. This new adjunct group, while under the supervision of the original YMHA, was a separate and distinct organization, with its members having all the privileges enjoyed by members of the YMHA, with the exception that they were not allowed to vote or hold office.

The members of the Junior YMHA, however, were permitted to elect their own officers, conduct their own meetings, and in every way have an organization of their own. The first officers of the new auxiliary were: Emanuel M. Levi, president; Julian O. Kern, vice president; Gilbert Levy, secretary; and Leo Wurtzburger, treasurer. Along with the officers, the board of directors included Sidney Lerner, Travers Dreyfuss, Halle Kern, Julian Strauss, Halle Gabay, Irving Bright, and I. Levy. With the assistance of the YMHA, the junior group had dances, debates, minstrels, and a variety of other activities.

Another auxiliary class of membership, composed of young boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 16 and ladies, was accorded the use of the gymnasium, swimming pool, baths, bowling alley, and library at no charge. The only requirement was that young boys under the age of 16 had to be sons or brothers of active YMHA members.

Later officers of the Junior YMHA were Abe Waldauer, president; Joseph Goldstein, vice president; Earl Lehman, secretary/treasurer; and Sig Harpmann, Harry Bernstein, M. Bronstein, I. Cohen, J. Alperin, and Norman Bacharach, directors. Despite what seemed to be a thriving membership, in 1920 the annals of the Junior YMHA came to a close, along with those of the YMHA. ☆

Historical Marker Recognizes Temple Israel as the First Synagogue in Tennessee

The marker reads:

**CONGREGATION B'NAI ISRAEL
(CHILDREN OF ISRAEL)**
First Permanent Jewish House of Worship in
Tennessee

Jews have been part of Tennessee's economic, social, and political life since the early 19th century. Congregation Children of Israel, chartered by the State of Tennessee, March 2, 1854, rented and eventually purchased a building near this site at Main and Exchange Streets. Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, the founder of American Reform Judaism, dedicated the new synagogue on March 26, 1858. Growing rapidly, the congregation moved to larger accommodations on Poplar in 1884. It moved again to the corner of Poplar and Montgomery in 1915, and to East Massey in 1976. Congregation Children of Israel became known as Temple Israel in 1943. The establishment of Congregation Children of Israel in Tennessee affirmed the American principles of freedom of religion and assembly.

Erected by the Shelby County Historical Commission, the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation, and Temple Israel



On the morning of March 2, 2007, the 103rd anniversary of its charter date, a historic marker was dedicated in downtown Memphis officially recognizing Temple Israel as the first Jewish house of worship in Tennessee. The location of the marker is where Temple's first synagogue was located, on the southeast corner of Main and Exchange Streets, directly across from the Cook Convention Center and where the Federal Reserve Bank presently stands. Speaking at the ceremony for the unveiling of the marker were Lee Millar, Chairman of the Shelby County Historical Commission; Jerry Klinger of Washington, D.C., President of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation; Congressman Steve Cohen; and Temple Israel Rabbi Micah Greenstein.

Picture and information courtesy of the Temple Israel Voice.



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