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Compiling the 100 year history of Temple Israel has been a most awesome task. There is the inevitable feeling of inadequacy. We wonder if we have done enough digging. We come across references to documents that can't be located and at the same time we have volumes of material that have to be sorted through for the most interesting and pertinent data. Sylvia Roffman, ~~My~~ co-editor, and I have been truly fascinated and at times overwhelmed by some of ^{records} that ~~material~~ we have been sifting through.

What I would like to share with you today are the findings that we feel are the most amusing. I justified this ~~xxx~~ to myself through the idea that there is nothing less interesting than the recitation of historical facts. But the truth is that Silvia and I have had so many good laughs that we just wanted to share them with you too.

~~But~~ first I must give you a little background. Picture if you will, the Omaha of 1871. Nebr. had been a state for 4 years. Omaha was a flourishing hub of commerce with a population of about 13,000. Indians camped on the perimeter and saloons outnumbered churches 10-1. The pioneers who came to this young community were indeed a hearty adventurous ~~xxx~~ courageous lot.

The first Jewish arrivals came in 1856 and by the late 1860's there were enough Jewish families to begin thinking of establishing a synagogue. Earlier attempts failed, but in 1871 11 men founded the Congregation of Israel, which later came to be known as Temple Israel. This was the first Jewish congregation in Nebraska. ^{*SerVICES*} ~~Meetings~~ were held in homes, storefronts, or halls until our first building was erected in 1884 at 23rd and Harnedy. By Then we had 50 members.

At the time of the dedication of our new buillidig Rev. G. Harfield was our spiritual leader. However 2 months after his arrival his qualities of leadership were strongly questioned. He was accused ^{of} and I quote, " The language used by him from the pulpit is unbecoming a clergyman." Since he refused to resign, he ~~was~~ brought to trial by the congregation. Among those who brought evidence against him was a gentlemen who heard the Rev. say as he left Temple one night, " I wish when B. Newman and his wife retire for the night, they not live to rise in the morning." Needless to say, that was the end of his stormy pulpit.

The next Reverend was a Mr. Benson who would only come to Omaha after we agreed to pay him in advance, give him 30 days annual vacation, and install bookshelves in the library. He had a successfull ministry, although we did come across one choice bit of corresspondence from a member who wrote, "I wish to retain membership in the congregation, however, I have no need for a pew during the present spiritual management." ~~However~~ ^{Harfield} In 1889 ~~he~~ informed the Board that for his families health he would have to move South to ^a warmer climate. Can you imagine our congregations chagrin when six months later they found he had relocated. And He had moved South. All the way to Lincoln.

I am happy to say that our next spiritual leader was our first ordained Rabbi and since then we have had outstanding men who have reach great promincence in Refrom Judaism.

Without a doubt our most colorful history was the first three decades and during this time our ~~most~~ colorful member was Julius Meyers. He and his brothers began trading wtih the Indians. His brothers supplied him with trinkets and

cigars which he exchanged for furs beads and moccassins. These were then sold at their store, The Indian Wigwam. His was indeed a hazardous occupation and once Pawnee Chief Standing Bear saved him from being scalped. The Pawnees became his life long friends and they even gave him an Indian name which translated is "Curly Haired white chief with one tongue. A man with 1 tongue cannot talk with 2 and is therefore trustwory. We have a picture of Julius Meyers with his Indian^{give} friends--he had to pay them six ponies before they would poase with him.

In the late 1890s Julius gave a grand ball which rivals any party we've ever heard of. The dance floor was a giant chess board. The chessmen were the guests who took the place of the ~~K~~ings, queens, knights and pawns. They were then moved as the game proceeded.

One of the sources for our book has been a folio of letters from the early years. Most of our members were from Germany and their script was very ornate and florid. At the same time the language was very formal and stilted to our ears. It was extremely difficult to decipher much of the writing--especially in the beginning ~~xxx~~ until we became accustomed to their style. One evening Silvia had spent many hours reading through a stack of letters and she was indeed becoming bleary. She had two letters that were written on the same letterhead and signed by the same man. The first one she read fairly easily but the second one she simply could not decipher. She's very persistent and she knew if she read one she could certainly read the other. Her frustration mounted as she became more determined. But just then her husband came and ~~started locking~~ *peeked*

over her shoulded. He looked at her with shocked disbelief, and then gently broke the news. The 2nd letter was written in German.

In addition to the letters, a great source of information has been the minutes of the Board meetings. While they are generally quite dry, we did discover a few choice lines. In^{the}/1890s the Board passed a ruling that prohibited anyone from taking vegetables out of the cemetery. We still can't figure out who was cultivating them.

Another line from the minutes had me checking to see if I hadn't gotten the proceedings from a local crime syndicate. When a member of our Congregation died, the Board would send a resolution ~~we~~ expressing their sympathy to the bereaved family. However in 1913 the secretary got a bit confused, and I quote, "The death of George Becker, a member of our congregation is recommended."

These tales of course are only light hearted moments out of a long and proud history of ~~our~~ Temple. ^{Israel} ~~In 1908~~ Our 11 members have grown to over 600. We have had problems-- but even in our early days there was never a question but that our congregation would flourish.

The book we are working on is not only for now-- but we are planning it to be a reference for future generations. For we are sure that they will look on our deeds with the same interest that we look on those of our ancestors.

We have glimpsed in to ^{the} last hundred years. Now we are eagerly awaiting tomorrow.

1-2-71

30 Jews

(1)

First Pres. Myer Hellman

by March \$1000. —

Decided to create acc to principles of
IMW

Burial Society same year. (Bnei Israel Burial Society)

July 1871 — cemetery at 42 + Redick \$300. —
~~later~~ shortly deed to Congregation of Israel.

Rev. Alexander Rosenberg — summer + fall of '71

Apr 16. 1871 1st Conf. (7) + 3 conf as teachers

July 1872 4 confirmed organized a Sunday School. (4 kids)
Rabbi M. L. L. L.

HH serves in 1873 + 4 Rev Hartmann of CB in Myer Muni Hal

Nov. 1873 — articles of incorporation filed

1877 Rabbi Elias Epstein organized a school
(of Milwaukee)

1889 affiliated w UAMC

March 1878 Rev. David Stern (few months) 20 families
couldn't afford him.

Next 3 yrs = laymen + on 14th Lincoln Bloom an attorney.

Feb. 1879 purchased 23rd + Harvey (\$1400.)
Temple built 1884.

HH 1883 Rev H. Saff then engaged

Served less than 1 yr. Factions

(2)

1884 New Temple 45 families 60 kids in R.S.
Sept 18 seated 300

Dedication: Rev Alexander Coengitz (who had served in 1871)
+ " George E. Harfield - new rabbi
200 people there.

Choir directed by Julius Meyer

Harfield from London engaged Sept 1884 28 years old,
\$125 per month!

Have lessons in French + German — 8 months German

First Bat mitzvah spring 1885 Joseph Oberfelder
son of Isaac " , pres of congr.

Re-elected Harfield in March 1885

but layoff in Syn School &
pulpit entering a clergyman

he was asked to resign.

Refused. Trial. Ordered not to officiate

3 kids said he stopped them.

Rabbi N I Benson Sept 1885 \$1500 per year
(4 years)

had his Sewing Society (just organized Ten
women's charity in Omaha.)

(5)

June 9 1886 1st Conf. in new Temple
10 kids.

1886 - 100 members.

1887 bldg enlarged

Benson travelled. Sun aft lectures

Benson resigned 1889 after new constitution
male workshops accepted 10/10/89
Went to Lincoln

1889 Wm Brennan 1st HOC grad.
— 1892

Sept 1 1892 Geo Franklin
admitted VPB

1899 resigned to Detroit.

April 28 1899 Abram Hunsay
Sark organized.

March 1904 Fred Cohen
new Temple Park & Tack. 1908

Daniel Wice 1933 — 41

Art helgnesd — 41 44

Lou Selkman — 44 — 52

SAB 1952 —