

# JEWISH DELAWARE

## *History, Sites, Communal Services*



HISTORY AND SITES

Bernard Postal

Lionel Koppman

RESEARCH, EDITING AND LAYOUT

Rabbi David Geffen Ph.D.

COMMUNAL SERVICES

Paula Lehrer

Ellen Meyer

Jacob Solis' children were Esther Etting, 1815; Judith Simiah, 1817 and Solomon, 1819. Daniel's daughter was Benevenida Valentina, born in 1815.

No other Jew is known to have lived in Delaware until the 1840s when Henry B. Nones, son of Benjamin Nones, the Revolutionary War patriot of Philadelphia, took up residence there in 1843. The younger Nones was a Revenue Naval officer who commanded a cutter based in Wilmington for many years. His commissions were signed by Presidents Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren and Abraham Lincoln. Nones, who was cited for bravery during the Mexican War, also served in the Civil War. When he married he probably converted to Christianity since he, his wife and their four children are buried in the Christian Wilmington and Brandywine Cemetery beneath a tombstone on which there is a cross.

In 1855 Moses Stern was in business in Milford and Henry Lieberman in Dover. Joseph Row opened a clothing store in Wilmington in 1853 and Nathan Lieberman did the same in 1862. The latter, together with Jacob deWolf and Henry Buxbaum, two other clothing dealers, appear to have been the prime movers in the first attempt to found a synagogue in Wilmington in 1872. Its founders planned to call it "Roudof Shalom" and its chief function, apart from conducting worship services, was to have been to acquire ground for a Jewish cemetery. The synagogue never actually came into being but the first Jewish worship services in Wilmington were held for the High Holy Days in 1873. During the 1870s there were worship services for the High Holidays in makeshift quarters in the Morrow Building, 211 Market St., the Lieberman Building, 5th and Market Sts., and on Shipley St., between 3rd and 4th Streets. In 1875 a Rabbi Hertzberg was brought from Philadelphia to officiate. In that year a Wilmington newspaper reported that there are "in this city twenty families of Jewish persuasion aggregating about 100 persons."

In 1879 a reporter for the Wilmington Every Evening described the Yom Kippur service in the Morrow building. He said there were 30 persons present, including four or five women and a dozen children. "All the men kept their hats on," the reporter wrote, "most of them wearing neatly brushed and glossy head coverings of the stovepipe variety. Rev. Julius Weil of Philadelphia officiated." The service was conducted in German and Hebrew.

The day after this service, September 28, 1879, the Moses Montefiore Beneficial Society was founded in Nathan Lieberman's home. Incorporated in 1883, the first Jewish organization in Delaware, it is still in existence. It was established "to succor needy brethren," "to accumulate a fund for the payment of sick benefits" and "to aid indigent and unfortunate brethren who may be cast

ashore, so to speak in this city." The organizer was Bernard Rosenblatt, a hairdresser, about whom little else is known.

Some months later, on March 19, 1880, a synagogue was dedicated on the third floor of the Lieberman Building. A Rabbi A. Rosenberg, who doubled as shochet, conducted the service for this first congregation in Delaware, which was named Ohabe Shalom. The rabbi's sermon, delivered in German, was summarized the next day in a front page story in the "Every Evening." The reporter described the service fully, noting that 40 persons were present, "the number being restricted to those to whom cards of invitation had been issued. Isaac Isaacs, the oldest Wilmington Israelite, carried the thara (sic!) containing the sacred five books of Moses." The reporter concluded by saying that "an uncircumcised newspaperman then turned off the gas jets and the congregation dispersed."

George Jacobs was the first president of this congregation, which was listed in the Wilmington City Directory until 1883, with Rabbi Morris Faber mentioned as spiritual leader.

Cong. Adas Kodesch, the first enduring congregation, was founded in 1885, and its synagogue was dedicated by the celebrated Rabbi Sabato Morais of Philadelphia.

In 1898 the Wilmington Lodge of B'nai B'rith was organized by Moses Weil, a Civil War veteran from Ohio, who was elected Delaware state commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, the organization of Union Civil War veterans. Nathan Levy, also a Civil War veteran from Michigan, arrived in Wilmington about the same time that Weil turned up. Both were German Jews but the bulk of the newcomers to Wilmington at the turn of the century were East European Jews. In 1900 Delaware's Jewish population was 1200.

Before the 19th century ended, a Reform congregation, called Oheb Shalom, had been established in Wilmington, but endured only from 1895 until 1898, the year Cong. Adas Kodesch acquired the old Zion Lutheran Church and converted it into the first synagogue building in the state. The Reform group, however, maintained a tie with Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf of Philadelphia's Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel by having him officiate at their children's weddings. Cong. Beth Emeth, the first permanent Reform congregation in Wilmington was organized in 1906.

Rabbi Geffen has pointed out that while most of Delaware's Jews are located in Wilmington, Dover Jewry has a history going back more than 110 years. Boyd's Delaware Directory of 1865-66 lists Henry Levy, general merchant, and Henry Lieberman, owner of a general store. The latter's brother, Nathan,