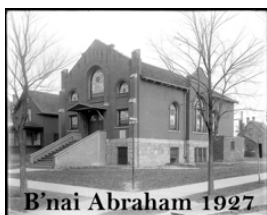




The B'nai Abraham Synagogue in Virginia, Minnesota is a story of loss and reuse. Built in 1909-10, it was the last remaining active synagogue on the Iron Range until its congregation dwindled to a handful of members who could no longer maintain the handsome brick structure. It closed its doors in the mid-1990s. It was acquired in 2005 by a not-for-profit organization, the, **Friends of B'nai Abraham**, who raised funds, and continue to do so, for the building's restoration and reuse in order to serve as a cultural center for all the citizens of Virginia, Minnesota and surrounding areas, and to preserve the history of its Jewish community, of which it was so much a part.



Together with our partner, The Virginia Area Historical Society (VAHS), we look forward to seeing this lovely building used for many cultural and educational programs for the community.

- The B'nai Abraham Museum & Cultural Center is located at 328 5th Street South at the corner of 4th Avenue & 5th Street South.
- For updated information visit the B'nai Abraham website: www.ironrangejewishheritage.org

PRESERVING THE PAST: ENDOWING THE FUTURE

By Marilyn J. Chiat, Ph.D.

CHAPTER ONE: MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Just over a decade ago, a group of people with connections to Minnesota's Iron Range, had a dream that became a mission, to restore and find an appropriate reuse for the beautiful historic but sadly neglected B'nai Abraham synagogue in Virginia, MN. To dream is to fail to confront reality and the reality was that while the building was structurally sound it would require a great deal of money to restore it so it could meet reuse standards. Undeterred by reality and refusing to simply dream, this intrepid group formed a not-for-profit organization, the Friends of B'nai Abraham, and the rest, as you faithful readers of our newsletters and website know, is history. Thanks to funders both large, like Legacy grants from the Minnesota State Legislature, and small, contributions from supporters, the mission to restore the synagogue is near completion [see what is left to do elsewhere in newsletter]. What is most fulfilling is seeing the building have a second life. Beautifully restored, the B'nai Abraham Museum and Cultural Center stands as a living monument to the Range's vibrant Jewish community, and its historic displays tell the story of that community.



Prior to a complete restoration, B'nai Abraham has been host to a variety of programs including music, lectures, and Sabbath services. Thousands of people, many of whom had never entered a synagogue before, have passed through its doors where they were able to see an *Aron ha Kodesh*, (the large cabinet that traditionally houses the sacred Torah Scrolls) with a *ner tamid* (perpetual light) hanging above it, beautiful stained glass windows adorned with Jewish symbols like Noah's Ark and the names of the window's donors, memorial plaques, and a variety of historic documents, photographs and artifacts related to the Jewish faith and the history of Range Jewry. The successful restoration of the synagogue has received local and national attention: it is featured in two public television documentaries and is the subject of numerous newspaper articles.

In addition, the methodology employed for B'nai Abraham's restoration is being used in the restoration of other historic religious properties. The dream that became a mission has been realized, but that is not the end of the B'nai Abraham story. As we close this chapter we open another one where the focus is on the future of the building. Once again a dream must become a mission so it can then become a reality. The mission this time is that the building will be maintained in perpetuity so it will continue to enjoy its successful second life as a museum and cultural center. The only way this mission will be successful is if an endowment fund is established that will cover costs for maintaining the building. It is in making this mission a reality that we once again call upon our faithful readers and contributors for help.

THE NEXT CHAPTER

This newsletter introduces our supporters to our plans for the next chapter in the life of this historic structure. A chapter we are hoping that will be followed by many more as we prepare to inaugurate an effort to raise endowment funds to secure the building's future. Further details of this mission will be forthcoming in the coming months. At this time, this is a "mission in progress," and we welcome our supporters' suggestions and comments as to how to make it, too, a success.

We are pleased to announce that we are kicking off our effort on a very positive note thanks to a very generous donation of \$25,000 from the estate of Kenneth Simon. Mr. Simon was the son of Gus and Jeanette Abrahamson Simon, early Virginia settlers. Gus with his partner Dave Schibel were proprietors of a men's wear shop, The Palace Clothing Company located at 303-305 Chestnut. Later Mr. Simon opened a fashionable women's store, The Smart Shop, also located on Chestnut Avenue, where even today one can see the names of Jewish merchants emblazoned on buildings' facades. Kenneth, one of four children, went to Virginia Junior College before joining the Navy where he served heroically during World War II. Following the war he went on to attend the University of Minnesota graduating with a degree in engineering. Following his marriage to Beatrice Feurestein, the family moved to Los Angeles where Kenneth had a very successful career as an engineer. Although Kenneth left Virginia, he continued to take pride in his family's history in the city. It was his desire that their story not be forgotten, as well as the stories of other Jewish families, who upon settling in a once remote area of Minnesota were still able to maintain and pass on their Jewish heritage to another generation. The endowment fund Kenneth Simon inaugurated, and that we hope you will support, is dedicated to seeing that his desire and our mission become a reality.

Board of Directors of the Friends of B'nai Abraham

Marjorie Ostrov, *President*
Ann Shanedling Phillips, *Vice President of Administration*
Charles Ostrov, MD, *Treasurer*
Dianne Siegel, *Secretary*
Alan Milavetz, *Legal Counsel*

Michael Blehert, *Engineering Consultant*
Marilyn Chiat, PhD, *Architectural Historian*
Leighton Siegel, MD, *Webmaster/Editor*
Larry Chiat, *Legal Counsel*
Judy Karon

Elayne Deutsch Chiat
Audra Keller
James Rubenstein
Jo Doig

From the B'nai Abraham Archives
A history of Virginia's Range Hebrew Cemetery
By Audra Keller



Originally, the Iron Range Jews had no cemetery of their own; they were all buried in either Duluth, MN. or Superior, WI. and funerals were mostly scheduled towards the end of the day. After one such funeral, which ended in the dark, Simon Bourgin's brother Dave, along with some other similar minded friends decided that Virginia's Jewish community needed it's own cemetery.

They went to the city, which owned the cemetery and received a plot of land and had a Rabbi come to consecrate it. However, no one wanted to be the first to be buried there. People were still being buried in Duluth and Superior even though they had bought cemetery plots in the then empty Jewish section of the Virginia Cemetery.

Nate Keller, a successful insurance man, and a friend of Dave Bourgin, said to him " Look Dave, I know when I die I'm going to have one of the biggest funerals this town has ever seen and I'll be buried in the cemetery."

Not too long after that, Nate was killed in an auto accident in July 1960 and the funeral, because of it's size, was held in the National Guard Armory and Nate Keller was the first person buried in the Jewish Section of the Virginia Cemetery.

After that, other Jewish people decided to be buried there and now with an almost non-existent Jewish community the cemetery is quite full. Along with other portions of the Virginia Cemetery, the Range Hebrew Cemetery is maintained by the City of Virginia.

A number of Jewish War veterans from the Range are buried in this Jewish cemetery. They include: Lewis Deutsch, Sid Blumberg, Nate Keller, Harold Joffe, Louis Roth, Daniel Milavetz, David Sher, Manuel Finkelstein, Samuel Cohen, Harry Rubenstein, Dick Blumberg, Morris Greenberg, H. Siegel, Myron Marks, Lewis Stone, Ed Cohn, Ben Stein, Irving Frisch, David Oxman, Richard Levant and Maurice Levant.

*Written by Audra Keller, using information from the **Jewish Times**, Simons, Howard, 1988*

Construction Report Fall 2016: by Michael Blehert

Last spring, the Newsletter reported that the front entrance was completed. This highly visible change included installing front step wrought iron railings, brick and cast concrete newel posts and staining and sealing the front entrance hardwood floor. The work this fall has dealt with the less glamorous but much needed exterior of the building. Specifically, the lower portion of the 100 plus year old brick mortar was ground out and replaced and rainwater drainage was improved.

Tuck-pointing of select areas of the building has been done every year of the restoration project. In some areas, cracks and loose bricks cried out for immediate attention, but other areas that look good sometimes have only a skin of firm mortar, with disintegrated dust like mortar behind the skin. This season, the area below the Sandstone facia (about 10 ft off the ground) was tuck-pointed. There were many large openings around the lower windows and the Sandstone facia. Next season, areas around the east and west side multi pane windows will be tackled.

There have been rainwater drainage issues for years because it has been difficult to maintain the downspout extensions that direct water away from the building. The sump system works overtime to keep up when the extensions are bent by kids or become compromised in some other fashion. So, this fall, permanent custom cast concrete spill troughs were positioned under the vertical downspouts to direct water away from the building.

We're looking forward to the winter indoor construction season. If funds are sufficient, the trim on the three balcony windows will be completed. The center Mesberg window is the largest in the building and trim will reduce leakage from the north wind and improve support around the entire window perimeter.

Past Summer Performances in 2016 (A retrospect) ***At the B'nai Abraham's Museum and Cultural Center***



Sunday, June 26, 2016: An evening with Alan Phillips featuring Brent Saari, Alan on the guitar and Brent on the keyboard, played Golden Oldies, Beatles and contemporary music.

Saturday, July 16, 2016: Northern Lights Music Festival under the direction of Veda Zuponic, founder of the program, combines award winning student and internationally known performers and teachers presented a classical music program.

Saturday, July 30, 2016: Sam Miltich and the Clearwater Hot Club featuring Charmin Michelle presented a program featuring music from Adelainde Hall, a jazz singer from the 1930's and 1940's.

Saturday, August 20, 2016: Our Finnish Festival featuring Kanteleen Soittajat and Jarvenpaa Singers played the kantele, an ancient Finnish instrument and sang in the Finnish language.

In addition to the above, we hosted A Spring Recital of high school students of Holly Weir and Sheila Wilcox in May and the local version of Antique Road Show with Dan Sershon and Denny Mager on Sept. 3rd.

Once a year, Rabbi David Steinberg, from Temple Israel in Duluth, has led a Shabbat service at B'nai Abraham. This year Cantor Leah Frey Rabine joined him. The service took place in July.

The Virginia Area Historical Society with the Friends of B'nai Abraham presented an exhibit of ARCHITECTURE OF REGIONAL HOUSES OF WORSHIP

Special Bequest from Kenneth Simon's Estate

Harlan Simon and his wife Mary traveled to Virginia along with their family in July to make a presentation of the \$25,000 bequest from Harlan's father, Kenneth Simon.



Harlan Simon and his wife, Mary

Individual Contributions: April 30, 2016 – November 1, 2016

Alan Apter	Connie and Paul Ross
Nancy and Rick Hauser	Robert Shay
Merton Horne	Dianne and Leighton Siegel
Barb Knoop	Anita Lurye Silver
Joey and Jerry Laurie	Carolyn Sunquist
Barb Levie Charitable Fund	Ben Yokel
Lauren Nelson and Mary Ann Vukich	Kathy and Howard Zack
Margie and Charlie Ostrov	

Special Contributions: April 21, 2016 – November 1, 2016

Lenore Bear: In memory of Harry Bear; Marilyn Chiat: Wishing a speedy recovery to Bruce Waller;
Jo Doig: In honor of Sandy Scherling's 75th Birthday; In honor of Marty Barke's Birthday;
Peter Friedlieb: In memory of Osker and Connie Friedlieb;
Barbara Fryer: Thank you to Audra Keller for her incredible hospitality;
Anita Geller: In honor of Dianne Siegel's 75th Birthday;
Renate Hiller: In honor of Jo Doig's birthday;
Audra Keller and Frank Claymon: In memory of Betty Greenstein;
Gene Kishel: In memory of Paul Ostrov and Karl Kaufman;
Cal Lewis: In memory of my friend, Ed Paster;
Betty Sue and David Lipschultz: In honor of Dianne and Leighton Siegel's 50th Anniversary;
Margie and Charlie Ostrov: In memory of Gene White;
Ann and Felix Phillips: In memory of Stewart Segal: Wishing Carol Garrison best wishes for good health;
Wendy and Wayne Salita: In honor of Dianne and Leighton Siegel's 50th Anniversary;
Mimi Sanders: Best wishes to Ann and Felix Phillips in their new home;
Berta Shapiro: Wishing Marilyn Chait a speedy recovery;
Dianne and Leighton Siegel: In memory of Gene White; In honor of Sam Siegel's 90th Birthday;
Vicki and Lloyd Stern: In honor of Dianne Siegel's 75th Birthday;
Sharron Steinfeldt: In memory of Sylvia Segal;.

If we have inadvertently missed your name on the Contributors list, please let us know so that you can be included in our next newsletter.

Endowment Fund Creation – help us preserve B’nai Abraham

Now that the building’s restoration is nearing completion, **The Friends of B’nai Abraham would like to create an Endowment Fund** that will make certain B’nai Abraham can be well maintained long into the future. We have spoken to staff at several experienced community funds who have expressed an interest in being the repository for such an endowment and work with the Friends to assure that these dollars continue to be used to meet the goal of providing a community resource and ensuring that the contribution of the Jews of the Iron Range will not be forgotten.

To quote our Board member, Dr. Marilyn Chiat: B’nai Abraham represents our nation's great religious, cultural and ethnic diversity. When historic buildings such as B’nai Abraham are lost, our nation's magnificent mosaic (to quote Hubert H. Humphrey) loses some of its brilliant color.

This building in particular, the only extant synagogue left on the Range, and the only synagogue building in Minnesota to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, provides people with a window into understanding

the history of the Range and the people who contributed so much to its unique character.

If you have suggestions or may wish to make such a contribution, please contact Charlie Ostrov at:

costrov@gmail.com

We need everyone to participate and help.



Ensure the preservation of this wonderful building.

WISH LIST - YOUR HELP IS GREATLY NEEDED TO COMPLETE:

Trimming the three windows in the balcony (\$2,400) as well as finishing tuck-pointing to close leaks and secure bricks (\$10,000). This will protect the beautifully restored building from harsh winters. The balcony floor needs to be sanded and refinished (\$2,000).

We welcome much needed contributions to the Endowment fund.

We are still short of our goal.		All donations are fully tax deductible.	
Please send your donation to: Friends of B’nai Abraham c/o Charles Ostrov, treasurer 1788 Maryland Ave. North Golden Valley, MN 55427 <input type="checkbox"/> Endowment: <input type="checkbox"/> Restoration: <input type="checkbox"/> Both:		Name: _____ Address: _____ City, State, Zip: _____ Amount: _____ To contribute stock -or- appreciated securities, contact: Jackie or Daryl at Morgan Stanley 800-791-8360 -or- costrov@gmail.com	
<input type="checkbox"/> Memory of: <input type="checkbox"/> Honor of: <input type="checkbox"/> Other: Send acknowledgement card to: Name: _____ Address: _____ City, State, Zip: _____			

If you would like to receive emails of our upcoming programs and events or you would like to receive our newsletter by email, please send your email address to Charlie Ostrov at costrov@gmail.com