

*Rodeph Sholom's
History*

The History of Congregation Rodeph Sholom

By Helen Wasserman, Bobbi Markowitz and Carol S. Weinschel

OUR BRIDGEPORT ORIGINS

On June 4, 1836, Bridgeport was incorporated as a city. The former town boundaries were somewhat enlarged, “for while the western line still remained at Division Street or Park Avenue, the eastern line was extended to include East Bridgeport.” Set apart from the mother community of Stratford and changed from the status of “town”, Bridgeport, in 1836, was considered a thriving area for the times. It gave evidence of future prominence as an industrial center, enjoying a central position between New York and Boston. There were dry goods stores and shops, carriage-making and saddlery industries and furniture companies, as well as itinerant peddlers. There was a harbor full of whaleboats and an abundance of shipping activity. The city’s population was approximately 4,000.

THE EARLY JEWISH COMMUNITY

Knowledge of Jews and their activities until the 1850s is surmised. The Bridgeport City Directory listed the names of ten Jewish businessmen. Of prominence were Moses and Bernhard Klein, Jacob Werner, and Pickney Lesser, four of the charter members of Congregation B’nai Israel, founded in 1859.

THE 1600s THROUGH THE 1700s

In 1669, individual Jews peddled and traded with the Indians in towns and seaports along the Connecticut River. Some came, sold, and moved on to other locations; others braved adverse circumstances, remained and settled. Court records show that Jews settled here as early as 1700 but the numbers were unknown. This entire area was known as Stratford, though after 1798 it was divided and part became Bridgeport.

THE 1800s

From the year 1855, growth of the Bridgeport Jewish community was slow, but steady. The ten listed in the Directory of 1855 grew to 33 by 1879. According to Dr. Hamilton Hurd’s *History of Fairfield County* written in 1881, “The Hebrews in this place number only 15 families, or about 75 persons, all of whom belong to the Congregation.” He was referring to Congregation B’nai Israel.

On the basis of these statistics, we may assume that there were 100 Jews in Bridgeport, an insignificant number when the total Jewish population in the U.S. in 1880 was 250,000. While the main concern of the people was, naturally, to make a living for themselves and their families, they established institutions to maintain their identity as Jews. They organized a congregation for worship, started a Sunday school to teach their children religion, and purchased a cemetery for burial according to the rites of Judaism.

THE FORMATION OF CONGREGATION RODEPH SHOLOM

Fifty years after its inception, a schism arose within Congregation B’nai Israel. In 1909, during discussion of a new building, differences arose about the type of worship. Some wanted a strictly reform service; others, the traditional service. It was the latter which broke away to form its own religious organization.

On November 7, 1909, three men, Nathan Schwarz, Samuel Graves, and Nathan Klebansky, sent out notices for a meeting held at Veruna Hall on Court Street to organize a congregation for the purpose of holding religious services according to Orthodox ritual. At that meeting, officers were elected: Nathan Klebansky, President; Nathan Schwarz, Vice-President; Julius Nussenfeld, Treasurer; Joseph Lovenbein, Secretary; and Samuel Graves, J. Lang, and B. Blumberg, Trustees. The name: Rodeph Sholom. Dues were 50 cents a month; donations and voluntary contributions were welcomed. On February 20, 1910, a lease was signed for the hall on Court Street. Rent was set at \$15 for the first year. Membership grew, and on June 5, 1910, the following members accepted and signed the charter of incorporation:

Max Boas	Saul Geduldig	Daniel Platt
Herman Bogin	Samuel Graves	Hirsch Reiback
Alexander Caplan	Herman Haut	Abraham Scherman
S. Caplan	Joseph Lang	Nathan Schwarz
Hyman Cutler	Nathan Levy	Sam Simon
Max Elprin	Joseph Lifshitz	Harry Trager
Marcus Fried	Joseph Lovenbein	B. Weisberg

THE FIRST YEARS

One of the first acts of this group was to provide for burial grounds. On July 31, 1910, the plot of land in Fairfield adjoining the Eintracht Cemetery was purchased: "\$150 cash and \$400 to be paid off at \$50 every six months, with five percent interest." The dedication ceremony took place in October of 1911.

The first chazzan was hired, along with three singers at \$150 for the High Holy Days. Mr. Ira Hirshick was hired as a reader for the morning services. It is interesting to note that although the desire was expressed for a Talmud Torah, the suggestion was vetoed for fear the landlord would object!

In 1911, Nathan Schwarz became president upon the illness of Mr. Klebansky. The year 1913 was highlighted by the first fundraising event of the Congregation—a successful Whist party, the forerunner to Bridge... with net proceeds of \$33.65.

Mr. Schwarz continued until 1926. The records during these early years reveal faithful attendance at meetings, Shabbat worship and holidays. The future looked bright. No longer was it necessary for the president and treasurer to advance the funds necessary for the continuance of Congregation activities.

1923-1934: GROWTH, MERGER, AND A NEW HOUSE OF WORSHIP



In March of 1923, Mr. Schwarz, at a special meeting of the Congregation, reported that a building at the corner of Iranistan and Maplewood Avenues could be purchased for \$4,000. After a short discussion, a motion was made and carried unanimously to buy the building at the asking price. The dedication ceremony on August 5, 1923 was a huge success. President Schwarz spoke of the

great progress the Congregation had made and said that his untiring work and interest would never cease until we had a "real Synagogue and Hebrew School which we could be proud of."

Based on his outstanding leadership and service since its inception, Nathan Schwarz was unanimously elected Honorary President for life on August 23,

1925. The following officers were named:

Adolph Schwartz, President	A. Scherman, Treasurer
S. Simon, Vice-president	Marcus Fried, Secretary

Trustees:

Nathan Schwarz, A. N. Caplan, and D. Stepensky

Dues in 1925 were \$12 a year, and permanent seats in the Sanctuary were being purchased. In September, a committee was appointed to research the possibilities of starting a Hebrew School. By November, 1929, Rabbi Elihu Rosenblum was engaged to form a Talmud Torah and be the principal. In the following month, the Talmud Torah was opened with an attendance 20 children.

By that time, the \$3,000 second mortgage had been paid and a banquet held in celebration. The newly-elected officers included Dr. Abraham Bernstein, President and Meyer Schwarz, son of the late Nathan Schwarz as Vice-president.

After Rabbi Rosenblum's resignation in March, 1931, the future of the Talmud Torah was in question. However, the end result was to hire Cantor Louis Rosen of New Haven as the Hebrew Teacher/Cantor. The Talmud Torah operated satisfactorily and there were daily morning services. Cantor Rosen formed the first volunteer choir and initiated the practice of guest speakers at the late Friday evening services.

In 1932, Rodeph Sholom and the Emanuel Congregation consolidated. Early in that year, Rabbi Leon Spitz had interested about 60 people in Conservative Judaism, a movement for those who desired traditional Judaism interpreted in terms of modern day life. This small group had been meeting in the old Jewish Community Center on Fairfield Avenue. When the two congregations merged, the Rodeph Sholom Synagogue at Maplewood Avenue was enlarged, and Rabbi Spitz and Cantor Rosen both served the newly combined body. It affiliated with the United Synagogue of America, the parent institution of all Conservative congregations.

On September 25, 1932, the Bridgeport community was invited to an informal reception celebrating the expansion of the Rodeph Sholom Synagogue. The Bridgeport Times Star reported that "The synagogue auditorium seating capacity has been doubled. A beautiful Ark of the Torah has been installed, the altar has been remodeled, and the sanctuary presents an aspect beautiful and reverent in its simple dignity."

1934: NEW LEADERSHIP

The resignation of Rabbi Spitz in May of 1934 was a major turning point in the history of Rodeph Sholom. Many congregants questioned the need for a Rabbi based on the congregation's financial position. While there was a motion to dispense with rabbinical services for a year, an opposing motion passed—fortunately. At the June meeting, the vote called for the Congregation to hire a rabbi affiliated with the United Synagogue for one year. At the same time, Cantor Rosen's contract was renewed.

THE RABBI NELSON YEARS



According to the minutes of the August, 1934 meeting, Maurice Resnick, Chairman of the Rabbinical Search Committee, and his committee interviewed a number of applicants. They recommended hiring Rabbi Harry Nelson as spiritual leader for one year, commencing September 1, 1934.

Maurice Resnick, president in 1934, presided over the meeting when Rabbi Nelson presented his first monthly report. The Rabbi stated that a Junior Congregation had been formed and was already holding its own Sabbath services; that there were 40 children now attending the Hebrew School and 89 in the Sunday school. Due to the lack of facilities, no more could be accommodated.

On November 11, Rabbi Nelson was officially installed as Rabbi of Rodeph Sholom. Professor Louis Finkelstein, then Professor of Theology and

Registrar of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), was the principal speaker. Shortly after the installation ceremony, the Congregation received an invitation from Mr. and Mrs. Louis Herman to attend the marriage of their daughter, Ethel, to Rabbi Nelson, on Sunday, December 23, at the Hebrew Institute in New York. A new era, rich in promise, had indeed begun.

1935-1949: THE PRACTICAL MATTERS OF GROWTH

The major project for the year was remodeling the vestry on Maplewood Avenue. In December, 1934, a Chanukah supper was held at Muensterberg Hall, chaired by Mrs. Samuel Silver. Pledges totaled over \$1,300 to remodel the vestry and

the schoolrooms; work began the following June. A loan was obtained after a short-lived hope that the necessary money (\$5,500 at the beginning, \$6,425 by completion) could be raised by voluntary contributions alone. On November 17, 1935, the banquet and dedication of the vestry took place. Both financial and social success were achieved; over 150 people attended and a profit of \$200 was realized. It was not long after this event that a separate Building Fund was established.

Composed of the religious, philanthropic, financial, and welfare organizations of Bridgeport Jewry, the concept of a Jewish Community Council was considered to represent all Jewish groups in the community. It would serve as the central headquarters, to speak with authority for the entire Jewish community. Mr. Resnick was appointed as Rodeph Sholom's spokesman at the initial planning stages and in April, 1936, when the Council was officially established, Mr. Resnick and Vice-President Philip Bernstein were named as the first two delegates from the Synagogue.

Funding was a prime concern and from 1936 on, increasing mention is made in the Congregation minutes of ways and means projects. Bridge and pinochle parties and masquerade balls were but a few of the functions held to support furnishing the Rabbi's study and aiding the Rodeph Sholom Synagogue in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, after the Johnstown flood. There were also intensified efforts to collect indebtedness from the membership.

There was great concern not only with the general finances of the Synagogue but with its professional personnel. With almost 50 children in the Hebrew School and in light of the economic status of the Synagogue, the general feeling was to focus on teaching the young students. After the departure of Cantor Rosen in 1936, the position remained unfilled. The Rabbi was empowered to procure a graduate of Teachers' Institute of the JTS to teach in the Talmud Torah.

In June, 1936, with a membership of 136 and a Hebrew School enrollment of 66, Harry Malin, a student at the Teachers' Institute of the Seminary, was hired. His job: to serve "as a teacher and to assist in the cantor's work, when required, for a period of one year." The outlook was one of progress and optimism. Reports from President Resnick and Rabbi Nelson reflected pride in the Congregation's growth as they referred to the outstanding quality of our Talmud Torah and to "our spiritual influence in city affairs."



By the end of 1937, there were 86 children in the Talmud Torah; the Talmud Torah Committee reported that progress had not only been made by the children but in the increased receipts, as well. By 1938, due to its growth, the Talmud Torah budget was separated from the Congregation's.

"Housekeeping" and maintenance problems continued to absorb the time and efforts of the Congregation, chief among these being perhaps the matter of cemetery care, improvements and enlargement. Servicing Boy Scout Troop #122 of Rodeph Sholom, which was formed in early Spring, 1937; replacing and purchasing basic Synagogue equipment; and adjusting salaries were other issues. In the Fall of 1938, the increase to 102 pupils in the Talmud Torah necessitated a new full-time teacher, and for the first time, the services of a part-time secretary were required.

Important, too, was continued participation in community affairs: active representation on the Jewish Community Council, financial support of the new Jewish Community Center, and, of course, donations of manpower and money to the United Jewish Appeal, which, beginning in 1939, was of major importance. At all times, there was a cordial relationship between Rodeph Sholom, the Reform and Orthodox Congregations.

THE WAR YEARS

In the Spring of 1939, Reverend Hyman Siskind was engaged as the Cantor. He brought a new emphasis on Jewish music to Rodeph Sholom. During the next few years, under the presidencies of Meyer Schwarz, Robert Hirsch, and Paul Bai, an annual yearbook was introduced and a committee was appointed to form a Brotherhood. Rabbi Nelson even spoke of limiting Sunday school to children less than nine years of age.

In his report in 1941, Rabbi Nelson recommended the formation of a committee to consider a new building. Only a year before, there was discussion about accommodating the 140 students who had outgrown the present edifice.

Meanwhile, with World War II underway, war efforts were a vital part of Synagogue life. Air raid warden classes were held in the vestry, war bond rallies were sponsored, and blackout and dimout shades were purchased. Profound concern for the fate of European Jewry and Palestine was obvious. The unanimous decision that Rodeph Sholom has 100% membership in the Zionist Organization of America was critical at the time and a telegram was sent to Washington protesting the "White Paper."

In July of 1942, Rabbi Nelson became a chaplain in the U.S. Army. During the next few years, Rabbis including Gershon B. Chertoff, Murray Alstet and Moshe Cohen, a senior student rabbi, served Rodeph Sholom. As each one was called to active duty, another one took his place until the return of Rabbi Nelson in 1946.



Throughout these war years, with their ensuing hardships, and despite the absence of our rabbi, Congregation efforts to raise money for the proposed new building continued undiminished. This was due largely to the efforts of three men: Philip Bernstein, Philip Friend and Samuel Silver, co-chairmen of the Building Committee. Although in the Army, Rabbi Nelson remained in constant contact; on many occasions, he returned to address meetings and to inspire greater participation and generosity on the part of the congregation.

A NEW HOME FOR RODEPH SHOLOM – PARK AND CAPITOL AVENUES



Through the early meetings and solicitations, \$100,000 was pledged. Under President Morris Bufferd, many sites were considered and rejected; finally on March 23, 1945, the deed for the present site was signed. The Construction Committee, headed by Frank Jacoby, engaged the

services of Jesse James Hamblin; the contract was awarded in the Fall of 1946 to the E. & F. Construction Company for \$326,000. It was not until February, 1947, however, that permission for the construction was granted. Although the war had ended, government building restrictions were still in effect and special approval of the Civilian Production Administration was required. In order to proceed effectively and to coordinate all activities, a Steering Committee was formed in August, 1947, under the chairmanship of Philip Sagarin.

In the Dedication Journal of 1949, the yearbook to commemorate the occasion of the opening of the new Synagogue, the following members were identified with the building program: Benjamin R. Bresler, Samuel Dworken, Alexander

Elson, Dr. Jesse Englander, Herman Friedman, Irwin Friedman, The Honorable Samuel Friedman, Mrs. Philip Friend, Morris Goldman, Nathan Harrison, Abraham Holzer, Nathan Levin, Mrs. Louis Lovins, Arthur Lunin, David Nevins, Mrs. David Nevins, Archie Puzinsky, Irving Rappoport, Sol Rosenzweig, Saul I. Smith, Max Soloff, Dr. Nathan Tolk, and Kurt Vogel.



As Rudolf Vogel inaugurated the historic groundbreaking ceremonies, 1,000 people gathered on Sunday morning, November 30, 1947 and all the affiliated organizations of the Congregation participated. It was the beginning of another vigorous fundraising campaign. A large carnival, several raffles, and a Mardi Gras augmented the treasury of the Building Committee.

On June 6, 1948, the cornerstone was laid, and in September of that year, the first High Holy Day Services were conducted in the social hall (later to be called Friend Hall) of the new building. Although the building was incomplete, those present experienced an indescribable thrill. So great was the enthusiasm of the Congregation that at the Kol Nidrei Service, the membership responded to an appeal with an additional \$52,000.

In keeping with the emphasis Congregation Rodeph Sholom had always placed on the importance of education, the school was moved into its new quarters first—significantly, on Thanksgiving Day, 1948. It was on Shavuot, 1949, that the first services were conducted in our new Sanctuary on the bimah named for Samuel and Sadie Silver.

GROWTH IN OUR NEW SYNAGOGUE

These years had seen a tremendous growth within the Congregation. Not only had the number of members soared, but there had been a correspondingly gratifying increase in the participation of members in Congregation affairs and activities. Educational programs for both young and old had grown quantitatively and qualitatively over the years and became a source of pride to the entire membership.

The decade beginning in 1949 with the occupation of the new building was incredibly memorable. These were the years when Morris Bufferd, Phillip Friend, Philip Bernstein, and Bennett Silver each with great insight, served as presidents with ability and devotion. The Synagogue was refurbished with air conditioning, a new library, and a redecorated social hall.

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THE 1950s

The first of three affairs honoring the spiritual leadership of Rabbi Harry Nelson took place on March 5, 1950, his 15th anniversary. Dr. Simon Greenberg, acting president and provost of the JTS was the guest speaker. Mention was made of the Rabbi's many personal achievements, including his Doctorate of Hebrew Literature.

In 1953, the Ark and Eternal Light in the Chapel and the Rabbi's study were dedicated. The ceremony, held during Shavuot, was an especially moving one, highlighted by a Torah procession to the Chapel and by the placing of the Torah scrolls in the Chapel Ark.

The completion of the Rodeph Sholom Memorial Park was another major milestone in our history. The Park, located on Kings Highway in Fairfield, just over the Bridgeport city line at North Avenue, was purchased in 1953 and dedicated in September of 1954. Its purchase was necessitated by the growing membership and the lack of burial space at the old Eintracht Cemetery. The new Memorial Park was carefully designed and planned to serve as a beautiful and fitting resting place for those whose memories were to be honored.

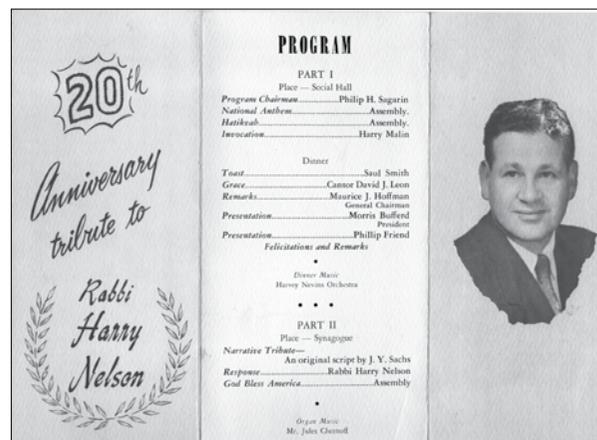
The JTS began to assume a role of increasing importance in the activities of the Congregation. Efforts had been expended to acquaint the membership with the work of the Seminary—its great contribution in spreading the insights and teachings of Judaism. Rabbi Nelson stated that “our effectiveness as a Conservative Congregation depends, to a large extent, on the inspiration and assistance we receive from the Seminary.” In the ensuing years, the goal of the Synagogue was to have every member be a contributor to the Seminary. This goal was accomplished by special programming throughout the years.

By 1955, the Talmud Torah facilities and enrollment forced the Congregation to limit the school to members' children only. Previously, the Congregation

had sought to provide a Jewish education for every Jewish child. Even limiting attendance, a decision made with great reluctance, did not solve the problem of an inadequate number of classrooms. Many families joined so children could attend the school and it became imperative, yet again, that facilities be enlarged to meet the educational goals set by the founding fathers.

In 1955, plans were initiated to build an addition to the still rather new Synagogue. Arthur Lunin, Chairman of the committee, began the process. After months of deliberation, Charles Greco, an acclaimed architect from Boston with experience in building synagogues throughout the country, was hired to draw the plans; Leonard Asheim, the Bridgeport architect, was engaged as General Contractor. The Building Committee was chaired by Maurice Hoffman. His team included Kurt Vogel, Isadore Bauchner, Nathan S. Levin, George Lewin, Harry Resnick, Bennett Silver, and Harry Silverstone.

CELEBRATIONS



On May 22, 1955, Rabbi Nelson's 20th anniversary was celebrated with a Minyan breakfast, Sunday school assembly, and testimonial dinner. In his honor, and under the direction of Jerome Siebert, \$100,000 was pledged. The dinner marked the successful completion of the drive to expand the Talmud Torah.

A few years later, Maurice Hoffman became chairman of the Congregation's 50th Anniversary Celebration Committee. The story of the Talmud Torah addition is graphically recorded in the Dedication Book of December, 1956, a tribute to those who made possible the enlargement of the old kitchen; the addition of a second kitchen; an elevator, choir loft, library, two social halls, and ten new classrooms.

By the end of 1956, Harry Malin had been honored twice for his service to Rodeph Sholom, the first time for his 15th anniversary and the second for his 20th year. Each time, students from the Talmud Torah, Pre-L.T.F. and Junior Congregation were included in the celebrations.

Shortly after the dedication ceremonies for the new building, David J. Leon became the Cantor. On November 21, 1958, the Synagogue celebrated the tenth anniversary of his service with a special Sabbath Eve program and reception. In addition to his duties at Rodeph Sholom and his contributions to musical programs in our community, Cantor Leon had served as secretary of the Cantors' Assembly of America; President of the Cantors' Council of Connecticut; and Chairman of the Connecticut Region of the Cantors' Assembly.



The Golden Jubilee Year ended when the Congregation presented Rabbi Nelson with a life contract and a trip to Israel during a testimonial dinner in the social hall. More than 1,500 well-wishers from the community paid tribute to the Rabbi and his wife. Everyone was aware not only of his services as Rabbi, but also his leadership in the community, including president of the Jewish Community Council, Chairman of the U.J.A., and Chairman of the Mayor's Appeal Board. He was also Secretary of both the Jewish Chaplains' Association and the Rabbinical Assembly of America.

In 1959, the Rodeph Sholom Board and membership voted to establish a relationship with the Fairfield Jewish Community Group. A Steering Committee comprised of members from both groups met and the decision was made to establish Congregation Beth El in Fairfield as another Conservative Congregation.

1960-1974

In 1960, the close relationship between the two Conservative congregations was highlighted by the co-sponsorship of a lecture series on "Jewish Values: Their Impact on Modern Society." A concert by world-renowned Cantor, Moshe Koussevitzky was held. Rabbi Michael Hecht was hired as Assistant Rabbi and the first Arthur Yuridin Memorial Scholarship was awarded to Stuart Kelman, now *Rabbi* Kelman.

The highlights of 1961 included:

- the celebration of the State of Israel's Bar Mitzvah Anniversary
- the opening of Camp Ramah in Nyack, New York
- Harry Malin's 25th year as Educational Director
- the presentation of two new Torah scrolls by the Abraham Aaron and Jules C. Simon families
- a new Institute of Adult Jewish Studies
- a professorship in American Jewish History was established at the JTS in the name of Rabbi Harry Nelson

Rabbi Sheldon J. Weltman succeeded Rabbi Hecht as Assistant Rabbi in September of 1962. Also that year, Rodeph Sholom hosted eminent philosophers through the Institute of Adult Jewish Studies including Professor Abraham J. Heschel, Professor Mordecai M. Kaplan, Dr. Bernard Mandelbaum and Dr. Richard Rubenstein.

In 1963, Rabbi Nelson, on behalf of the Seminary, presented an award to Seymour Hollander for his “dedicated service, unselfish devotion and unstinting contribution to the Seminary.” In June, the first Talmud Torah graduate to be ordained as a Rabbi received his degree at Seminary: Alan H. Lovins.

The death of Rabbi Harry Nelson in October of 1964 brought grief not only to the Synagogue family, but to the entire community, as well. Only 56 when he died, Rabbi Nelson had served Rodeph Sholom for 30 years and had been elected Rabbi for life. A graduate of the University of Chicago, he was ordained as a Rabbi at the Seminary, which awarded him a Master’s and Doctor’s Degrees in Hebrew Literature. His impact on the Congregation was profound, and his passing precipitated a period of difficult transition.

In May, 1965, Rodeph Sholom held a testimonial dinner honoring Rabbi Weltman for his devoted service. The new spiritual leader was Rabbi Sanford Hahn of Mount Kisco, New York, who was installed by Dr. Arzt in December of 1965.

With 1966 came two reasons to celebrate: the 80th Anniversary of the JTS and the 30th Anniversary of Harry Malin as Educational Director. At the event honoring Harry Malin, Rabbi Morton Siegel, Director of the United Synagogue Commission on Jewish Education, acknowledged the Talmud Torah’s national acclaim.

Once again, this time in 1967, Seymour Hollander was honored: he was one of eight leaders in the United States to receive the Seminary’s National Community Service Award presented on its 80th Anniversary. Earlier that year, Philip Sagarin received the Seminary’s annual National Community Service Award.

During March of 1968, at the Jubilee Tribute Day to Sisterhoods affiliated with Conservative Judaism, Seminary President Bernard Mandelbaum presented a Certificate of Participation to Ruth Rubenstein, Sisterhood President. The affair marked the 50th Anniversary of the National Women’s League in the United States. That May, a more personal event took place, with the honoring of three faculty members at the annual Parent-Teachers Organization Sabbath: Mrs. Rose

Abeles for 20 years of dedicated service; and Mr. Moses Nachtman and Mrs. Sarah Karpilow for 15 years’ service. The 25th Anniversary of our Brotherhood took place in January of 1969. Rabbi Gershon B. Chertoff, the Rabbi at the founding of the Brotherhood, was the guest speaker.

The Board of Trustees elected Israel Stein as Rabbi of Rodeph Sholom on August 8, 1973.

It was the end of an era when, after 33 years as Educational Director, Harry Malin resigned to accept the position of Educational Director for the Federated Jewish Schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The farewell reception, honoring him and his wife Pearl, an educator in her own right at Rodeph Sholom, saw the establishment of the “Harry Malin Scholarship Fund”. The income from this fund has assisted Talmud Torah graduates who have pursued advanced Jewish studies. Rabbi Edward H. Feldheim was hired as the new Educational Director and served in this position until 1973.

Other significant milestones occurred in rapid order, with the death in 1971 of Mrs. Ethel Nelson, widow of Rabbi Nelson; the hiring of Cantor Alon Miller of Whittier, California as assistant to Cantor Leon; a special recognition and tribute in May, 1972, for Mr. Morris Bufferd; and, in 1973, the passing of the dean of the Talmud Torah faculty, Moses Nachtman. After eight years, Rabbi Hahn left to accept a position at Rodeph Sholom in Tampa, Florida. Following the resignation of Cantor Miller, Cantor Jacob S. Kleinberg became Cantor Leon’s assistant.

In April, 1973, the Mitchell family presented Rodeph Sholom with a Torah Scroll smuggled out of Poland in 1939. Nearly a decade earlier, Mr. and Mrs. Archie Perry had presented a Torah to the Junior Congregation. Also, in the same year, Louis Sternfield from Richmond, Virginia became the new Education Director.

The Board of Trustees elected Israel C. Stein as Rabbi of the Congregation on August 8, 1973. Due to his prior commitment, he did not take the pulpit until August 1, 1974. Rabbi Stein, a native of Hartford, Connecticut, graduated from Trinity College in Hartford and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. After ordination, he entered the military chaplaincy as Captain. Rabbi Stein was Assistant Rabbi of Congregation Beth El, Rochester, New York for two years and, prior to his arrival in Bridgeport, was Rabbi at the Jewish Center of Bayside, Long Island for six. At the Seminary, Rabbi Stein was an Adjunct Professor in



Homiletics. He is married to the former Roslyn Berkowitz of Hartford and the father of four sons, Jeremy, Rabbi Jay, Eli and Seth. Rabbi and Roz Stein have been blessed with 11 grandchildren.

In the interim between the departure of Rabbi Hahn and the arrival of Rabbi Stein, Rabbi Hyman R. Rabinowitz served the Congregation. During 1974, Cantor Leon was honored for 25 years of service and his son, Rabbi Stephen Leon, was the guest speaker. A reception to welcome Rabbi and Mrs. Israel Stein was held on September 7, 1974, prior to S'lichot Services.

1974-1984

From its inception, Congregation Rodeph Sholom has affirmed its role in the Jewish religious life and secular leadership in the Greater Bridgeport Area. The founders were Jews to the core. They had the vision and the tenacity to maintain their traditions. In the early 1900s, this was no easy task, for they lived amidst a variety of cultures in an alien new world, and they experienced a bewildering procession of changing conditions. Their solace and strength came directly from their faith and determination to build the essential institution that would give expression to that faith.

In the 75 years since the founding of Rodeph Sholom, challenge and change had abounded. In particular, it is essential that we understand the sense of intense loss and flux that preceded this decade. Changes in key personnel were numerous and unsettling:

- Rabbi Harry Nelson's death in 1964 after 30 years' service to Rodeph Sholom;
- The departure in 1969 of Harry Malin after 33 years as Education Director;
- Cantor David Leon's departure in 1975 after 26 years' service.

THE STEIN YEARS

The appointment of Rabbi Stein was in time for the culminating event of the 65th anniversary year. In September of 1974, Rabbi and Roz Stein were officially welcomed at a reception and in March of 1975, there was a banner program. This gala not only celebrated the Synagogue's 65th anniversary but the 25th year in the Sanctuary on Park and Capitol Avenues.

In the six months between these two occasions, the administration of President Charles Zigun, M.D. and the professional leadership of the new Rabbi were already making their mark. Indications of the fresh infusion of energy were the record number of registrations for the second semester adult education program; the first of a six-year tradition of annual Thanksgiving services with Congregation B'nai Israel; and the involvement of the Congregation in response

to the plight of Soviet Jewry. In addition, there were sustained efforts to encourage letters protesting the condition of both Russian and Syrian Jews. This active concern for the fate of Jews world-wide continued to be a major thread in the fabric of Rodeph Sholom's history. Other issues were reflected in sermons and bulletins: the cults, the United Nations, and Israel and the Middle East. During this time, there was a significant growth in Synagogue membership.

Growth, too, was evident in the proud story of our activities on behalf of Israel Bonds. Over the 12 years from 1972 to 1984, Rodeph Sholom had achieved a level of leadership and accomplishment unmatched in the Greater Bridgeport area. A milestone was reached in 1984, when over \$200,000 was raised by our Congregation. On that occasion, in particular, when honoring Sidney Hoffman, the guest speaker was General Yehuda Halevi.

EDUCATION

Education on all levels had blossomed from 1975 to 1985. In the Fall of 1975, one of the most ambitious projects of the adult education program was a forum series entitled "A Festival of Light and Learning."

Among highlights of these programs were issues affecting women, Jews throughout the world, Jewish family, cults, battered women, conversion, Jewish genealogy, the Rosenberg Case, freedom fighters, Israel's sovereignty, the American Jewish family, women in the Rabbinate and Falasha Jews. Among the speakers, Rodeph Sholom welcomed Dr. and Mrs. Abraham Joshua Heschel, Rachel Cowan, Beate Klarsfeld, Arthur Kurzweil, Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, and Belva Plain.

Education has always been important to the Synagogue. Members had been encouraged to participate in area-wide cooperative efforts such as Merkaz and the Institute for Jewish Studies. For the first time, in 1984, the Congregation sponsored, in conjunction with the Federation's Commission on Community Relations, a program of vital importance: Ethiopian Jewry. The Synagogue leadership encouraged involvement in Greater Bridgeport endeavors such as the Energy Bank, the Hunger Program, "Meals on Wheels" and educational as well as humanitarian commitments.

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EDUCATION



A shining example of the new generation of professional educators was Liz Englander, a graduate of our Talmud Torah and Hebrew High School. In 1976, she was hired to create a Nursery School along with Sheila Ment, Sharon Nathman, Roz Stein, Carol Weinschel and Judy Zeidel to name only a few of those on the committee at the time.

This bicultural program opened with totally refurbished and fully equipped indoor and outdoor facilities. Its goal was to create an atmosphere in which the child's physical, mental and emotional growth would be fostered in a living—and loving—American Jewish environment.

A Family Friday Evening Worship Service was instituted in the same year as our new Nursery School: 1976. Designed for families with young children, the service lasted about half an hour and was followed by an informal Oneg Shabbat and a story-telling hour.

Shae J. Kane arrived in 1976, to serve on the staff as Education Director for three years. Following Mr. Kane in 1979 was Mrs. Gilah M. Amitai, a Sabra who had served with the Haganah and was a lieutenant in the Israeli Army during the War of Independence. The philosophy of the educational program could be summed up in her credo: "To teach our students the fundamental values of Torah; to 'tell' them the Jewish story, that is, to teach them our Jewish history and to provide them with a basic knowledge and understanding of the Hebrew language and as a result to cultivate their pride and sense of identity as Jews."

CANTOR Y'SHAYA GRAMA

The dynamic changes that took place in 1976 were capped by the arrival of Y'shaya (Isaiah) M. Grama as Cantor. Cantor Grama, a Helden Tenor, came from a distinguished family of Cantors. His father served a Yemenite Congregation in New York, where our new Chazzan Grama had studied Nussach at the Cantorial Department of Yeshiva University and voice at



New York University. He had served Congregations in Elmont, Long Island and at the United Nations Synagogue.

In the first eight years of Cantor Grama's leadership, the Synagogue saw a choir for seven-through-eleven year olds singing on each Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh and during High Holy Day services; the participation of students in all aspects of the Shabbat service, from P'sukei D'zimra through Adon Olam; the training of the Sheirut group of post-Bar and Bat Mitzvah young adults in Torah reading, High Holy Day ritual, Megillah reading, and a regular discussion of the laws of Siddur and Machzor. In addition, and in keeping with the philosophy that "the best way to learn is to teach," Cantor Grama encouraged a dedicated number of Bar and Bat Mitzvah students to tutor the younger students. He also incorporated a program of music appreciation into the weekday Talmud Torah curriculum, with emphasis not only on traditional music, but on the modern music of Israel as well. He taught music to the Nursery School children, and twice a year joined them as they visited the Jewish Home for the Elderly.

As a true Pied Piper, the youth of the Synagogue were attracted to Cantor Grama and found his love for music and Judaism to be contagious. As yet another way to connect the youth, he took the Sheirut Group on many trips, including Washington, D.C. and New York. His love for traditions was second only to his love of food as was evidenced by adult trips to Borough Park and the Lower East side.

A major enhancement to Jewish education at Rodeph Sholom was attributable to the funds made available primarily from the proceeds of the annual Cantor's Scholarship Concerts. Many students had thus been encouraged to further their Jewish learning experiences through study in Israel, Ramah Camps, U.S.Y. on Wheels and advanced Judaic studies on a college and graduate school level. The concerts came to delight people of all ages as Cantor Grama invited guest performers and Rodeph Sholom talent to join him on the Bimah. As he made his entrance to "Here's Y'shaya" in a different outfit each year, his rendition of Heiveinu Shalom Aleichem will always be remembered.

During the ten years from 1975 to 1985, the Youth Group, under Youth Director Stuart Gordon, had seen many accomplishments. Mr. Gordon worked under the guidance of lay leaders, past and present. There was a full roster of United Synagogue Youth (USY) and Kadima Synagogue Youth programs geared to teens in grades 7-12 and concentrated on social, religious and fund-raising development, and on service both to the Synagogue and the community. The

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quality of these activities earned Rodeph Sholom USY “Best USY chapter in the Connecticut Valley Region” in 1976 and 1983. The Kadima Chapter for seventh and eighth graders had been awarded the Regional Kinnus Katan every year for ten years based on its superior programming. Other highlights included the production of two major musicals, “Grease” and “The Wizard of Oz”—both presented to “full house” audiences in Friend Hall.

In 1982, the format of the Thanksgiving Services changed when Rev. Robert Moffat, Pastor of the Summerfield United Methodist Church in Bridgeport and Protestant Chaplain at St. Vincent’s Medical Center joined Rabbi Stein on the pulpit. A mainstay of this annual Service was Cantor Grama’s singing “One God”. This interfaith effort continues today as one of the best vehicles for outreach into the community and most especially where we all celebrate being Americans.

One of the outstanding events of 1982 was the presentation of the Louis Marshall Memorial Medal of the JTS to Maurice J. and Sidney Hoffman, both past presidents and key leaders in the religious and communal life of Bridgeport. The award was one of the highest honors given by the Seminary.

On April 8, 1984, Rodeph Sholom celebrated the spiritual and personal vibrancy of the congregation: the tribute and appreciation marking Israel Stein’s ten years as Rabbi. In the last year of the 1974-1984 decade, Bridgeport’s Common Council voted to approve the sale of the former Nathan Hale School property on Capitol Avenue to Rodeph Sholom. Rather than use the land for a structure, its location was perfect for a much-needed parking lot.

THE LAST QUARTER CENTURY: 1985-2009

As the years quickly passed, the number of B’nei and B’not Mitzvah grew. More and more notable guest lecturers spoke at our Synagogue. To further our education and enhance our connection to Judaism, there were trips to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., the Heritage Museum, the Lower East Side of New York, as well as the Seminary’s Rare Book Room. In the Greater Bridgeport Community, our Synagogue continued its participation in intergroup and interfaith events, including the African-American and Jewish Bike-a-Thon at Captain’s Cove, Crop Walk, and, in 1999, the dedication of a Habitat for Humanity house. Continuing blood drives, Interfaith Thanksgiving services

and new Law Day Interfaith Services added to the roster of general community activities. Our Social Action Committee remained dedicated to its charge and reflects our commitment to Tikkun Olam.

In the local Jewish community, we initiated synagogue-led missions to Israel and continued our noteworthy “at home” events. Cantor’s Concerts continued to delight audiences of all ages. It is important to the history that we recognize the significance of three different named lectures. The Esther Kelman Lecture, as part of the Forum Series, was established to honor the Executive Director who served tirelessly and faithfully for over three decades. Esther saw firsthand the changes in both professional and lay leadership, always offering guidance, history and wisdom in her quiet, but skilled way. The Harriette Gray Memorial Lecture series is focused on issues critical to women. Through the generosity of the Norman Rappoport Family, a lecture series was named in his memory and continues to be the venue for prominent speakers and critical issues. Most notable guest speakers included Mayor Ed Koch, Anita Hill and Sherri Mandell.

The Festival of Light and Learning, Forum Series and Breakfast Lecture Series, as during earlier years, presented subjects including ethics, death, adolescent issues, anti-Semitism, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, domestic violence, the Jewish gangster in America, the Holocaust, and Soviet Jewry.

The Men’s Club has kept our membership current with local, state and national political issues, including lectures and debates. Over the years, it has fielded an excellent softball team and boasted many trophies.

Peter Zeidel’s presidency, from 1983-1985, was filled with activity including the historic completion of Rabbi Stein’s lifetime contract and the purchase of the property on which the Nathan Hale School sat. The 75th Anniversary Gala was also the last celebration of this type to be held in the original Friend Hall.

Sisterhood underwent a transformation under Co-Presidents Bobbi Markowitz and Carol Weinschel in 1985 when they accepted the challenge of bridging the generations. To accommodate the “now-working women”, they moved meetings to evenings, created a cadre of drivers to pick up the ladies who were no longer comfortable with driving at night, and coined the phrase, “A lot of people doing a little.” This philosophy encouraged busy people to do as little or as much as they could to help.

To enhance the grand architecture of our main sanctuary, they launched a project



to beautify the Bimah during their term. Westport needlepoint artist Marc Bloch was commissioned to create designs depicting the symbols of the Holidays on canvases that would eventually be used as upholstery for the chairs bordering the Aron Hakodesh. Jack Brown of I. Brown Brothers graciously accepted the task of upholstering the chairs. In keeping with the motto, the project took two years to complete, allowing more than 50 Sisterhood members an opportunity to sew as much or as little of each canvas as they could. The cumbersome dowels were transported from home to home, allowing every generation to lovingly

contribute stitches to the everlasting legacy they were creating.

Sisterhood provided gracious hospitality for every speaker, Shabbaton weekend, special event, and Thanksgiving service, as it welcomed, and catered to, the membership and visitors alike. For at least the past two decades, Lenore Sachs and Marion Richer have been the mainstay of hospitality at Rodeph Sholom. No job was ever too large or too small as they gave freely of their time and energy.



At the very beginning of Michael Weinshel's term in 1985, Rabbi Stein signed his lifetime contract. The Synagogue began to undergo transformation, both inside and out. After close to three decades, Friend Hall took on a newly-decorated look, and prepared to be the venue for future gala celebrations. The purchase of white chairs to be used as rental income was yet another addition to the beautification process. It was also during this time that Hirsch Hall, the Cantor's Study, the Main Office and the Men's and Ladies' Rooms were re-done. The upper parking lot on Park Avenue was sold, the Nathan Hale School was demolished and a much-needed parking lot was constructed in its place. Work crews could be seen at any time, except on the holidays and Shabbat.

New High Holy Day prayer books were purchased and two new critical committees were formed: Long Range Planning and Social Action. The goal of this Plan was to look at education, ritual, facilities, finance, cemetery, social action, personnel and leadership to ensure the continuation and prosperity of

Rodeph Sholom. It was at this time that Esther Kelman was honored for her 30 years of service.

Unprecedented appointments were made during Michael's presidency when Simeon J. Bogin, Florence Goldfarb, Tess Kasden and S. Lester Mitchell were given Life Membership on the Board of Trustees. This position was reserved for past presidents only. Not only had this never occurred before, but it has not happened since. Their untiring efforts, dedication, hard work, support and encouragement were the basis for this decision.

Under President Allan Alper, Cantor Grama signed a lifetime contract. The Long-Range Planning Committee worked long and hard to create a 10-year plan for the future of our Synagogue.

Construction and renovation did not stop in the 80s but continued into the early 90s when the hallways, Chapel foyer, Coatroom, stairwells to the Sanctuary and Bridal Loft were beautified. Carpeting in the Sanctuary, the Rabbi's Study and Chapel were also replaced to reflect a change in the times. It was during this time that the Office began to enter the Age of Computers and little by little, simplified its tasks. The Nelson-Stein Campaign was in full swing and the building was re-pointed, thanks to the fundraising efforts of a few. The goal of \$500,000 was reached.

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In 1991, the first woman to be elected president of Rodeph Sholom was Sharon Nathman. Being a nurse served her well in her presidency as this was a time that required healing and Sharon was perfect for this task. One of the major projects undertaken at this time was the creation of the Y'shaya Grama Resource Center. A small, but dedicated committee worked tirelessly to computerize the collection and create a place where people could easily conduct research or locate a book or two to read. An evening that will always be remembered was the one when Theodore Bikel charmed nearly a full Sanctuary with his music and wit. This was a time of change at Rodeph Sholom and with it came a new Executive Director, Myrna Retsky, whose incredible skill of remembering names and making people feel welcome was essential to the growth in membership. She remained in this position until 2000.

It seems as if the years between 1993 and 1995 were a time to celebrate people. During Carol Weinschel's presidency, we celebrated our 85th Anniversary; the Nursery School received accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children; Norma Verrilli was honored for 35 years of service as our organist; Rabbi Stein celebrated his 20th year; we began to recognize birthdays of our members over 75; and we formed the first Adult Bar and Bat Mitzvah class. During that time, enlightening road trips were enjoyed by many. An Evening with Stiller and Meara was yet another gala bringing together people of all ages and filling the Sanctuary. The category of Life Membership was introduced and the number of Sustaining Members increased. Our stained glass windows were featured as a "Windows on Rodeph Sholom" Sunday morning program where Rabbi Stein explained their significance and, once again, we sat in awe of their beauty. One more project that celebrated people was the video interviews of our elders who were able to share their memories of our early history. Among those interviewed were Morris Bufferd, Rose Comen, Adele and Ben Goodman, Cele Jacobson, Sarah Karpilow, Esther Kelman, Arthur Lunin, Ben Rosenbluh, Hannah Schwartz, Bella Weisman and Frances Zabin.

To ensure that those who perished during the Holocaust were remembered on Yom Hashoa, a 24-hour Vigil was instituted, where people read names in our Sanctuary, literally around the clock. Some brought names of their entire families who had died and others read names provided by the Holocaust Museum. This became an annual event and to date, one can be sure that 6,000,000 names have not yet been read.



The Twinning Program for B'nei and B'not Mitzvah provided a deep appreciation of the lives our children have here in America. To honor Morris Bufferd for his dedication to the Minyan, the Vogel Chapel was renamed the Vogel-Bufferd Chapel. And yet another honor was bestowed upon Jack Sylvetsky as he was named Gabbai. To honor volunteers, a special Shabbat was held and people including Rose Bernstein, Cele Jacobson, Lawrence Ostrofsky, Helen Spitz, and Frances Zabin, to name only a few, were feted for their tireless efforts as unsung heroes. With all of the happiness at this time, there still was sadness when Adam Kreiger passed away at far too young an age. A son of our Congregation, the membership was devastated and in his memory, an annual scholarship is presented.

To upgrade the Talmud Torah, the classrooms were painted, fixtures and desks were replaced and to date, every classroom in the building has been named.



In the latter years of the 90s, more construction took place when the boiler was replaced and new oak doors were installed at the Talmud Torah entrance, along with a security buzzer. The building was pointed – a job that required a fundraising effort of \$500,000. Hirsch Hall was refurbished. New speakers were installed in the Sanctuary and new prayer books,

thanks to a generous donation, were placed in the pews. It was also at this time that Rodeph Sholom entered the world of Cyberspace and its own website was created. Cantor Grama's 20th Anniversary was celebrated, the Resource Center received computers and land was purchased in Monroe for a new cemetery. The title of Administrator was changed to Executive Director to address the increased responsibilities placed upon this staff member.

A Men's Support Group and a Bereavement Group were formed, both of which Rabbi Stein led and counseled. In 1998, yet another Holocaust Torah was dedicated in our sanctuary. Adult B'nei Mitzvah continued in increasing numbers.

Still during the 90s and into the next Century during the terms of Stuart Segall and Mort Bernstein, the programming continued with the Forum Series, lectures, Thanksgiving Services, Holocaust Vigils, members being honored by Israel Bonds, the Seminary and the United Synagogue.

Volunteerism was taking a downward spiral. More and more women were working out of the home and finding officers was becoming a major challenge. It was with heartfelt appreciation by Rodeph Sholom leaders past and present that former president, Mort Bernstein, joined the ranks of only a few who answered the call for a second time. Celebrating Rodeph Sholom's 90th Anniversary at the same time as Rabbi Stein's 25th year made for an elegant affair, attended by over 200 people.

In 2000, a search committee chaired by Carol Weinschel found a new Executive Director. Ben Streltzer came with a mild manner and vast experience. He quickly became part of the Synagogue family and we all looked on as he met and dated Hedy, soon to become his bride. This was a time to re-live Cinderella until all too quickly and suddenly, Hedy Streltzer, several months after their wedding day,

died. The Synagogue family was devastated and in true Rodeph Sholom fashion, rushed to Ben's side to offer consolation.

With the fundraising campaign completed, groundbreaking for the Talmud Torah Plaza took place during the presidency of Jay Ringelheim in 2000 with construction officially beginning in 2001. This plaza was to be a place to honor and memorialize loved ones through specially-designed bricks and benches at the entrance to the Talmud Torah.

Entering the new Century and the presidencies of Marion Richer, Jay Ringelheim, Marilyn Warmflash and Michael Goldman brought many changes to Rodeph Sholom, both in personnel and philosophy. The Long Range Plan was, once again, revisited and revised to accommodate the future needs of the Synagogue.



During the summer of 2000, Arnold Rotenberg arrived in Connecticut, and began his work as Rodeph Sholom's new 7th grade teacher. Still involved with that class, he assumed the position of Educational Director in 2006. His mission was to provide professional development for staff including topics such as Understanding by Better Design (UBD); learning styles; and integrating

Israel into the whole school. Arnie admits that Hebrew schools are not what they used to be—attendance is down; the hours are fewer; and the tools are different. The phrase “I can't believe it's Hebrew School” has become an ongoing goal for our Talmud Torah—always trying to do something different while maintaining all the curricular goals. The Talmud Torah in our 100th year reached a milestone: every 7th grade student has taken on a mitzvah project to change the world as part of his or her Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

In 2003, during the presidency of Marilyn Warmflash, after many years of soul-searching, Rabbi Stein announced that Rodeph Sholom would finally join the other Conservative Congregations throughout the country that were egalitarian. In 2004, for the first time in several decades, an Assistant Rabbi was hired after an extensive process by the Search Committee chaired by Carol Weinschel. Rabbi Tziona Szajman remained with us for three years and used her abilities specifically for young family programming.

Changes in the High Holy Day services were initiated during Michael Goldman's presidency. When Rabbi Stein announced his retirement, a search committee, under the leadership of Bradd Robbins and Perry Wasserlauf, was formed to find his replacement. This committee worked long and hard and ultimately recommended Rabbi David A. Cantor to be the next Rabbi of Rodeph Sholom. Joining Rabbi Cantor were his wife, Kedma, and their four young children Joash, Avniel, Shoshana, Devora, and Ben Zion (of blessed memory).



As Michael Goldman was about to turn the gavel over to Jill Lesser, in June of 2007, the formal dedication of The Louis and Bertha Zeff Early Childhood Center took place.

Jill Lesser was the president who officially welcomed Rabbi Cantor. While this was a happy event, it was followed by a most traumatic one: the sudden, untimely death of Cantor Y'shaya Grama. Having served Rodeph Sholom for 33 years and making a name throughout the surrounding area, his passing stunned the community, both Jewish and non-Jewish alike. His beautiful voice, his sense of humor, and his love of the children will always be remembered.



And so, a search committee was formed with Michael Goldman as chairman and, in August of 2008, Cantor Jason Green, a Lyric Tenor, was selected. He and his wife, Jodi, and their two young sons, Zev Ronel and Noah Liam, have become a welcome addition to our Synagogue family. Cantor Green not only came with enthusiasm, creativity, energy and a wonderful voice but an extensive knowledge for programming.

We are now poised for a dynamic future. The Hazak Chapter, a program for seniors 55 and older, and the Chavurot are demonstrating new life and effective outreach from within, as well as attracting new members.

An exciting development in Rodeph Sholom's programming began in late 2008, when William Markowitz, Vice President of Adult Services (and now President-elect), with the Board's enthusiastic support, enrolled Rodeph Sholom in the STAR (Synagogue Transformation And Renewal) initiative. Through this system, we now offer “Synaplex” programs—modeled on the “Cineplex” concept that there is something for everyone. We have held three Synaplex Shabbat services,

each offering traditional, educational, musical, gastronomical, physical, spiritual, and/or social “services” simultaneously. The goal of this program is to make the synagogue

- a place of prayer (Beit T’filah)
- a place of learning (Beit Midrash) and
- a place of social gathering (Beit K’nesset), open and enticing to all our members and potential members.

With the new generation of clergy in place, Rabbi Cantor and Cantor Green are poised to lead our Congregation into the next decade. Both in their thirties, they have already begun revitalizing Rodeph Sholom with their fresh approach to family-friendly services, inter-married couples and new programs.

Heartfelt thanks are owed to Sheldon Lawrence and David Stone who have revived the Social Action Committee. This group of dedicated members has highlighted areas addressing critical needs in our community:

- Adult literacy
- Tutoring children at the Geraldine Johnson School in Bridgeport
- A knitting project that provides hats and gloves to Bridgeport school children
- Warm coats for kids
- A Community Supper program for less fortunate families, to be held here at Rodeph Sholom
- A program of visitations and deeds of loving-kindness is in the planning stages
- Support Our Soldiers Project, a project created and implemented by Susan Spivack and Michael and Carol S. Weinshel. The Committee is offering assistance to the trio in collecting toiletries and snacks for troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The spirit of Tikkun Olam is alive and well and there will be a need for volunteers to make it a lasting commitment and is essential to the future of Rodeph Sholom.

As this history is being written, we are soon to embark on a new era—our second century as the first Conservative congregation in the Greater Bridgeport area. We do so with a leadership that is notable for having the first Rabbi Emeritus in the 100-year life of Rodeph Sholom. After 32 years with us, Rabbi Stein richly deserves this recognition.

In reflecting on the last 50 years, some names quickly come to mind and although it could be dangerous to mention them for fear of omitting others, it is important that we remember those dedicated, hard-working unsung heroes who added to the foundation of Rodeph Sholom. To name only a few, Florence Goldfarb, Ben and Adele Goodman, Tess Kasden, Irving and Cele Jacobson, Herman Klavir, and Lester and Shirley Mitchell were among those who made a difference and worked tirelessly, whether it was supporting the Minyan, fundraising or running programs. They achieved their goal of educating the next generation how to lead; those of us who are the beneficiaries of their teachings are forever grateful.

While, as of late, attendance at our daily minyan struggles, Rodeph Sholom continues to take pride having two minyanim a day, 365 days a year. Although the Gabbaim have been key to the success of the Minyan, this history would be incomplete without mention of the dedication of Sol Schine, our current Gabbai, for his steadfast support, quiet manner and beautiful chanting of the prayers.

Our synagogue, in its 100 years, has lived through tumultuous times and peaceful times. Our congregants have seen firsthand the effects of war, the depression, the Holocaust, major hurricanes and blizzards, inventions, philosophical changes in our religion, issues affecting women and children, technology, modernization, and far too many others to recall.

We have had the good fortune of having spiritual leaders who ministered to the needs of the congregants, took roles in the community and were dedicated, hard working professionals. We have had great lay leaders who brought their own particular strengths to their presidencies. Our Talmud Torah Directors have moved our children forward in their Jewish education and our Nursery School Directors have nurtured children from the very early years. Our Executive Directors and Administrators have kept our day-to-day operations working smoothly and our Maintenance Staff has always paid close attention to the needs of the building.

Even with the change in lay leadership and professionals, the goal remains ever the same as when Rodeph Sholom began 100 years ago. A foundation was built on which to grow, a legacy was left for each generation and that is exactly what we have done. As we embark on the second century of Rodeph Sholom’s history, we have new challenges to face, new projects to undertake, and issues that relate to the very complex 21st Century in America. We are thankful to all who came before us. It is, undoubtedly with the same fear of the unknown that our founders had, yet coupled with the same enthusiasm and dedication, that we will now venture into our next Century.