Jews Establish Temple of Worship in Hornell After 95-Year Struggle

Jewish Families Settled Here 98 Years Ago

The dedication of Temple Beth-El in Hornell September 7, 1947, culminated a 95-year struggle of Jews in this community to establish a house of worship.

Families of Jewish faith resided in Hornell as far back as 1852 and these early settlers were already hoping to establish a congregation and a synagogue. With so few families, their dream wasn’t to be realized until 95 years later.

Efforts to organize a synagogue date back to November 2, 1854, when the congregation “Ahavath Achim” (Brotherly Love) was incorporated. Trustees were Benjamin Willey, Jacob Corn and Solomon Ossoski.

On November 5, 1858, the trustees purchased a lot in Hope Cemetery for the purpose of establishing a Jewish Cemetery. The congregation, however, was too small to be able to build a synagogue and to employ a spiritual leader.

They met on holy days in private homes or rented halls for services. The religious education of their children was neglected. They called in teachers from Rochester to teach and lead services.

First Resident Leader

The first resident spiritual leader was Rabbi Schnell. Since then the congregation has been served by Rabbis Wachtfeigel, Ungar, Winer, Mavsky, Rosenbarg, and Gonish. Since February 1950, Rabbi Harry Zwirn has been the spiritual leader of the Temple.

There was no noticeable growth of the Jewish community until the outbreak of the First World War.

Since then, and particularly in the last two decades, the Jewish congregation took shape.

In 1938 they established their first permanent place of worship in the Erlich Building at 97 Main Street. As a result the name of the congregation was changed from Ahavath Achim to the Erlich Hebrew Center.

Community Growth

The Jewish community continued to grow and the elders realized that the time had come when a permanent synagogue was needed. It was not an easy task, as there were so few Jews. This dream, however, became a reality because each and every member, their wives and even their children gave to their utmost.

They saw their prayers answered with the dedication of Temple Beth-El on Church Street September 7, 1947.

The planning and work began in earnest when Mr. and Mrs. Max L. Landman donated the land for the erection of the Temple. Charles Wineburg was president when the synagogue was completed. Joseph Cropp was chairman of the building committee. Frank Spuitnik was made a life honorary president. This was bestowed upon him for his many years of faithful service. The Sisterhood of Beth-El with Mrs. Harvey Miller as president at the time of the dedication.

Hornellsville Tribune
September 10, 1887

The officers and friends of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist Sabbath Schools in this village have made arrangements for holding a Sabbath School Celebration on Friday next. We understand the schools of each denomination meet and organize at their respective places of worship at 9 o’clock a.m. and proceed immediately in front of the Public Square on Main Street, from which point they will march in order to the grove North of the new burying ground, the spot selected as their place of resort for the occasion. Preparations are making to render the celebration pleasant and interesting.

ville Tribune
December 14, 1844

Railroad trouble at Le Roy. There is some prospect of an Erie railroad at Le Roy in consequence of the Canandaigua and Niagara Falls R.R. Company neglecting to construct their depot on the side of the creek nearest to Hon. A.S. Upham’s farm. It appears that gentleman granted the right of way to the company through his farm on condition that the depot be so located; but in consequence of their non-compliance, has fenced up the road and removed part of the track. A correspondence of the Bath Advocate says the president of the road and one conductor is under arrest, also the Hon. Senator; and that one hundred Irishmen well armed with shillalahs marching and counter marching along the disputed territory, determined to knock down the first Le Royan who dares oppose the running of the "Maheeens."