

CONGREGATION BETH TIKVAH: A Brief History

by Marty Seltzer, President 1970-72 and 1995-97

Congregation Beth Tikvah had its genesis in 1956, when a group of Jewish families living on the northside of Columbus established the Northside Jewish Community Association (NSJCA), based at The Ohio State University Hillel Foundation. In October 1959, a group of NSJCA families began to conduct Friday evening services at Hillel.

In 1961, High Holy Day Services were conducted at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church with some twenty families helping to defray the \$350 fee paid to Rabbi Donald R. Berlin for leading the services.

At an October 1961 meeting at Hillel, a constitution was adopted and the assembled membership voted to approve the name of Beth Tikvah for the newly organized congregation. The vote was five votes for Beth Tikvah, two votes for Beth El, and one vote for Tikvah Shalom. Dick Goldgraben was elected President of the first new Jewish congregation in Columbus in over 50 years.

In May 1962, we rented a vacant house, which then stood at the southeast corner of North High Street and East North Broadway. Congregants gathered every Sunday to reconstruct the rooms so that they could be used for a sanctuary, social room and classrooms – a communal labor of love. Right from the start, members looked after the spiritual and building maintenance needs of a growing congregation.

Records from 1961 document 39 members, while the first published list included 48 membership units. During this first year, a series of seminars with speakers from the three major branches of Judaism was organized in an effort to determine if Beth Tikvah should affiliate. Many of our earliest members leaned toward establishing a congregation that adhered to the traditional laws of *kashruth*, mandatory head covering by men, no instrumental music, and the use of the Conservative prayer book. It was not until November 1963 that the congregation voted to affiliate with the Reform movement.

In July 1966, one month after his ordination at the HUC, Bennett Herman, who had been our student Rabbi since the fall of 1964, became our first full-time rabbi. This action resulted in the doubling of our annual budget from \$7,000 to \$13,000, presenting serious financial strains for a congregation of 57 generally young families.

In 1967 we received an eviction notice as our building owner made plans to tear down our house in order to make way for the office building that now stands at our original location. Rabbi Herman found the building that was to be our home from 1968 to 1981, a former (and now again) church at the corner of Indianola and Walhalla. Jack and Eleanor Resler arranged for the financing, and issued a cash match challenge to the membership that made it possible for us to meet the obligation necessary to move within a period of 30 days. Our congregation demonstrated that we were "here to stay" on the Northside with a Torah procession on East North Broadway between High Street and Indianola Avenue. A synagogue dedication on Sunday, March 3, 1968, followed, preceded by a late night work party at our new 3199 Indianola address.

Slow, but steady growth marked our years on Indianola Avenue. Rabbi Alan Ponn became our second rabbi in 1970 when Rabbi Herman left to take a pulpit in Rochester. In 1971, Rabbi Mark Raphael replaced Rabbi Ponn. Rabbi Raphael, who came to Columbus from California to take a position in Jewish History at Ohio State, introduced us to the concepts of creative services and guitar playing cantorial soloists. Shabbat service attendance swelled as we explored a variety of religious themes, and congregants learned a multitude of Hebrew melodies.

The pattern continued when Rabbi Roger Klein came to us in 1974. Rabbi Klein continued our tradition of having annual family retreats, where a weekend was devoted to study, fun and games, with the rabbi taking the lead as our most awesome batter. With his academic bent, Rabbi Klein had a special gift for encouraging our Bar and Bat Mitzvah students to discover wonderful insights in their Torah portions and to challenge our adult members during various study sessions.

In the early 1970's, women began to take their rightful place in the government of Beth Tikvah, with the election of Barbara Creinen as our first female president in 1978. Creinen played a key role in the planning of our move to Worthington.

In the late 1970's, it became clear that we were outgrowing our little building on Indianola Avenue. Various meetings were held to discuss our options, which included the purchase of an existing structure or building a new synagogue in Columbus or in one of our suburbs. Some members preferred moving closer to downtown, others opted for building on the then fringes of the suburbs on Sawmill Road. After much physical hunting and soul-searching, we reached a consensus on the present Olentangy River Road property. With a generous matching grant from the Reslers, announced only months before Jack Resler died, we were able to dedicate our present building in November 1981. For the second time in our congregation's brief history, we proudly marched our Torah, this time all the way from Indianola Avenue to the Worthington border.

The Worthington years saw an early growth in numbers of member units, children in Religious School, budget and staff. Rabbi Tony Holtz succeeded Rabbi Klein, who left in 1981 for academia. When Rabbi Holtz took a position in Duluth in 1983, Rabbi Gary A. Huber became our sixth full-time rabbi. In 2011 we celebrated our 50th anniversary and a new milestone for our rabbinic staff. In July 2011, after 28 years of service, Rabbi Huber became Rabbi Emeritus, and Rabbi Richard Kellner, from Temple Isaiah in Los Angeles, became our seventh full-time rabbi. The combination of a strong, dedicated, and stable professional staff and outstanding lay leadership has served as the catalyst for continued development of our programs for worship, study and community. Few of our twenty pioneer families could have imagined that the little *schul* they organized in 1961 would become a 430-member-strong pillar of the Central Ohio Jewish community.

Past Presidents

The following is a list of all the Past Presidents of the Congregation:

Dick Goldgraben	1961-62	Howard Fink	1985-86
David Brilliant	1962-63	Allan Samansky	1986-87
David Guttman	1963-64	Don Sylvan	1987-89
Harold Chern	1964-65	Evelyn Freeman	1989-91
Morris Ojalvo	1965-66	Jack Schwarz	1991-93
Sanford Shapiro	1966-67	Robin Thomas	1993-95
Walter Loeb	1967-68	Marty Seltzer	1995-97
Manny Luttinger	1968-69	David Binkovitz	1997-99
Bill Gilbert	1969-70	Bob Fisher	1999-01
Marty Seltzer	1970-72	Gordon Hecker	2001-03
Jerry Cohn	1972-74	Michael Fliegel	2003-05
Bernard Bayer	1974-75	Bruce Chapman	2005-07
Marty Keller	1975-76	Barbara Mindel	2007-09
Don Simon	1976-78	Greg Russell	2009-11
Barbara Creinen	1978-79	Patti Price	2011-13
Bob Mayer	1979-81	Andrew Shafran	2013-15
Gil Nestel	1981-83	Ernie Mandell	2015-17
Carol Folkerth	1983-85	Judy Weisberg	2017-19
		Cynthia Barker	2019-20
		Lewis Sanderow	2021-23
		Ted Fons	2023-25
		Tara Rozen	2025-