



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 2004 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.

VIRGINIA OPENS A PIECE OF HISTORY

In 1967 in Virginia, MN a time capsule was buried in front of city hall. The time capsule was opened in 2017 commemorating the 125 anniversary of the founding of Virginia. The capsule was filled with such things as personal letters, newspapers, catalogs and photos marking 75 years since the city was first platted and incorporated as a village. There was a plaque at the south entrance to City Hall stating the piece of history was to be opened in 2017.

The rectangular box, roughly 2 to 3 feet long and autographed by those involved in burying it, was sealed in a cement vault. The objects were all wrapped in Mylar, with a note from the original committee stated that the plastic film was a brand new invention and they didn't know how it would hold up. Perhaps the most mystifying thing in the box was a package of razor blades.

Dr. Cleo Brunetti, born in 1910 in Virginia, was an inventor. Eight inventions including one of the Dick Tracy wristwatch broadcasting transmitters was in the time capsule. Anyone who owns a smart watch has this native son to thank.

Amongst the items buried in the capsule was a document written by Florence Dorfman Stein, wife of Ben Stein, telling the story of the B'nai Abraham Synagogue. **READ ON NEXT PAGE...**



B'nai Abraham Synagogue 1920



B'nai Abraham Synagogue 2017

VIRGINIA'S DIAMOND DAYS CELEBRATION AUGUST 10 11 12,13.....1967 75 YEARS YOUNG
"A Bit About Us"

A man has to have faith ... not only in himself, or his country, or fellow— man but for his spiritual guidance ... and that, encumbers all of these.

The need for spiritual guidance began about 1893 after the first year of the founding of Virginia. Jewish families migrated to America from Lithuania, Russia, Poland, Germany and Romania, some fleeing the "Pogroms". Our first place of worship was in the "North Pole Hall" in the Phoenix building. That building was owned by Louis Cohen, father of Sam Cohen. No Rabbi to lead them, and many were the years that our group could not seem to afford one... still the spirit of keeping the Faith remained strong.

In 1909 the B'nai Abraham Synagogue was built by our forebears at its present location, 5th Street and 4th Avenue South on the East corner. Some of us are the children of these pioneers. Names like Milavetz (Ben, Sam and Ike), Sam Dorfman, Isidore Kaner, Paul Hostin, the Shanedlings (Julius, Morris, Harry and Henry), Adolph Keller, M.K. Baer, Louis Cohen, Isidore Cohn, Sam Kaufman, Dave Schibel, Joe Roman, Ben Bankman, Max Lewis, Sam Lippman, Steinberg, Herman Nathenson, John Mesberg, Booth, our kosher butcher, Gordon.... Some of these members purchased stained glass windows as memorials or honorary presentations to the completion of the Synagogue, others purchased their own pews and at that time families sat together. Later, one of the few Rabbis we had insisted that the men and women must sit separately to conform to the orthodox custom.... so the seating arrangement was changed.

Presidents who presided over our house of worship were John Mesberg, Ben Milavetz, Sam Milavetz, Isidore Cohn, Dave Schibel, Ben Norvitch. When "time" took its toll of our members the sons took over as active officers. Dave Milavetz, Howard Schibel, Edward Cohn, Lewis Deutsch, Dr. Dave Finkelstein, presided at the helm and Daniel Milavetz (son of Sam) too over in his father's footsteps as Secretary.

The Synagogue was remodeled, the outer stairs were enclosed, some of the walls paneled or painted with the advent of this group of officers: Edward Cohn, president; Max Rubenstein, Vice President; Daniel Milavetz, Secretary; Myron Marks, treasurer; and members of the board were M. J. Shandeling, Dr. David Finkelstein and Carl Kaufman.

Here are other pertinent factors that might prove of interest to the reader; in 1903 the third High School graduating class had one Jewish graduate, Herbert Steinberg.... the following year his brother Sidney graduated and he was the "sole" graduate... 1908, Minnie G. Cohen, late sister of Sam L. Cohen. In 1910, Nate V. Keller known as Mr. B'nai Brith who also attained the office of National Vice Commander of the American Legion.

In 1939 the Virginia Federation for Jewish Service began under the leadership of Monroe J. Shanedling and the first secretary was Florence Dorfman. Right up to the present time this organization is still very active. Our Jewish Community of about 55 families has active Jewish organizations. . the Virginia—Eveleth Council of Jewish Women and Hadassah, B'nai Abraham Susterhood, N.V. Keller B'nai Brith, Range Cemetery Association and we maintain Wednesday Religious classes for the youngsters and Sunday School.

Several of our group are active in fraternal organizations like the Rotary, Kiwanis, Elks, Masonic Lodge and Shrine. In 1966 I was elected Worthy Matron of the Star of the East Chapter, No. 210 of Virginia. I did not go through the chairs which is a routine procedure. This was the first time a Jewish woman in this community had this recognition. My husband will become Worshipful Master of the Masonic Lodge in two years.. and that, too, is a first for one of our group to receive this recognition. At present Ben Stein is Vice President of the Ver—Saba Shrine Club...another first.

A professor Berman of the University of Minnesota asked for the old secreterial books of our Synagogue. He wished to compile a History of some of the minority groups in Minnesota. At this writing the books have not been returned even though the compilation of that history, we understand, has been completed. It was necessary to secure this story by word of mouth and "brain picking". We hope it will prove interesting and of some historic value when this "TIME CAPSULE" is opened at the Century mark of this Community of Virginia. May the blessings of God be with you and may you enjoy many happy occasions in our little Synagogue -


MRS. BEN STEIN (Florence Dorfman) Stein

IN MEMORIUM



We remember Leighton Siegel (1937 – 2017) who died this summer. Leighton will be remembered as a Physician, a photographer, an inventor, an intrepid traveler and the webmaster and graphic designer for the Friend's of B'nai Abraham. He was an active Board member and was generous with his time and expertise. Using his computer skills, he developed several programs that were medical related along with doing patient care, which he loved. His grandparents immigrated to Virginia, MN as did his Siegel aunts and uncles. His father, Clarence, grew up in Virginia before moving to the Twin Cities to go to medical school. Leighton was an Otolaryngologist in St. Paul and since he always liked gadgets, this was the perfect field. He was in the Air Force at Clark Air Force Base from 1963 – 1965 and spent a great deal of time traveling around South East Asia collecting art. He was famous for his puns and he loved his crossword puzzles. He was married to Dianne Ziskin Siegel and they have three children and seven grandchildren.

REMEMBER WHEN



SAM MILAVITZ FAMILY approximately 1929 Picture could have been taken at Bubs Bar Mitzvah
Front Row: Annie, Sam, Bubs (Dan) Back Row: Art, Ethel, Peck, Joe's wife (?) and Joe

SUMMER OF 2017 PROGRAMS

The mission of the Friends of B'nai Abraham is to have B'nai Abraham Museum and Cultural Center a welcoming place for the people of Virginia and the surrounding communities. To fulfill that mission, we offer the space for lectures, musical performances and other events. The Virginia Area Historical Society provides an exhibit every year: this past year it was Prohibition. As part of our mission, the Friends of B'nai Abraham, with the sponsorship of the Arrowhead Regional Arts Council, presented five musical programs. The five programs this year were:

The Wilcox Family Fiddlers – standing room only crowd, including a lot of young people

Alan Phillips with Jim and Joan Hagblom – always popular

Northern Lights – performs classical music, drew an older crowd

Sam Militich and the Clearwater Hot Club – a wonderful program

The Singing Slovenes – also very popular, filled all the seats

In addition, the always-popular Harbormasters performed in the Fall to a standing room only crowd, sponsored by the Virginia Area Historical Society.



Board of Directors of the Friends of B'nai Abraham

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Elayne Deutsch Chiat
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Contributors to the Friends of B'nai Abraham

Grants Received 2017

Arrowhead Regional Arts Council: \$3280

Individual Contributions: June 2017 - October 2017

Alan Apter: Apter Family Fund

Jim and Renee Gainsley

Jon and Judy Harris

Judy Karon

Steve Lapaka

Rhoda and Don Mains

Susan and Walter Malac

Margie and Charlie Ostrov

Roberta Palen

Ann and Felix Phillips

Alan Milavetz and Bonnie Resnick

Nancy and Steve Schactman

Dianne Siegel

Anita Lurya Silver

Ben Yokel

Special Contributions: June 2017 - October 2017

Neil and Naomi Arnold, Sam and Tracy Arnold, Jessica Marland and Jason and Becky Altman:
In memory of Leighton Siegel.

Alan Apter: In honor and with thanks to the officers and board for their outstanding efforts and devotion to the restoration of B'nai Abraham

Lenore Bear: In memory of Harry Bear.

Susan and Dale Berns: In honor of Sam and Lone Siegel.

Mike and Sue Biehart: In memory of Leighton Siegel.

Frank Claymon and Audra Keller: In honor of the 60th wedding anniversary of Lee and Cissy Greenberg.

Marilyn Chiat: In memory of Leighton Siegel; In memory of Rick Chiat.

Ben Deutsch: In memory of Rick Chiat.

Jo Doig: In memory of Leighton Siegel.

Jessica and Brent Griffith: In memory of Leighton Siegel.

Myra Eder and Murray Heifer: In memory of Leighton Siegel.

Rob Hunegs: In memory of Rick Chiat.

Pearl Favin: In memory of Lone Siegel.

Beverly Fitzgerald: In memory of Leighton Siegel.

Gary and Bonne Goldish: In memory of Leighton Siegel.

Beverly Apter Greenbaum: In memory of Abe and Minnie Apter.

Harriet Israel: In memory of Leighton Siegel.

Judy Karon: In memory of Lone Siegel; In appreciation of Margie and Charlie Ostrov.

Audra Keller: In memory of Leighton Siegel.

Carol Kaemper: In honor of Audra Keller and Frank Claymon.

Barb Levie: In memory of Leighton Siegel.

Marilyn Machkowsky: In memory of Rick Chiat.

Lauren Nelson: In memory of mother, Helen Nelson Walker, who lived to be 102.

Margie and Charlie Ostrov: In memory of Leighton Siegel; In memory of Rick Chiat.

Francie and Mark Paper: In honor of Ann Phillips.

Ann and Felix Phillips: In Honor of Veda Zuponcic.

Charles and Marietta Pitzele: In memory of Leighton Siegel.

Marvin and Stefanie Segal: In honor of the great work by Dianne Siegel and Margie Ostrov; In memory of Leighton Siegel.

Dr. Melvin and Delores Sigel: In memory of Leighton Siegel.

Dianne Siegel: In memory of Rick Chiat; In honor of Charlie Ostrov's special birthday,

Maraline Slovut: In memory of Gordon Slovut.

Bruce Stasch: In memory of Lone Siegel.

Irwin D Weisman: In memory of Margery Pelin Weisman.

Alan and Bonnie Ziskin: In memory of Leighton Siegel.

Endowment Fund

It is very important to grow an endowment for the future of B'nai Abraham Museum and Cultural Center. As of now we have approximately \$60,000 in that fund. Our goal is \$100,000, which would maintain the building for at least 10 more years. The building is beautiful. Many who come for tours, exhibits and programs enjoy it. The Friends of B'nai Abraham has under taken this project to ensure that the building remains 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 Chait: "B'nai Abraham represents our nations great religious, cultural and ethnic diversity. When historic buildings such as B'nai Abraham are lost, our nations magnificent mosaic 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 understand the history of the Range and the Jewish people who contributed so much to its unique character.

WISH LIST - YOUR HELP IS GREATLY NEEDED

Tuck-pointing to close leaks and secure bricks, which will protect the beautifully restored building from harsh winters. The balcony floor needs to be sanded and refinished. Crown molding is needed in the sanctuary.

We welcome much needed contributions to the Endowment fund.

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

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