



B'nai Abraham, built during 1909-1910, is the last remaining synagogue on the Minnesota Iron Range and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It had not functioned as a working synagogue since the late 1990s and had undergone significant deterioration. In 2005, the Friends of B'nai Abraham (FBA) was organized as a non-profit 501(c)3 with the mission of restoring and preserving the building so that it can function as a community cultural center for all the people of Virginia and the surrounding communities, as well as providing a small museum space to tell the story of the Jewish presence and contributions on the Iron Range. 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.

## Wonderful Progress

By Mike Blehert with contributions from Bob Roscoe

Since the May 2009 newsletter, progress has been obvious and significant. The sanctuary, while not completely restored, looks wonderful and is usable. Much of the original exterior historic appearance is visible again and major interior work on the lower level social hall was accomplished. The **B'nai Abraham Museum and Cultural Center**, now ready for prime time, is a desirable destination and meeting place and increasingly visited and used by many during the last six months.

### *The work, completed and in progress, is primarily in three areas:*

**First:** The building's front entrance has been restored to its original historic stairway. The original stairway rose to a canopy covered entry landing and double doors. The new stairs, while still meeting National Registry requirements for historic accuracy, rise to a larger landing upon which a glass enclosed vestibule with two sets of double doors, planned for the future, will shield the interior from the cold winter winds.

**Second:** The lower level social hall is 80% complete with new walls, ceiling, lighting and two handicapped accessible bathrooms. The floor is still bare concrete and the small kitchen area is being used for construction storage, but the main room is bright, clean and being actively used for events and exhibits.

**Third:** Six of the thirteen stained glass windows and window frames have been restored. The remaining seven still need to be done. These treasures highlight the beauty of the sanctuary



The sanctuary, seen from the balcony, in July 2009.

and are very visible reminders of the original members and history of the community. As with the future addition of the entry vestibule, 1/4-inch thick tempered glass storm windows were installed to both protect the windows and increase energy efficiency.

At this time, after four years of effort, the basic building shell and interior infrastructure are in place, and we are looking forward to a very interesting prospect – finishing the work that will bring out much more of the building's original architectural beauty to fulfill our long-standing objectives of a completely restored landmark of historic preservation.



The front of the building and stairs are being historically restored.

**We've made great progress but are still short of our goal. Your continuing interest and contributions are vital to our success.**

Newsletters, in full color, may be found and downloaded from our website: [www.IronRangeJewishHeritage.org](http://www.IronRangeJewishHeritage.org)

## A Highlight of the Summer of 2009!

by Ann Phillips



The scene just prior to the opening cello performance of Bruch's *Kol Nidrei* played by Thomas Rosenberg.

The event was scheduled for July 5 by 7:00 pm. The doors would open at 6:15 pm. By 5:45 pm lines were forming outside the **B'nai Abraham Museum and Cultural Center** in Virginia, Minnesota.

**WHY WERE THEY COMING?** The first annual concert to be held at B'nai Abraham sponsored by the *Northern Lights Music Festival* and directed by Veda Zuponic was about to begin! The sanctuary and balcony were filled. By the time lights had dimmed, nearly 150 excited audience members from all over the country were standing or seated – and about to be treated to a simply fabulous evening of music. The concert opened with *Kol Nidrei*, followed by a *Shostakovich String Quartet*, a Bloch *Suite Hebraique*, *African American Spirituals* by the baritone, Lourin Plant, and many more stunning violin and piano pieces. The 11-year-old virtuosic violinist, Haeji Kim, played *Ziguenerweiser* by Sarasate at an extraordinary pace, thrilling the audience. She rated a wildly cheering standing ovation.

The fourteen musicians who performed were students and faculty from all over the world – the United States, Honduras, Belgrade, Moldova, Ukraine...and more.

We cannot thank Veda Zuponic enough for bringing her wonderful talent to Virginia and B'nai Abraham.

We look forward to the return of the *Northern Lights Music Festival* during the summer of 2010, when **B'nai Abraham celebrates its 100th Birthday and Re-dedication!**

### SPECIAL THANKS TO SANFORD BERMAN

A very generous gift last spring, from Sanford Berman, allowed the Friends to restore the lower level Social Hall. The Social Hall was named in honor of his parents. We wish to thank Sanford Berman for this beautiful gift in memory of his parents, and for his long-standing generosity to the Virginia community. Many Virginians have heard & seen his performances as a hypnotist and have enjoyed his sparkling showmanship. We also wish to thank his lovely wife Sande for her assistance. Even though more needs to be done to the lower level, such as the catering kitchen, the Sanford Berman Social Hall was put to its first use on July 5, 2009, when a lovely reception was held following the concert by the Northern Lights Music Festival.

*The Sanford I. Berman  
Social Hall in Memory of  
Jennie and Alex Berman*

## Social Hall Reception and Exhibit

By Marilyn J. Chiat, Ph.D.

The builders of B'nai Abraham wanted their new synagogue, as synagogues throughout time had, serve as a gathering place, not only for worship, but also as a place for social and cultural events. In fact, the very term 'synagogue' is Greek and means 'to gather.' For that reason they made certain that their synagogue would have a spacious social hall equipped with a kitchen and restrooms in the lower level. Like the rest of the building, the lower level suffered from neglect and was in need of major restoration. That project is now just about complete. The hall can once again be used as a gathering place. One such event was held on July 5, 2009 when the Northern Lights Music Festival presented a program to a full house in the sanctuary. Following the program, the audience adjourned to the social hall where they enjoyed refreshments and viewed a beautiful exhibit of 19 enlarged historic photographs of Jewish merchants who once had shops and businesses on the Iron Range. It was created and mounted by Leighton Siegel.



**Social Hall reception:** Marilyn Chiat and Margie Ostrov are seen setting up the Northern Lights concert reception.



**Social Hall historic photo exhibit:** Harry Lampa, from the Virginia Area Historical Society, discusses the exhibit of historic photos with Steve Lapatka.

The photographs tell the story of Jewish settlement on the Range beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when Carl Shapiro, one of the Range's first Jewish settlers, arrived in Tower and opened a butcher shop selling meat to miners. Another early arrival was Adolf Keller who is pictured surrounded by horses that his business, The Virginia Horse Company, provided to the mining companies. The majority of the Range's Jewish men were merchants. Photographs depict them standing in front of their stores, such as Julius Shanedling in Virginia, or displaying their wares, as Ben Walt did in the photo of the interior of his clothing store, also in Virginia. A dramatic photograph shows the Sapero family in front of a shack bearing a sign reading S. Sapero and Sons. This makeshift structure served as their store following the devastating fire in 1908 that destroyed most of Chisholm.

Other photographs show shops owned by the Stone family in Cooley, the Stein Drug Store in Hibbing, the Siegel Brothers Furniture Store in Eveleth, Joe Siegel's butcher shop in Biwabik and Carl and Fred Siegel's in Virginia (both non-kosher), the Palace Clothing Store owned by the Finnish born Dave Schibel, the staff of the Quality Shop owned by Monroe Shanedling, and the Ostrov Grocery, all in Virginia. Two families were engaged in businesses that catered more to the miners' social needs: the Goldenberg family's El Queeno Cigar Company in Chisholm, and Louis and David Deutsch's movie theater, the Granada, in Virginia.

The exhibit not only attracted an audience, it also served to remind the younger generation of Iron Rangers of the contributions that Jewish settlers made to their community. Photographs, such as the ones on display in B'nai Abraham's social hall, are a teaching tool. They provide the viewer with insight into history, and an understanding that the present is built on the accomplishments of the past.

*We would welcome articles and stories about other Jewish businesses in the early years.*

## Archives of B'nai Abraham and Jewish history on the Iron Range

### LOCAL JEWISH FOOTBALL HERO JOINS THE PRO GREEN BAY PACKERS!!!!

By Ann Phillips

Probably the only Jewish man from the Range to play for the Gophers and the Green Bay Packers was George Abramson who did both! He was born in 1903 in Eveleth, son of Aaron Abramson, a saloon keeper, and his wife Hattie Bresky, but his family soon moved to Virginia to join their extended family. One of his cousins was Arthur Naftalin, later the first Jewish mayor of Minneapolis; he claimed George inspired him to attend the University of Minnesota.

Although he weighed only 198 pounds, and was only 5'7" tall, apparently nothing stopped this right guard, not even the unstoppable Red Grange (the "Gallop Ghost") during the legendary 1924 Illinois game. It was the dedicatory game for the then brand-new Memorial Stadium. Illinois and Red Grange were heavily favored. However, with the help of George and his good friend Lou Gross, both of whom played the whole game, Illinois fell to the University of Minnesota Gophers 20-7.

The Queen City Sun, one of Virginia's newspapers at the time, reported that George was named as a member of sports writer Norman E. Brown's All Western mythical football team. Brown classed him as one of the best linemen in the country, ranking him even above Edliff R. "Butch" Slaughter, the famous 1924 All-American Michigan guard.

Other sportswriters at the time described him as the greatest guard ever developed at the University of Minnesota. In 1924, George was named to the Walter Camp's All-America Mythical second team.

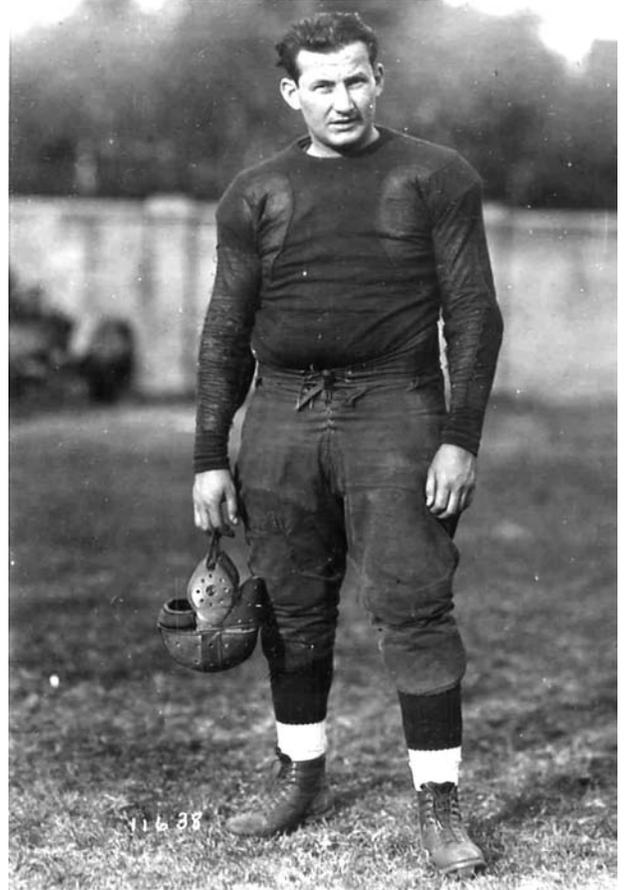
George played for the Gophers in 1922, '23 and '24, graduating in 1925. While a guard with the Gophers, he was called "the quickest lineman Minnesota ever had" by his assistant coach Sig Harris. George was a member of the Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity.

George was more than a football player. His photo and a description of his election as one of eight SENIOR LEADERS and a REPRESENTATIVE MINNESOTAN are in the 1926 *University of Minnesota Gopher Yearbook*.

George played guard and tackle for 10 games with the Green Bay Packers during the 1925-6 season, and kicked two field goals, of 30 and 35 yards, plus two extra points, scoring 8 points for the Packers to give them a lead against the Cardinals.

George died in 1985, and had lived in Kewanee, Illinois and California. He was a great footballer and a great guy. George Abramson grew up in Virginia, Minnesota.

*If any of our readers knew or remember him, or his son Bruce, please send additional information/corrections to: Ann Phillips [phill037@umn.edu](mailto:phill037@umn.edu). I am solely responsible for any factual errors.*



George Abramson  
Image courtesy of the University of Minnesota Archives,  
University of Minnesota - Twin Cities

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**Watch for more information about the rededication of the B'nai Abraham building in 2010.**  
For a complete list of future events at B'nai Abraham, visit our web site: [www.IronRangeJewishHeritage.org](http://www.IronRangeJewishHeritage.org).

A special thanks to our supporters

**Grants awarded to the Friends of B'nai Abraham**

**Matching grant from the State Historic Preservation Office of the Minnesota Historical Society - \$5,000**  
**Matching grant from the Iron Range Resources - \$15,000**  
**Minnesota Center on Energy and the Environment - \$10,000**  
**Virginia Community Foundation - \$2,500**  
**Matching grant - Minnesota Historical Society Grant in Aid - \$10,000**  
**Beverly Foundation - \$60,000**  
**Matching grant from Iron Range Resources - \$75,000**  
**Matching grant from St. Louis Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) \$75,000**  
**Matching grant - Minnesota Historical Society Grant in Aid - \$48,500**  
**Wells Fargo Bank Foundation - Minnesota - \$15,000**  
**Minneapolis Jewish Federation - \$1000**  
**Jay and Rose Phillips Family Foundation - \$5000**  
**A Special Gift from Sanford I. and Sande Berman - \$20,000**  
**Jeffris Heartland Fund - \$5,956**

**Individual Contributions: May 2009 – October 2009**

Elizabeth Abrohams  
Arno and Noyme Blum  
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Jane Effress  
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Peter Friedlieb  
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Marvin and Stefanie Segal  
Leighton and Dianne Siegel  
Benjamin Zalkin  
Alan and Bonnie Ziskin

**Special Contributions: May 2009 – October 2009**

**Trudy Bers:** In memory of mother, Saragrace Kenner Haffron;  
**Marc Blehert:** In honor of Mike Blehert;  
**Mike Blehart:** Wishing Brian Gunderson a speedy recovery;  
**Sherill and Irving Borkon:** In memory of Harvey Chiat;  
**Myron H. Bright:** In memory of Leo and Billia Jean Bright;  
**Marilyn Chiat:** In honor of Carol and Shel Segal's 50th Anniversary; In honor of Ruth Brin's 88th birthday;  
**Frank Claymon:** In memory of Rose Claymon; In memory of Etta Gurstel;  
**The Fifteen Club:** In honor of Audra Keller;  
**Betty Flax:** In memory of Burton Flax  
**Jeanne Schibel Gross:** In memory of the Gross Family;  
**Brian and Francine Gunderson:** In honor of Mike Blehart and the Friends of B'nai Abraham;  
**Francine and Butch Jensen and Sarah Jensen:** In memory of Joni Schwartz;  
**Andrea and Rob Karsh:** In honor of 100th birthday of Edna Milavitz Engelson;  
**Lewis Katz:** In memory of Lieutenant Colonel Abraham David Katz;  
**Audra Keller:** In memory of Lorraine Schweitzer; In memory of Steve Cannon; In memory of Roz Fryer Marks In memory of the brother of Nathan Harrison;  
**Gene Kishel:** In memory of Paul Ostrov and in memory of Carl Kaufman;  
**Robert Masklansky:** In memory of Carolyn Phillips Maslansky  
**Margie and Charlie Ostrov:** In honor of the special birthday of Ione Siegel  
**Ann and Felix Phillips:** Congratulations to Judy Sagen for her award as MN Music Educator of the year; In honor of 100th birthday of Lee Cook; In memory of Monnie Goldfine; In memory of Steve Cannon; In honor of Bert and Susan Gross for their combined age of 155 years; In memory of Jack Scheer;  
**Mel and Delores Sigel:** In honor of Marilyn Chiat;  
**Diane Siegel:** In memory of Irving Siegel;  
**Dianne and Leighton Siegel:** In memory of Honey Salita; In memory of Virginia Stern; Wishing Marietta Pitzele a speedy recovery; In memory of Sylvia Tennebaum; In honor of the special birthday of Ione Siegel;  
**Margot Siegel:** In memory of Harold Siegel  
**Joseph and Fay Squillace:** In memory of Dena and Ben Norvitch;  
**Sharron and Oren Steinfeldt:** In memory of Jack Bankman (yahtzeit);  
**Alan and Lou Ann Stone:** In memory of Edward and Bess Stone;  
**Steven and Lisa Weisman:** In memory of Irving and Shayndel Weisman;

**Gifts of kind and other aid: May 2009 – October 2009**

A gift of a kaporet (valence) from the Eveleth Synagogue - donated by the **family of Betty Kaner Lipkin**, in her memory.  
A two-drawer file cabinet donated by **Deedee and Richard Harris**.

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



Participants in community events at B'nai Abraham are seen on the newly restored entrance and front stairway.



Dorothy Karon celebrates her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party at B'nai Abraham.



B'nai Abraham's restored sanctuary is an important event venue for people living in, and visiting, Virginia, Minnesota. Part of the museum exhibit is seen in the back.

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**For a complete list of future events at B'nai Abraham, visit our web site: [www.IronRangeJewishHeritage.org](http://www.IronRangeJewishHeritage.org)**

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**Your continuing interest and contributions are vital to our success.**

*Included are:* Repair and tuck point the deteriorating exterior brick work; install a security system including smoke, water and carbon monoxide sensors and alarms; install a wooden floor in the sanctuary and foyer; resurface the interior stairways; install permanent handrails on the stairway; obtain bookshelves and a small desk for the office; obtain a coat rack for lower level; obtain additional folding chairs to match our current ones; install required exit lights and a variety of electrical outlets; outfit the catering kitchen with appliances; complete the occupancy permit requirements in the bathrooms; restore the 7 stained glass windows still needing repair; complete the restoration of the Bema and what is on it; landscape the outside yard; and not the least, create an endowment for future maintenance of the building.

<b>We've made great progress but are still short of our goal.</b>		<b>All donations are fully tax deductible.</b>
<p><b>Please send your donation to:</b></p> <p>Friends of B'nai Abraham            c/o Charles Ostrov, treasurer            1788 Maryland Ave. North            Golden Valley, MN 55427</p>	<p>Name: _____</p> <p>Address: _____</p> <p>City, State, Zip: _____</p> <p>Amount: _____</p> <p>To contribute stock contact: York Securities, Inc. 800-221-3154 directed to Kathleen -or-  <a href="mailto:ccostrov@gmail.com">ccostrov@gmail.com</a> -or- <a href="mailto:phill037@umn.edu">phill037@umn.edu</a></p>	
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