



B'NAI ABRAHAM

Virginia, Minnesota - St. Louis County



The History of Jewish Life on the Minnesota Iron Range



B'nai Abraham, built in 1909, 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.

Great progress thanks to so many supporters:

With thanks to so many of you who have supported this project, we are making great progress on the restoration of B'nai Abraham. The grant from the Minnesota Historical Society has been matched with your donations and work is now underway. The 1970s wooden addition to the front of the building has been removed, and a new front entrance and a new stairway will be finished by this summer. We have utilized photos of the original entrance as a guide so that the restoration will be in keeping with the original design. With a nod to the reality of Minnesota winters, there will be a vestibule to keep out the cold in the winter. A portion of the funds has been allocated to stained glass window repair. This is an expensive part of the project and the Minnesota Historical Society grant has allowed us to restore four of the most damaged windows. When the windows are restored, wooden sashes will be built, the windows reinstalled and then protected with new storm windows. Several families have stepped forward and provided funds to help restore the windows that commemorate their particular families.

Thanks to the generosity of several families, the lower level is also in the process of being restored. The social hall has been renovated and looks wonderful. Both the men's and women's handicap accessible restrooms will soon be completed.

As you are making your summer travel plans, consider stopping by Virginia and touring the building to see the progress to date. Tours led by volunteers from the Virginia Area Historical Society will be on Wednesdays and Fridays from 1 to 3 pm during the tourist season. Tours may also be provided by special arrangement by calling the Virginia Area Historical Society at 218-741-1136.

Although we are fortunate to be as far along as we are, there is important work yet to be done. The next goal will be to raise money for the serving kitchen, the hardwood floor and railing in the sanctuary, landscaping and restoration of the balcony.



Work has begun on the new staircase and entrance (photo: Steve Carter) and is nearing completion in the lower level social hall (photo: Charles Ostrov).

PLEASE HELP IF YOU CAN!

Discovered Treasures

by Mike Blehert



Larry Rudd's Awakening Stained Glass Studio

top: Examination of the stained glass window artwork revealed hidden Hebrew text.

bottom: Charlie and Margie Ostrov holding a piece of the original deteriorating stained glass depicting the Torah and the partially completed new one.

The story of one of the stained glass windows touches upon the artistry, history and hidden meaning discovered during repair. The window in question was dedicated to Mrs. Louis Cohen and the Hebrew/Yiddish transcription below her name says, "Donated in account of my mother, my teacher, Minna Nathanson. May she rest in Eden (paradise)."

But, as the window was examined on a light table after being removed from its' frame, it became apparent that the crown and headband artwork in the upper portion of the window (**See the photo on the left.**) contained some stylized Hebrew letters in the headband. The letters were identified and after consultation with Rabbi Olitzky at Beth El Synagogue, he determined that the words were Kodesh LaShem or Holy to the Lord. He further pointed out that this phrase is mentioned in the Torah in Exodus chapters 28: 36-39 and 39:30-31 and refers to the words on the gold frontlet plate worn on Aaron's (the high priest) forehead along with a gold crown as part of the vestments worn before entering the ancient Tabernacle to perform his duties. Finally, Rabbi Olitzky said that this phrase is not commonly used; in fact this may be a unique application, but very fitting for a Cohen (English surname related to the Kohain or biblical Priestly clan).

But, there may be more hidden meaning. The Friend's of B'nai Abraham will continue researching to try to learn more about the scribe and artist for this and other windows. We're quite certain that a Jewish scribe wrote the Hebrew inscriptions in the crown, but it appears that the shape of the crown is more indicative of Christian artistry than those typically depicted on Torah covers and other Synagogue art. The main artistic and historic treasures of the B'nai Abraham Synagogue are the 13 stained glass windows, all of which need repair. Perhaps other windows will lead to new discovered treasure, telling a story from the past.

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The Last High Holidays at B'nai Abraham

by Alan Milavetz

In the 1960's my parents often planned a summer family trip to visit relatives in Duluth and Virginia. There were many highlights including a visit with my great-grandmother Sarah Soloski Milavetz, a yearly haul of comic books from my Uncle David Milavetz, and firecrackers at their cabin on Sand Lake.

Some 30 years later, my brother Jamie and I traveled to Duluth and Virginia to learn more about our family history. We called Dr. John Siegel and his wife, Jane, about the synagogue in Virginia. Dr. Siegel along with Dorothy Karon had been keeping the synagogue running over the years.

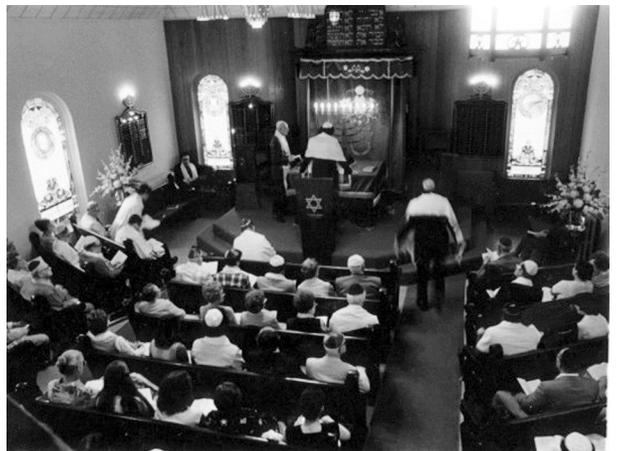
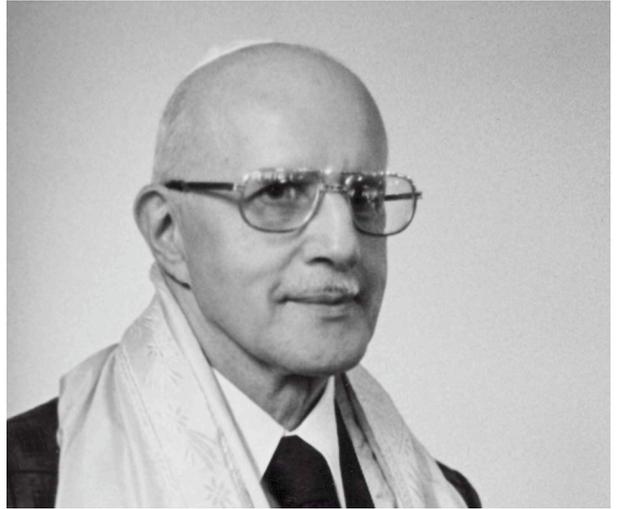
We also called Daniel "Bussy" and Anne Milavetz. Bussy's father and his Uncles Ben and Ike (my Great grandfather) were among the early founders of B'nai Abraham. We were invited to the homes of each of these couples to ask questions about our family history. Both gave us family stories and history, and were proud of their family and community. Dr. Siegel urged us to return in the fall for the high holidays. We said "sure", but deep down, it seemed unlikely. (Dr. Siegel was concerned about achieving a minyan, ten participants in the service, and was worried about the future of the synagogue.)

In September, 1997, my wife, Bonnie, and our 2 oldest kids, 10 year old Dave and 7 year old Danny, traveled to the "Range" after the first day of Rosh Hashanah services in order to celebrate the second day of the holiday at B'nai Abraham. That night we found ourselves at services...a short service which, when it ended, found me not wanting to leave the building. To me, seeing the stained glass windows, plaques and furniture throughout the shul was an exciting lesson about my ancestors that I wanted to share with my family.

The next morning, the second day of Rosh Hashanah, we walked from the Coates Hotel to the synagogue in the beautiful autumn sunshine. The service was being conducted by Jeff Friedson who led services there for over 20 years. I was with my wife and sons along with Dr. Siegel and his son Elliot Siegel. Some of the others were Louis "Leibel" Stone (my wife's cousin) and his wife Barbara, Bussy and Anne, and my cousins Gary and Mary Milavetz, and Judy Milavetz Friedson and her kids Jene, Debe and Ben. Dorothy Karon, the treasurer for the synagogue, was also present. Judy invited us to sit with her, explaining that her family always sat in the pews on the left side fourth row, since the days when the seats were "auctioned." This was a great way to begin the New Year. It was such a wonderful experience that we returned for the next year's High Holidays.

Although we didn't know it at the time, the High Holidays of 1998, became the last year of High Holiday services at B'nai Abraham. Even though we brought along many family members, including my parents Bob (who grew up in Ely) and Micki Milavetz and my mother-in-law Nancy Stone Karasov, (who grew up in Nashauk), still, fewer local congregants attended. My wife read from the Torah, my son David blew the shofar, and I had an aliyah and was on the bima with my cousin Bussy. After services, Dr. Siegel had arranged a brunch on the top floor of the Coates. It felt like a real holiday. This was becoming a great tradition for my family. Sadly, the next fall, Dr. Siegel told me that the synagogue was closing. After 90 years, there would be no more services in the last synagogue on the Iron Range.

Almost ten years later, in May 2007, the St Paul Talmud Torah brought its 5th grade class to B'nai Abraham to help with the restoration. The class packed up books, planted shrubs and led services. Among the class were my daughters, Zoe and Talia, who became the 6th generation of their family to daven and to participate in services in the B'nai Abraham Synagogue.



Dr. John Siegel b. 1912 d.2005 (top) and Dorothy Karon b. 1919 (middle) kept the B'nai Abraham Synagogue running over its last years.

What is hiding in your closet?

As we continue to create educational pieces for the exhibits, we would like to identify Iron Range Jewish residents' names, and obtain copies of photographs and information about them and their families, their homes, life cycle events and **especially businesses** starting before 1900 through the early 1950s. Contact Charlie Ostrov, costrov@gmail.com telephone: 763-544-6459 or Leighton Siegel siege005@tc.umn.edu telephone: 651-457-9869.

	<p>\$ DOLLAR DAY SPECIALS \$</p> <p>BROOM AND SANETTE PAIL, Both for \$1</p> <p>OIL MOP and BOTTLE OF POLISH Both for \$1</p> <p>Aluminum Double \$1 Silk Pillows..... \$1 Boiler</p> <p>Smoking \$1 2 Vases for..... \$1 Stands.....</p> <p>WE HAVE MANY MORE ITEMS FOR DOLLAR DAY \$ - SEE OUR WINDOWS - \$</p> <p>Sam Siegel FURNITURE & HARDWARE 315 Grant Ave. Eveleth, Minn.</p>	
<p>Do you know who these two are?</p>	<p>Eveleth ad - early 1900s.</p>	<p>Granada Movie Theater with Louis (left) and David (right) Deutsch and a friend.</p>

FUTURE EVENTS

1) SAVE THE DATE - JULY 5, 2009: A Chamber Players Concert will be held at B'nai Abraham on July 5 at 7:00 PM. This concert will be part of the Northern Lights Music Festival founded by Veda Zuponic, a former resident of Aurora, Minnesota and a professor of music at Rowan University in New Jersey. For three weeks every summer, students and faculty gather from all over the world, to perform in various venues in Aurora and on the Iron Range. We are pleased that B'nai Abraham was chosen as a venue. Admission is free. Thank you, Veda.

2) 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.

BENEFITTING THE IRON RANGE ECONOMY

We are proud that we have been able to help bolster the local economy by using local labor and purchasing materials and supplies from local sources. Dollars spent restoring this historic building has a multiplier effect on the local economy, important during these difficult economic times. There has been a direct financial benefit to many local companies and craft persons including:

A J Builders	Arrow Lift	Brock White
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Virginia Lumber Home Center	Rude Awakening Studio	Arrowhead Roofing
Sherwin Williams	Heisel Plumbing & Heating	Tile & Stone Co.

B'NAI ABRAHAM RECEIVES A NEW PLANNING GRANT

The Midwest Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation awarded the Friends of B'nai Abraham a grant from the Jeffris Heartland Fund. This matching planning grant for \$5,957 will be used for planning a remaining phase of the restoration project. The plans will include a serving kitchen in the social hall, restoration of the balcony area for storage and additional seating and a walkway access from the street to the handicap lift. Planning will consist of architectural drawings, consultation, building specifications, and preparation for permits and other associated efforts for the proposed work. Funds will need to be found to turn the plans into reality.

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 - \$50,000

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 - \$1,000

Jay and Rose Phillips Family Foundation - \$5,000

A Special Gift from Sanford I. and Sande Berman - \$20,000

Jeffris Heartland Fund - \$5,956

Individual Contributions: November 2008 – April 2009

Apter Family: Funded by the Apter Family Fund of the Duuth Superior Area Community Foundation

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Special Contributions: November 2008 – April 2009

Marc Blehert: In honor of father, Mike Blehert, In honor of Mike and Sue Blehert's special anniversary

Lou Ann Bongard: In honor of return to good health of Charlie Ostrov

Pam Brunfelt: In memory of Harvey Chiat, In honor of Marilyn Chiat

Janet Carlson: In memory of Fred and Ann Siegel

Marilyn Chiat: In honor of 50 anniversary of Sandy and Mort Greenberg, In memory of Arnold Soskin, In honor of the 55th Anniversary of Sandy and Marvin Wolfenson

Rusty and Burt Cohen: In honor of Marilyn Chiat

Judith and Rodney Cooperman: In honor of Audra Keller's special birthday, In honor of our friend, Audra Keller

Berwyn and Gail Davies: In honor of Class of "53" friends: Mitzi Bourgan (deceased), Rosalyn Sher and Ann Shanedling

Lionel Davis: In memory of Edith R. Davis

Barbara Diamond: In honor of wedding of Bill Chiat and Jim Gladfelter

Judy Dodd: In memory of Babe Toles

Mel and Patti Frisch: In memory of the Frisch family

Heidi and Howard Gilbert: In honor of Charlie Ostrov's recovery and continued good health

Marjorie Goldberg: In memory of husband, Nelson Goldberg

Bette Globus Goodman: In honor of Marilyn Chait

Joanne and Bruce Gruen: In honor of Margie and Charlie Ostrov, In honor of Alan Milavetz

Judith Joseph: In memory of Irene and David Schibel

Carol and Sheldon Kaner: In memory of Fannie and Henry Kaner

Martin and Susanne Kanter: In memory of Caril Netzky

Jeffrey Kaplan and Laruen Virshus: In honor of Felix Phillips

Nancy and Elliott Karasov: In honor of Alan Milavetz's special birthday, In honor of B'not Mitzvah of Talia Maya and Zoe Bess Milavetz

Larry Karkela: In memory of Emilie and Wesley Karkela

Frima Karon: In honor of birthday of Felix Phillips
Sidney Kaufman: In memory of Harry Cohen
Miriam and Erwin Kelen: In honor of the Phillips family
Audra Keller: In memory of Ida Heller
Barbara and Keith Knoop: In honor of Ann Shanedling Phillips
Cal Lewis and Carol Lewnsohn: In memory of Max and Rosa Lewis - founders of B'nai Abraham
Bob and Judy Marans: In honor of cousins Dianne and Leighton Siegel and Margie and Charlie Ostrov, In memory of Anne Siegel Marans
Lesli and Michael Marasco: In honor of Dianne and Leighton Siegel
Robert Maslansky: In memory of Carolyn Phillips Maslansky
Chana Mesberg and Harold Grossman: In memory of John and Sarah Mesberg
Alan Milavetz and Bonnie Resnick: In honor of the birthday of Alan's uncle, Richard Milavetz
George and Lila Mesberg: In memory of Bernard and Margaret Mesberg
Judi and Aaron Nathenson: In memory of Adrienne Weinstein
Charlie and Margie Ostrov: In memory of Sophie Ostrov
Ann and Felix Phillips: In loving memory of Irving Wiggs
Michael Phillips and Julia Bucknall: In honor of the Shanedling Family
Leah and Phil Pickman: In memory of Harvey Chiat
Nancy Powell: In honor of Marilyn Chiat
Heidi Resnick: In memory of Micki Milavitz and In memory of Harvey Resnick
Bettimae Richman: In memory of Harvey Chiat
Rochelle and David Rottenberg: In honor of Dianne Siegel's recovery from surgery
Paul and Connie Ross: "We salute your good work"
Linda and Leonard Schloff: In honor of the Friends of B'nai Abraham
Carol and Shel Segal: In memory of Harvey Chiat
Joyce and Stan Segelbaum: In memory of Harvey Chiat
Ione and Sam Siegel: In honor of Margie Ostrov's special birthday, In honor of Charlie Ostrov's good health, In memory of Palmer Siegel and Bessie and Carl Siegel
Sheldon Siegel: In memory of Carl and Bessie Siegel and Palmer Siegel
Harold and Mickey Smith: In honor of Marilyn Chiat
Milton Smith: In memory of Evelyn Smith
Shelia and Roger Stageberg: In honor of all the good work
Nancy and Howard Strauss: In honor of our friend, Marilyn Chiat
Dr. H. Jerome and Elaine Stulberg: In memory of Harvey Chiat
Heidi Svenkeson: In honor of the Chiats
Penny and Paul Svenkeson: In honor of Marilyn Chiat
Judi and Buddy Tennebaum: Wishing Dianne Siegel a speedy recovery
Rhoda and Merrill Toles: In honor of Marilyn Chiat and in memory of Harvey Chiat
Rolland and Ada Walt: In memory of Ben and Pearl Walt
Art and Jan Warner: In memory of Harvey Chiat, In honor of Marilyn Chiat
Steven and Lisa Weisman: In memory of Irving and Shayndel Weisman
Kathy and Howard Zack: In honor of Margie and Charlie Ostrov

Gifts of kind and other aid: November 2008 – April 2009

Janet Greenberg Vukson: Ketubah of Harry and Sara Levant dating to 1917

If we have inadvertently missed your name in our contributors list, please let us know so that you can be included in our next newsletter. Newsletters may be seen and downloaded from our website: www.IronRangeJewishHeritage.org

We've made great progress but 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>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- costrov@gmail.com -or- phill037@umn.edu</p>	
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