



Dear Friends, Followers, Donors,

This will be our last MAILED newsletter. Future newsletters and items of interest will be sent by email. If you haven't already done so, PLEASE send your email address to [costrov@gmail.com](mailto:costrov@gmail.com) or you can also sign-up on our website, [IronRangeJewishHeritage.org](http://IronRangeJewishHeritage.org). We appreciate your support and hope that you will continue to stay interested and involved.

Friends of B'nai Abraham

## WE WON AN AWARD!

Board members of B'nai Abraham with Award



Pictured are: (Standing) Larry Chiat, Alan Milavetz, Mike Blehert, Charlie Ostrov. (Seated) Marilyn Chiat, Dianne Siegel, Margie Ostrov, and Elaine Chiat. Board members not present: Jim Rubenstein, Judy Karon, Jo Doig, Ann Shanedling Phillips.

## **CELEBRATING THE IMPACT AWARD FROM THE MINNESOTA PRESERVATION ALLIANCE**

Each year the Minnesota Preservation Awards jury and Rethos, formerly known as the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, sends out a request for nominations for a series of awards for outstanding historic preservation projects. This year, the Friends of B'nai Abraham submitted an application for our restoration project to the Minnesota Preservation Alliance. The narrative, written by Marilyn Chiat for the nomination is in this newsletter. Charlie and Margie Ostrov also submitted all of the required supporting data, including photographs and names of stakeholders. We later received an email from Rethos that B'nai Abraham had been selected by the Awards Jury and its board to receive one of its four Impact Awards in recognition not only of the successful preservation of an important historic structure, but also of the impact its restoration and reuse has on its community. The announcement notes that this year Rethos received many amazing nominations making the selection of winners exceptionally difficult.

Unlike all other projects that were honored at the celebration, B'nai Abraham was distinguished as the only not-for-profit preservation project accomplished by a team of dedicated volunteers who oversaw the work done by professional preservationists. We all have reason to be proud and to celebrate not only the award, but also the beautiful synagogue we saved and still stands in Virginia as evidence of its once vibrant Jewish community.



## **Application to the Preservation Alliance by Marilyn J. Chiat**

Twenty year ago, people driving past a red brick building located on the east corner of 5th Street and 4th Avenue North in Virginia, MN, either ignored it, or viewed it as yet another abandoned piece of property. Perhaps some recalled that it was a synagogue, B'nai Abraham, erected by the city's once populous Jewish community, but few knew that when it was dedicated in 1910, the local newspaper hailed it as the "the most beautiful church (sic) on the Iron Range." Over the ensuing years, the synagogue's congregants experienced the same ups and downs as others on the Range. As opportunities dwindled their children moved away, and while they aged in place, their numbers too diminished to the point where they could no longer maintain their beautiful building. However, its historic and architectural importance did not go unnoticed, and in the 1980s it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, the only synagogue in Minnesota to be so honored.



**Social Hall with an Exhibit**



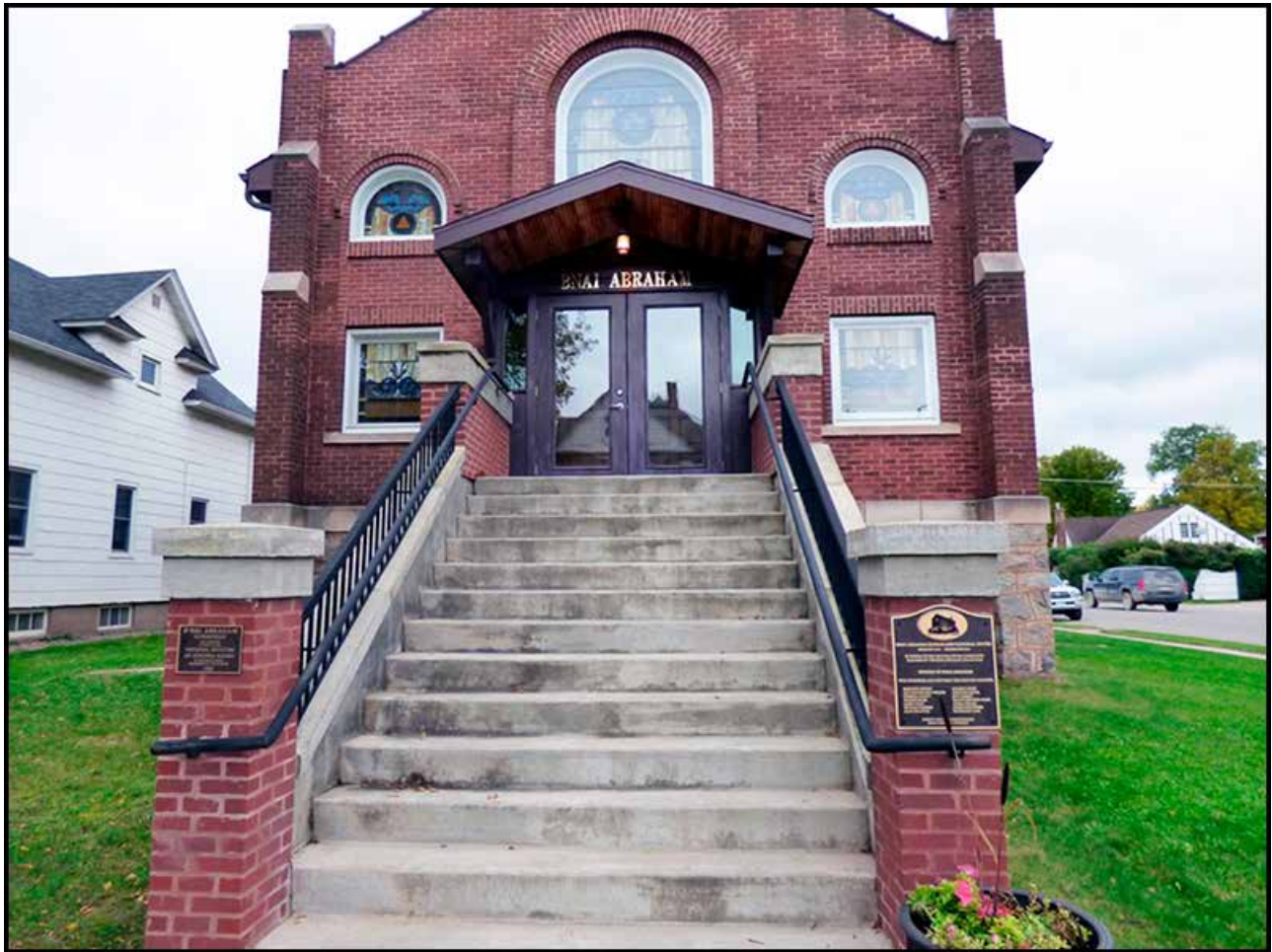
**The Sanctuary**

It was at this time that students from the University of Minnesota began to travel to the Range to record the history of its Jewish community. They were surprised to find such an impressive and historic synagogue in what to them was an unlikely location. Soon word of the building and its endangered condition spread, and in 2004 a group of individuals whose families were either members of the congregation, or were interested in the preservation of historic structures, visited Virginia. While there they spoke to community members regarding the possible preservation of the building and its reuse by the city as a museum, preserving the history of the Range's Jewish community, and as a cultural center. The response was positive, including interest by the Virginia Historical Society in participating in the effort. Thus a not-for-profit organization, The Friends of B'nai Abraham, was founded.

A team of preservationists' visited the building, found it to be structurally sound, but in need of complete restoration. Plans were drawn, and the Friends began a fund-raising effort. Thanks to Legacy Funding from the MN Legislature administered by the State Historic Preservation Office and donations from other foundations and hundreds of individuals, the dream of preserving, restoring and reusing this historic building has been realized. There is now a beautifully restored edifice that is used by Virginians and their Range neighbors for a variety of events -- music, lectures, meetings, exhibits; the possibilities are endless.

## THE BUILDING AS IT LOOKS TODAY

*Note new sign above the door:*  
B'NAI ABRAHAM



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. It now serves 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.

## SUMMER PROGRAMS

As in previous years, we had many outstanding summer programs!

All our programs are offered free to the public. Some groups ask for a free will donation.

Sunday, May 19 – A Touch of Class. This group of male and female voices from across the Iron Range sang jazz and other popular choral music.

Saturday, June 8 – Steven Sokela – Steven is a young musician from the Iron Range who sang opera and folk music.

Saturday, July 13 – Northern Lights Festival Musicians under the direction of Veda Zjponcic played classical music at B'nai Abraham as they have for a number of years.

Saturday, July 27 – The Singing Slovenes under the direction of Frank Bucar, performed folk music from Slovenia and other European countries.

Saturday, September 28 – The Duluth/Superior Harbormasters with Steve Lapatka presented “Home on the Range”, in barbershop style.

In addition to previous improvements such as a handicap lift and handicap restrooms, the building is now air-conditioned. This should be a great asset for those using the building.

There are only one or two minor other restoration or maintenance items that need to be done. Those include tuck-pointing which preserves the brick and a sliding door at the bottom of the stairs to the lower level. That door would keep the heat in the lower level to keep the pipes from freezing when the building is not in use.

**Individual Contributions  
May 2019- October 2019**

Alan Apter	Charles and Margie Ostrov
Mike and Sue Blehert	Allen and Marcia Oleisky
Wayne and Bernie Christensen	Anne Sandvig
Larry and Shonna Dunphy-Orso	Rabbi Ron and Judy Shapiro
Joyce Giblin	Dianne Siegel
Alan and Mary Hoberg	Sharon Steinfeldt
Virginia McBride	Ben Yokel
Rhoda and Don Mains	

**Special Contributions  
May 2019 - October 2019**

Howard and Heidi Gilbert: In honor of Charlie and Margie Ostrov.  
Artis Silverman: In memory of Rosabelle Berkoff and Ann Stanley.  
Alan Milavetz and Bonnie Resnick: In honor of the 100th Birthday of Sam Nilva and in honor of Rick Weiland's special birthday.  
Morris and Judy Sherman: In honor of Charlie and Margie Ostrov.  
Bob and Judy Marans: In honor of Dianne and Leighton Siegel.  
Trudy Bers: In memory of mother, Saragrace Kenner.  
Cynthia Spikell: In honor of Ann Phillips.  
Bert and Susan Gross: In Honor of Ann Phillips.  
Charles and Margie Ostrov: In honor of Sam Siegel's 93rd Birthday.  
Cyril Greenbaum: In memory of Beverly Greenbaum.  
Lauren Nelson: In memory of Bonnie Nelson, 1963 classmate.  
Dianne Siegel: In honor of Sam Siegel's 93rd Birthday.  
Mel Sigel: In memory of Markle Karlen.  
Priscilla Falkowski: In memory of Tom Falkowski

**Board of Directors of the Friends of B'nai Abraham**

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Charles Ostrov MD, Treasurer  
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