

# The history of Temple Shalom of Sussex County

In Eastern Sussex County, the most Northerly of New Jersey's Counties is located the town of Franklin Borough. Part of Hardyston Township until 1913, when the residents of Franklin Furnace decided to withdraw from the Township. They incorporated and formed a municipal government with a population of over three thousand.

There are many communities that have been close-



ly connected with one economic resource. This was the case with Franklin, with many varieties of minerals discovered there, several of which are not to be found anywhere else in the world.

The presence in the earth of large quantities of Zinc created a situation, which became inextricably intertwined with the lives of these people. They flocked to the area because of the Zinc, and the area developed and prospered.

There was an influx of immigrants to mine the Zinc. Some were brought in from Mexico, others were met at the boats coming in from Ireland, but the great majorities were Hungarian. A smattering of Russians and English also settled in Franklin.

Many mining companies operated in Franklin during the Nineteenth Century. The Edison Ore Processing Plant operated in Ogdensburg adjacent to Franklin Furnace, and the population increased. A town of One thousand sprang up near the Edison mines, called Summerville. Miners and mechanics found employment there.

All the mining interests in Franklin eventually were united into the New Jersey Zinc Company. From 1897 on the operation of the Zinc Company, with the utilization of the most modern technology, became one of the foremost mining operations in the world. Franklin came to be considered the model-mining town of the United States. As the New Jersey Zinc Company prospered, so did the people.

Franklin attracted itinerant peddlers, especially those who could speak the language of the miners. Ogdensburg also attracted merchants because of the Thomas A. Edison enterprises.

Among the earliest Jewish immigrants to Franklin were two Russians, the Mindlin brothers, Samuel, coming first in 1901, and then later Abraham. By 1916 Samuel owned an icehouse, then he became an upholsterer. Abraham worked in a mill, and then started a clothing store. When the New Jersey Zinc Company bought his store, he purchased land in Ogdensburg and opened a General Store.

Near the present Temple Shalom site on Oak Street was a Cohen's yards goods store. There were quite a few Hungarian Jews and Jews from other Eastern European countries who settled, prior to World War I in what was Franklin Furnace - The Weisses who ran a clothing store on Main Street; The Hirsh brothers, who ran Liquor and Grocery Stores in Hamburg adjacent to Franklin. The Markowitz family and the Rosen Families, who respectively ran Grocery and Bakery businesses. Among other early settlers were also the Herzenbergs, and the Honigs.

A Russian Jew, Joseph Charles, started his peddling on a horse and wagon, and then settled in the town of Sussex. For many years his family operated the Joseph Charles Department Store.

There were many, many more merchants and individuals who created businesses in the surrounding communities.

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One would assume that the New Jersey Zinc Company would resent and be hostile to the new merchants. After all, Franklin was a company town with company owned stores and houses, but the Zinc Company was helping to build Franklin. There were nice relations between the merchants and the company.

The First Presbyterian Church of Franklin Furnace was constituted on Sunday April 22, 1894 on Oak Street in a building that had been erected in 1832. This structure has been in continuous use for various religious purposes.

Early in 1911, the matter of a new church building was discussed. The New Jersey Zinc Company donated a site, and on December 7, 1913, ground was broken for the new edifice, and a new brick church was dedicated on December 2, 1914.

The Congregation Sons of Israel had been in existence since 1909 when seventeen members banded together and purchased a Torah. They met in each other's homes looking forward to the time when a suitable building could be obtained.

On March 3, 1919, there was a Historic celebration. On that day, The Presbyterian Congregation deeded (sold, for a token sum of one hundred dollars) their old building on Oak Street to the Congregation Sons of Israel. The stipulation was that the building was to be used for religious purposes only. The joy was overwhelming when the Synagogue officially opened. Prior to that, the con-

gregants had been using the building for several years, repairing it where and when necessary. The First Bar Mitzvah within its walls took place in 1919, Abraham Mindlin's son Moxie Mindlin. For the Holidays or for special occasions, a Rabbi would be brought in to Franklin.

On August 4, 1920, the Congregation purchased land on North Church Road from Ellsworth Rude to be used as burial ground. Up to that point, the families used cemeteries on Long Island or other preferred locations.

The central raised dais in the synagogue - called the "bema" in Hebrew - was added by the congregation shortly before the building was legally deeded to them. It is in the Sephardic Style. The win-



dows in the Temple are the originals. Everything is as it was, except for the vestibule that was added in 1954, which was used for classes and recreational use, and has been upgraded several times since.

For many years, the synagogue services were conducted in the Orthodox manner, women upstairs, then later on downstairs, but the sexes were separated. Women sat on one side of the sanctuary, men on the other. Another separation that took place had nothing to do with religion. The Hungarians and Russians separated themselves into groups. The congregation grew until the membership reached fifty families.

Over the years, more families moved in to the area, the Jewish population became more

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enmeshed into the local clubs, government offices, fire departments, law enforcement, and other businesses.

The ore deposit ran out in Franklin in 1954, but the Sterling Mine in Ogdensburg continued. When the New Jersey Zinc Company mine closed in 1955 the population in Franklin dropped by one thousand.

Sizeable Jewish populations were now evident in Newton, the County Seat, as well as Port Jervis NY. Both had Synagogues with Full-time Rabbis, whereas by 1963, Congregation Sons of Israel had dwindled to ten families.

A trickle of other families had joined the congregation, families which had joined during the 30's, 40's and 50's. Some elected to travel to Newton, or Port Jervis with their children for Hebrew Instruction and services.

Once a year, for the High Holidays, Sons of Israel would 'import', generally from New York City, a rabbinical student, Cantorial, or Seminary Student to conduct the services for the dwindling congregation. By 1963 it was difficult to get a "minion". Some of the older congregants had died, some had moved away, some of the first generation Americans had also moved, and Congregation Sons of Israel was left with a building and no members.

Prior to Yom Kippur for quite a few years, Paul Weiss, as President of the Temple, would phone the congregants ahead of time, to ascertain that there would be a presence of at least ten men over the age of thirteen. Confusion reigned if someone had to leave for a few minutes to go to the bathroom. It is against the Hebrew religion for less than the prescribed "minion" to pray in the sanctuary.

The townships surrounding the Borough of Franklin had a surge of new settlers during the 1960's and 70's, especially Vernon. In the latter Township, a group of active young Jewish families had formed

a congregation named Temple Shalom. This was a Reform group that met at the Grange Hall. They had people and no building. Congregation Sons of Israel had a building and no people. The logical resolution to this problem was a merger, which took place on February 5, 1975.

The original agreement was that the Synagogue was to be used for Orthodox services only, and the new name was to be Temple Shalom.

It was only a matter of time when the inevitable occurred - Reform Services became the order of the day. As various compromises were

reached, older members passed on, younger ones joined - changes were made in regards to the rituals. It should be noted that there has been compromise on both sides of the merged congregations; that is very commendable and is as it should be.

The general consensus prevailed (and still prevails) that it is better to have a viable, active Temple, a vibrant part of the Jewish Community, than nothing at all. It is a far cry from previous times, of the one-day-per year Yom Kippur open door.

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