

# The Synagogue Journal

## 1856-2006

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Shabbat Behar Bechukotai

View the Contents of Issue 20 at  
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### Issue 20 B'nai Mitzvah

#### In this issue ...

About "children of the commandments", readers familiar with Kane Street Synagogue traditions will find that our mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century predecessors took similar pleasure in their children's Bar Mitzvah and Confirmation services. Their joy is evidenced in trustee minutes and Brooklyn Eagle articles that describe parties tendered to Confirmation classes and the presentation of Kiddush cups and books, in the text of Rabbi Friedlander's May, 1890 address in "Hebrew Rites" and in Leopold Bennett's 1890 "Bah-mitzvah" speech in "Man's Estate".

The Congregation recently compiled a B'nai Mitzvah Registry of students, their residences, and their parents' names and occupations. A treasure trove for genealogical researchers, "The Synagogue Journal" includes a directory arranged by decades, starting with the 1860s. In 2005, at the completion of the Goldman Educational Center, a new mezuzah for the center door of the Sanctuary was dedicated by a number of Kane Street Synagogue B'nai Mitzvah to honor fifteen generations of young people who celebrated their coming of age with the Congregation. The synagogue gratefully recognizes our B'nai Mitzvah alumni who have supported the synagogue's renewal.

An article by Joseph Goldfarb about Confirmation services during the early twentieth century at Kane Street reveals the significance of the synagogue's center door to thirteen-year-olds. During Joseph's youth, Confirmation was the only occasion when the door was used. Conversations with Irving Weissler and Albert Socolov add to the lore of coming-of-age in the 1920s and 1930s.

Rabbi Sam Weintraub reports on the ways students and their families currently prepare for Bar and Bat Mitzvah. "The families get written guidelines through a Bar Bat Mitzvah Handbook, which is now being revised. I send out a mailing two years ahead, around January, to all the 1995 births or 2008 B'nai Mitzvah with a form to request dates in 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> preference. They reply by the end of March and assignments are made. Students are generally expected to have full Day School or Hebrew School experience. In unusual situations we will make up somewhat for it but generally at least two years class experience is required, plus special Bar/Bat Mitzvah tutoring. The Hebrew School students receive a Kiddush cup from the Hebrew School."

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During the last few decades, Kane Street Synagogue has observed special occasions such as "twinning" with Soviet peers in the 1980s. In 1991, 14-year-old Soviet émigré Stanley Ioffe became a Bar Mitzvah. Jane Abramowitz was our first Bat Mitzvah in 1978. Three generations of women read from the Torah in 1989. In 1976 Past President Arthur Lichtman began a Kane Street tradition of chanting his Haftarah on the anniversary of his Bar Mitzvah. The congregation welcomes adults to become Bat or Bar Torah. In 1999, Joey Stulberg, a remarkable young man, chanted his Haftarah and delivered his Dvar Torah via a portable computer. In 2002, Esther Gottesman, Albert Socolov's granddaughter, celebrated her "Bas Mitsve" with a speech about mitzvot, family and community.

Carol Levin, Editor

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**“A Hebrew Confirmation”** Credit: *Brooklyn Eagle*, June 4, 1880, Page 2

**“Jewish Confirmations”** Credit: *Brooklyn Eagle*, August 20, 1887, Page 4

**“Man’s Estate”** Credit: *Brooklyn Eagle*, January 25, 1890, Page 6

**“Hebrew Rites”** Credit: *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 26, 1890, Page 1

### **Bar Mitzvahs of the 1930s**

Albert Socolov, Joseph Goldfarb and Irving Weissler share recollections of their Bar Mitzvahs at Kane Street Synagogue.

### **Confirmations of Faith**

Milestones include Confirmation (1873), Bat Mitzvah (1978), three generations read from the Sefer Torah (1989) and a Bas Mitzva reflects on mitzvot, family and community (2002)

(image: Albert Socolov & Esther Gottesman)

### **B’nai Mitzvah Twinning with Soviet Jewry – 1987**

B’nai Mitzvahs pair with peers in Soviet Union unable to practice Judaism.

### **“Why is this boy’s bar mitzvah so special?”**

Credit: *The Jewish Week*, issue prior to June 29, 1991

Gitelle Rapoport reports on Stanley Ioffe, a 14-year-old immigrant from the USSR who celebrated his Bar Mitzvah at Kane Street Synagogue

### **“Ancient Rite, Modern Means”**

Credit: *The New York Times*, May 16, 1999

Katherine E. Finkelstein reports on Joey Stulberg’s extraordinary Bar Mitzvah and the preparations taken so that “this severely impaired and highly gifted” boy could do what Joey’s father reminds us, “what boys and girls have done for thousands of years”.

### **B’nai Mitzvah Directory**

Kane Street Synagogue’s B’nai Mitzvah Registry includes the congregation’s more than one thousand Bar and Bat Mitzvah from the 1860s to the present. To add a name to the registry or to correct information, [click here](#).

## About the Journal ...

The Synagogue Journal” is a one-year online publication at [www.kanestreet.org/historical\\_journal.html](http://www.kanestreet.org/historical_journal.html), designed to highlight prominent individuals and events during the Kane Street Synagogue congregation’s past 150 years.

We welcome submissions of reminiscences, letters and photographs to help shape the BIAE story. For a list of upcoming Journal themes or to read past issues, see “Archives” located under the Journal banner.

Special thanks to: Rabbi Samuel Weintraub, Vivien Shelanski, Dugans Martinez and Jack Levin; Brooklyn Daily Eagle Online™, Brooklyn Public Library; [www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle](http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle); *The New York Times*, *The Jewish Week*

### CONFIRMATION.

#### Services at the Boerum Place Synagogue This Morning.

Confirmation services were held at half past eleven o'clock this morning in the Jewish Synagogue on Boerum place near State street. The Jewish law requires that at the age of thirteen all children of the faith shall be confirmed, and as two of the youthful attendants at the Synagogue reached that age this morning, it was deemed well that they should be confirmed together. Their names are Jacob Cohen and Alfred Newman. The Synagogue was crowded with the members of the congregation, and twenty of the youthful associates of those to be confirmed occupied front seats. Many of the people present wore over their shoulders what is known as the "tlasse" or the "the robe of holiness." Those only who have been confirmed, and who have obligated themselves to uphold the laws of the Jewish covenant, are permitted to wear the "tlasse." Rabbi Tulsner officiated at the services, and at their commencement the boys to be confirmed stepped inside the railings at either side of him. Prayer in Hebrew was then offered, all the congregation standing. As is customary in the Synagogue, the hat was not removed. Young men are married with their hats on, and so these two boys were this morning confirmed without having to uncover their heads. After the prayer the Rabbi delivered an address on Hebrew confirmation, its solemn rites and the resolutions that ought to be formed in the minds of those who were to be confirmed. At the conclusion of his remarks he changed his position so as to face the boys, and then asked them if they were willing to obligate themselves to the upholding of the Jewish laws. Having replied in the affirmative, the boys were confirmed. They then faced the audience, and each of them delivered an address in English on confirmation. Newman spoke first, and for his age his remarks were neat, concise and well put. Both boys explained in plain language the nature of confirmation, and the services were brought to a close with singing. Before leaving the synagogue the "tlasse" was placed over the shoulders of both boys, and they were congratulated by all present.

## A HEBREW CONFIRMATION

*To the Editor of the Brooklyn Eagle:*

Permit me to obtrude upon your generosity by requesting the publication of this note. As was mentioned in your edition of the 30th ult., under caption of "Confirmation," Isaac, the son of Alexander Henry, Esq., of Atlantic avenue, passed through childhood's epoch and entered man's estate at the synagogue, Boerum place, last Saturday. The weekly portion of the law read consisted of the recapitulation of the Levites' consecration, the second Passover, the cloud and fire, the journey of Israel to Paran, Moses' blessing and appointment of seventy elders. The part apportioned the confirmant was the final paragraph and the Haftorah or Addenda, comprising the restoration of the temple promised under the type of Joshua, the high priest, construction of the future candlestick, by which is foreshown the good success of Zerubbabel's foundation, ending with "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain, and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace, unto it," which the young gentleman intoned in a clearly audible and pleasant manner. The pulpit was decorated with vases of variegated and fragrant plants at the expense of the parents. The reading desk was covered with an exquisitely wrought covering presented by the confirmant and a handsomely clothed scroll placed by him into the ark and confined to the keeping of the synagogue. At the close of the ceremonies the newly initiated member was presented with a silver basket of choice flowers by his preceptor. On the following day the relatives, friends and invited guests of the family were assembled at the residence, 96 Atlantic avenue, where a handsome collation was spread, over which toasts were given and addresses made by Messrs. Counselor Lippman, Levy, Hermann and Corn; the latter gentleman in an able manner dwelt upon the duties of a confirmant, and exhorted the young member to the endeavor of living a life of chastity, piety and worth, that he might in after life become a credit to his parents and useful to the community at large. Julius Corn, Esq., is the efficient superintendent of the Sunday schools attached to the synagogue, and was introduced to the guests by Dr. Harfeld, the preceptor. Master Isaac Henry was then introduced by his tutor, and delivered an elocutional address, drawing tears from many a dry eye. After the preceptorial lection, which took as its *primum mobile*, sixth and seventh verses of Zachariah, chapter iv: "Then He answered and spake unto me, saying, this is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit." *Vox et præterea nihil* (shall Israel be restored to their country and realm), saith the Lord of hosts. "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain, and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying: Grace, grace unto it." The guests retired to the drawing room, where they remained to a late hour.

The confirmant was the recipient of many costly presents, and among the most noticed were those received by his reverend teacher from the parents and his pupil.

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## **JEWISH CONFIRMATIONS.**

### **Two Boys Made Happy in the Boorum Place Synagogue.**

Two 13 year old boys, Rudolph Jacobs and Louis Kallscher, were made happy this morning in the Beth Israel Synagogue, corner of Boorum place and State street, by being confirmed in the Hebrew faith. The Jewish people call it "Bar Miswah," but it means the same as confirmation. The ceremonies were very impressive throughout and the little fellows, especially Master Jacobs, went through the ordeal in a graceful manner. The services were conducted by the Rev. Dr. Ettinger, assisted by the Rev. Philip Manasse, on the part of Master Jacobs, and by Dr. Kern on the part of Master Kallscher. The boys read a portion of the Pentateuch separately, and after receiving the blessing returned thanks to their parents and extended the right hand of fellowship to the congregation. While Master Kallscher offered up a silent prayer, Master Jacobs made a lengthy address in English, taking for his text "Behold I set before you this day a blessing and a curse." He said, among other things, that the hour was momentous to him, but he would promise to fulfill his duties as an Israelite.

At the end of the services the boys were warmly congratulated by their friends and taken home by their parents, where presents and other good things awaited their coming.

## MAN'S ESTATE.

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### **It is Attained by Three Mem bers of Beth Israel. Bah-Mitzvah Exercises in the Boerum Place Synagogue—The Public Pledges Made by the New Members.**

Bah Mitzvah service was celebrated this morning with much ceremony at the synagogue Beth Israel, at Boerum place and State street. The Bah Mitzvah is held whenever sons of members of the synagogue attain the age of 13, and the boy who has taken his Bah Mitzvah is no longer a child, but an independent member of the community and congregation, and at this service he wears the manly talis, or shoulder scarf, for the first time, and is allowed to sit among the men of the congregation. The service this morning was of special importance because there were three boys candidates for the honors of man's estate, and the synagogue was well filled with their friends. Two of the boys were the twin sons of T. Bennett, of 187 Eleventh street, Leopold K. and Richard W. Bennett, and the third was Aaron Levy, son of Frank Levy, of 109 Atlantic avenue. The boys and their parents were at the synagogue early. They were bright, manly fellows, and no freshman who had just passed his entrance examination at Yale, nor any youth who had just taken the oath of allegiance and was waiting to drop his first ballot in the box, could have been more full of enthusiastic anticipation. All that either of those ceremonies means to the Christian youth the Bah Mitzvah means to the young Hebrew.

The regular, impressive Jewish ritual was intoned by Rabbi M. Friedlander, assisted by Louis Jacobs, president of the congregation, and Isaac Lewison, vice president, with responses by the congregation. After the Thora, or five books of Moses, had been brought in solemn state from the ark and placed upon the aln memmor or reading desk and eight members of the congregation had been summoned to participate in its reading, the word "Bah Mitzvah" was heard ringing out from the chant. There was a stir and rustle among the congregation and little Leopold Bennett left the seat beside his father and mother and ascended the steps to the platform. He wore a derby hat, but the talis was not yet upon his shoulders. The boy took his place among his elders before the Thora and in a clear voice read the chapter of the law appointed for him in the original Hebrew. The reading had more emphasis and expression than that of a boy of the same age who is wrestling with a passage of "Virgil," but, otherwise, the effect was much the same.

Later each of the other boys was called up and read his portion of the law. Then the ritual was finished by the rabbi and congregation, the thora was borne in solemn procession about the aln memmor and restored to its place behind the rich curtains of the ark and the climax of the ceremonies was reached. The boys, each invested with a new and spotless white talis, went up the platform steps and took places among the elders in the seats at the side. Then, one after the other, each ascended the high pulpit between the platform and the ark and made a speech pledging his fidelity and undying love to his parents and to the service of God. This speech is a serious matter and involves training under a tutor for two or three months. It is written out and committed to memory beforehand, and the elders watch with keen interest to see how the new members of the congregation acquit themselves. As a boy who has not hesitated or stumbled comes down from the pulpit there is a rustle of sympathetic approval that almost amounts to applause. These boys were trained for the ordeal by the Rev. Dr. Froelich, formerly of the Froelich Institute, and who is about to take charge of a Reformed Hebrew congregation in Schenectady. The first speech was made by Leopold Bennett. In the course of it he said:

My Dear Parents, Friends and Worthy Congregation—As I stand before you in this house of worship, in this holy pulpit, in the presence of the Great God of our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I feel keenly that a great and heavy responsibility rests upon my shoulders. Like the great King David I pray now, I raise my eyes toward the mountains from whence help shall come to me. But, my friends, I fear not, for my help comes from God, the creator of heaven and earth. I walk with God upon this new pathway of life and He will send His angels to guide, to shelter and protect me, and to grant me the blessings of our ancient and holy religion that I uttered but now in your presence. Amen. My friends, my Bah Mitzvah animates me now to select poetical figures to express that deep impression on my mind. The word of God is a heavenly rose which I will fasten to my heart to-day that it shall remain there to be an everlasting ornament, a true decoration. I know well enough that I leave to-day in spirit my parental house and my parental home, and I cannot penetrate the veil that hides the future from my eyes. I do not know how far fate will lead me away from these dear surroundings and from my beloved parents, but I never tremble, for God is with me, and he will lead me. What a staff to a tired wanderer, that shall be religion to me, that I shall not fall or stumble on the pathway of life. This is the staff which the great lawgiver Moses meant should be in our hands when we leave the bonds of childhood. You, my dearly beloved parents, have been to me the shield in helplessness and childhood. You made me walk in the path of the Lord, the paths of right and justice. You were my staff that led me to this holy house of worship. I can say I thank Thee, O Lord, that Thou hast sent me the staff of my might, my beloved parents, from the Zion of my home. Mayst Thou, O Lord, bless them forever, be with them in the walk of life, and mayst Thou be their staff forever and ever. Amen.



Richard W. Bennett made a similar speech in German and Aaron Levy spoke in English, saying in part:

As the clouds are broken by the powerful rays of the sun and divides with its glow the heaviest clouds, so will always the memory of this day of my Bah-initzrah fill with sunshine and religious feeling my whole future. As the sun calls forth with its warmth the most delicate blossoms, so will the warm rays of parental love always induce me to be in the foremost ranks of the great army of true sons and devoted children. This feeling toward you will, I promise it faithfully, overthrow every impediment and break every obstacle. The teaching of the hour appeals so warmly to my heart that my last breath shall be of love and gratitude, which shall always illumine the future firmament of our life. Should some adverse fate be in store for me I will fight with the weapons of love and overcome all my enemies with virtue and justice. Never, never will I forget the happy hours spent in my parental home or the solemnity of this sacred hour. Amen.

# HEBREW RITES

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## Administered to Many Children Yesterday.

**Pentecost Celebrated in All the Jewish  
Temples of Worship—Little Ones Re-  
joice in the Giving of the Ten Com-  
mandments—Confirmation Exercises.**

Imposing ceremonies were held in the Jewish synagogues here and elsewhere yesterday in celebration of the commencement of the festival of Pentecost and the Feast of Weeks. In Hebrew the festival is called Shev ou onse or Youm Harbikoorim, the day of ripe fruits, in commemoration of the ancient customs of offering the first fruits of the harvest on a day of thanksgiving set aside for the purpose. The Feast of Weeks is so called because it denotes the end or last day of the seven weeks which the children of Israel were told by Moses to keep unto the Lord with tributes of free will offering. But above all is this day sacred and important in its character as the anniversary of that great and eventful epoch when the Lord at Sinai, in the year 2448 A. M., delivered unto the band of travelers who were gathered around the base of the mountain that glorious dispensation, the ten immortal principles of the Jewish code—the great repository of duty to God and man. The day is celebrated as the anniversary of the birth of religion, unlimited by state lines or national prejudices and universal in character. The sixth day of the Jewish month of Sivvon is the one selected by the Jews to celebrate these several events and to review with reverence and awe the history of their nation. Then also are confirmations made of those boys over 13 and girls over 12 years of age who wish to become thenceforth religiously responsible for their acts as members of the Jewish community.

At the Baith Israel Synagogue, corner of Boarum place and State street, eight confirmations were made by Rabbi M. Friedlander, the ceremony taking place immediately after the regular services. The interior of the church, which was crowded to the doors, presented a beautiful sight. Back of the pulpit platform was the ark containing the sacred parchment scrolls, screened by a rich yellow curtain with a central square of black. On this square, in letters of gold, was a Hebrew inscription, surmounted by a golden crown. This curtain is emblematic of the cloud which hung before the sanctuary in the temple. In front of the ark hung the never dying lamp commemorative of the perpetual light which formerly burned in the temple. Six cluster chandeliers surrounded the platform, the lights shining forth from banks of tall, green ferns which completely hid their bases from view. Alternating with the groups of ferns were banks of syringas, lilies and roses in such profusion as to hide almost every part of the platform, while suspended from the chandeliers was a wreath of evergreens which reached from either side of the ark to the front of the pulpit. Large hanging baskets swung from the galleries and a bunch of pure white lilies adorned the pulpit. At the conclusion of the Hebrew services Rev. Mr. Friedlander addressed the congregation in regard to the trust imposed on the Jews at the eventful time they were now celebrating. He took his text from Exodus xix: 5-6, and said among other things:

"And now if you will harken to my voice and observe my covenant you shall be to me the most beloved of all nations, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The Rabbi spoke of the sea of time that had passed since the King of Kings conferred upon the Abrahamitic race the mark of honor, "chosen people," and since Israel was appointed custodian of the Divine law. Yesterday they were gathered together to express their heartfelt joy and thanks for the dignity and honor. They were here to renew the promise given by their ancestors at the foot of Mount Sinai to execute faithfully the office and work which God had intrusted to them. That the Ten Commandments announced in flaming words by the Sovereign of the universe have the purest character, the softest counsels and the dearest charity, is admitted by every civilized man. The Jews were the first upon

whom beamed the rays of truth, Israel's mission was to advocate law, charity and truth. It was a fact that many Israelites were disloyal to the Mosaic law; the downfall of their temporal government was the end of fraudulent prophecy and tyrannical government. But the Jewish religion or Jews as a nation can no more be blamed for the vices of individuals than the constitution or citizens of this country for the evils of those who fill our penitentiaries. Three thousand years ago, when all mankind was prone to idolatry, the Jewish race was impressed with the lofty principle that it is improper to worship a God that is mortal, but a God who is uncreated, eternal, perfect, the author of all our affairs. Dr. Friedlander spoke at length on the customs and religious ceremonies of the Jews, and closed by charging his people that if they would retain the title of chosen people they must combine the worship of a true God with deeds for the interest of society.

At the conclusion of Dr. Friedlander's address the organ pealed forth a march and the fair confirmants advanced to the altar, four in each of the two aisles. On the right were Misses Jennie Sellar, Frances Sonustrahl, Anna Goldberg and Jennie Goldberg, and on the left Misses Bella Miller, Bertha Levison, Minnie Greenfield and Hannah White. All were dressed alike in costumes of white, with full waists, puff sleeves gathered above the elbow, and dainty lace collars peeping from the waves of hair which flowed about their shoulders. They formed a semi circle before the altar and united in singing "The Flower of Truth Blooming Here." Miss Miller then ascended to the pulpit and offered a prayer for herself and her sister confirmants. Her voice was clear, her enunciation distinct and her manner most earnest, making the ceremonial so effective that tears arose to the eyes of many in the audience. At the conclusion of the prayer the girls seated themselves around the altar and Dr. Friedlander addressed and examined them in regard to their fitness for the responsibility they were about to take upon themselves. The confirmation sentences were then pronounced and a final prayer was offered from the pulpit by Miss Levison in a manner scarcely less thrilling and effective than that of her sister confirmant. All kissed the sacred vail before the ark, received the benediction of the rabbi and were received into the arms of their parents with kisses and fond embraces.

## **Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Bar Mitzvahs: Three Conversations**

Journal editor Carol Levin spoke with Irving Weissler, Joseph Goldfarb and Albert about their Bar Mitzvah experiences during the 1930s. The conversations offer several perspectives on the congregation, students, teachers, school program.

### **Irving Weissler - Bar Mitzvah – 1919**

This conversation took place on August 18, 2003 at Irving's Henry Street apartment. Although Irving's parents were BIAE members and he and his siblings attended classes there, his Bar Mitzvah was at B'nai Jacob.

#### **MY BAR MITZVAH**

IW: I was a member of BIAE since 1914, my parents were members and I became active when I got older.

CL: You attended the schools ... the Sunday school and the Talmud Torah. What was the difference between the two?

IW: Sunday school was only on Sunday and Talmud Torah was every day. I'm not sure how the Talmud Torah worked in those days.

CL: You did not have your bar mitzvah at the synagogue. What happened?

IW: There was another bar mitzvah there that day. I wasn't going to play second fiddle and have two bar mitzvahs on my bar mitzvah. Wolf the clothier, the rich guy.... His son was being bar mitzvah....his store was on Columbia Street, that was the big mall, Columbia Street... The owner's name was Shapiro.

CL: [Looking at the B'nai Mitzvah registry] I have some Shapiros - Abraham Shapiro, Arthur Shapiro, David Shapiro. They are the sons of Aaron, Eli and William...

IW: William was the owner of Wolf the clothier. ...They lived on 2<sup>nd</sup> Place. I lived on 47 2<sup>nd</sup> Place. Actually it was 2<sup>nd</sup> Place corner of Clinton. We had a store at 465 Clinton, so we used to use 465 Clinton Street as our address. The entrance to the apartment, although we had a stairs in our store leading up to the apartment, was on Clinton. We used both addresses.

CL: So getting back to your bar mitzvah. Was it held on your birthday in November?

IW: It was around that time, the 17<sup>th</sup>. I went to Atlantic Avenue, that small synagogue on Atlantic Avenue...B'nai Jacob.

CL: Did you get a special bar mitzvah suit?

IW: I guess so. I probably got it at Wolf the Clothier.... I don't remember the boy's name. Why would I remember? He interfered with my life... It's true. A bar mitzvah starts a young boy's life.

CL: Do you remember anything about your bar mitzvah training?

IW: Yeah, this itinerant rabbi came to the house and he learned with me. He prepared me. Rabbi Goldfarb didn't help me. I attended the Talmud Torah, but I don't think I went to completion.

#### **JEWISH LIFE AT HOME**

IW: My mother taught us to be good Jews and it's still there. [L: What was Friday night like in your house?] It wasn't standard. We had more of a dinner on Friday nights than other nights. It's all hit and miss. We had a candy store, and the business interfered with having a separate life as a family. [Where was the candy store located?] Downstairs, in fact, we had three or four places. We had one on Hoyt Street, that's where I went to public school 32 up the block. Then we had another one on President Street and Clinton. Those were the two stores that I remember my father having. It was hard making a living in those days. Our Passover I remember we had a room in back of the store and for Passover my mother made the Passover activities, the dinner in back of the store. For some reason I did something that my mother was annoyed about and I was going to get even on her and I went to the front of the store and took a Hershey bar, which you weren't supposed to eat because it was Passover, to punish her.

CL: Did you have Kosher foods, Kosher meats?

IW: Oh yes. We always had Kosher foods. There were Kosher butchers around. There were quite a few. Our dear Rabbi Goldfarb felt very responsible about being Kosher, and they observed. But that's rare today. We had Kosher food, but I don't know if we observed all the laws. The dinners in the synagogue were all Kosher and we said the proper prayers before and after the meal.

IW: I didn't get involved in any of that stuff. [sports] I was too busy with my studies and whatever was immediate at the candy store. My parents lived a different kind of life than the average person because of the store. [L: What were their hours?] The hours were whatever the next competitor did. We had to do. In other words, we didn't close our store until the store four blocks away was closed. (L: Eli Wallach's family had a candy store...) They were on Union Street. I met him. He was a tough guy. They had a candy stores on Union Street. That's where my school was, Public School 46. It wasn't a real candy store. He had candy, but there were tough things happening. When he wanted to get behind the counter, he didn't walk around but he jumped over the counter to get behind the counter to wait on someone. They were members of the synagogue I guess.

IW: We always had a Seder. The store was closed and we had the Seder in back of the store. There was a little room with a little kitchen and we lived our life around the store. Actually, I didn't have a real childhood as a result. There was a woman called Crazy Kelly, and she once took me, asked my mother's permission to take me to Fulton Street where they had the department stores. This was a whole new fairyland for me. I had never seen anything like it and I was a young child. My mother had no time to do those things, to take me to Fulton Street and shop. And this woman did it.

### **Joseph Goldfarb – 1931 Bar Mitzvah**

Joseph knew Kane Street Synagogue's educational system from the inside-out as the Rabbi's son and as a Sunday school teacher. This conversation took place in May 2002.

### **BAR MITZVAH**

The bar mitzvah boys had their instruction here [in the rabbi's office] one at a time, unless there was something they were all learning at the same time. The blessings before the *Haftorah* were uniform every week and they had these lessons together every week. Each individual candidate, my father taught those, the bar mitzvah readings.

My father composed special music for me the summer before my bar mitzvah. It was never published, but it's written down. I have the book, which I will try to find. I haven't thought about this music in all these years.

We didn't attend each other's bar mitzvahs.

I'm not sure there was always a kiddush every time there was a bar mitzvah. But when there was, it was a piece of cake and a cup of wine. There probably was schnapps, liquor, for the men, and wine for the rest of the congregation. Remember, from 1918 until 1933 there were the prohibition years, and you weren't permitted to sell alcohol except for sacramental purposes.

### **SUNDAY SCHOOL – TALMUD TORAH**

I was a teacher here. We had two kinds of teachers here. We had different schools here. We had a Talmud Torah and we had a Sunday school. The Talmud Torah was a small weekday school. The kids came for two hours, M-T-W-TH afternoon. That was the Hebrew School. And maybe the two hours were split between two classes. It was probably only one hour for any one student. The younger ones were sent out and the older ones came in. Four-to-five and five-to-six were the hours. There were no assemblies for the Talmud Torah. There were just the classrooms. The teachers were paid teachers and some were professional teachers. The pay was so low.

At the end of Talmud Torah, in May or June when the school year was ending, they had public examinations for pupils in each class. For the kids it was a very terrifying experience. They had folding chairs here [in the middle of the room facing the rabbi's desk]. The kids would be called in class by class. And along this wall (south wall) there would be another line of folding chairs for invited guests and parents to sit on the side. The classes would come in and then there would be an examination. My father or the teacher would ask them certain questions and hear the questions and then hear how well the children would respond or perform. If someone springs a surprise, it's a challenge for the kids to come up with the right kind of answer. After ten minutes or so that class would go out and the next class would come in.

The other school was a Sunday school. They met every Sunday for two hours in the morning, and it started for kids of about 6 or 7, more or less parallel with the public school classes, and they stayed through eight grades. And there was a graduation. Then there was a post-graduate which was a teachers training course. Once they passed the eighth grade they were considered competent in a year or two of "study" they became eligible to teach the younger grades. They taught the bible stories, the Genesis, the book of Exodus, that material. Usually every grade, every child had a text book which he was supposed to look at and study. There were volunteer teachers. Tuition was 5 cents a week. The teachers were not paid. The reward that the teachers got was that every year when the congregation had its annual dinner dance, which was an annual function that continued years and years. Each year the teachers were invited as guests of the congregation, no charge. It was a big gala, social affair. We had probably ten, twelve classes. The post-graduate teachers were 16, 17 years old. Some stayed on for a number of years and some never came back.

They bused in the kids from other neighborhoods, Jewish neighborhoods, and then bused to school there and then bused them home.

### **ABRAHAM SCHOLSKY – SHAMUS AND BAR MITZVAH TUTOR**

One of Mr. Scholsky's sidelines from the earlier years on was to give lessons. He was a sort of substitute Hebrew school. He used to go and give Hebrew lessons for a small fee to parents of children who didn't come to the Hebrew school here. We had that. In other words, it was like two institutions side-by-side. One was the Talmud Torah here, and the other was Mr. Scholsky. He used to walk from house to house to house, and would go in there for an hour at a time, or for however long he could hold the child's attention. This was to the sons of members and non-members. He was in terrific physical shape. He would grip your hand, and you thought it was caught in a press or vise. He was an extremely powerful man, not big, but extremely powerful. I don't know how he came to be that way, almost inhuman. Very powerful grip when he shook your hand, and it all came from walking. He used to walk from Court Street to Clinton Street to Columbia Street, and back to Smith Street. He was constantly walking all the time. They keep him on I don't know if he had a pension. He came back for a while. In all, he was probably here, working in one way or another for about 60 or 65 years. He came here when he was 20-years-old, and he stayed on into his 80's. [Mr. Scholsky was first associated with Talmud Torah Anshei Emes].

### **Albert Socolov - 1934 Bar Mitzvah**

This March 2002 conversation with Albert, his daughter Emily Socolov and journal editor Carol Levin occurred two months before Albert returned to Kane Street Synagogue for an aliyah at his grand-daughter's Bat Mitzvah.

### **MY BAR MITZVAH**

For my bar mitzvah, I was told that it was the longest *Haftorah*. It was Succoth time.

ES: Do you remember people who had *aliyahs* at your bar mitzvah. Did your father have an *aliyah*?

AS: He had an *aliyah*. I don't remember who else. It could have been some of my relatives. I was focused on my own involvement of the Bar Mitzvah, the words that I had to say and the section of the torah that I had to read. I enjoyed services at Kane Street. Rabbi Goldfarb was an unusual rabbi. He was a *chazzan* and he was a rabbi, and he was good at both.

CL: Did your mother participate in your Bar Mitzvah?

AS: She *kvelled*.

CL: Were there prayers or blessings that your parents made?

AS: No. All the prayers came from the rabbi.

CL: When was the Bar Mitzvah party held?

AS: I think it was the next day. There was a *kiddush* after the service, a buffet in the Sunday School Building. The service was Conservative. A lot of the prayers were in English as well as in Hebrew. I'm sure that there were Orthodox Jews who thought it was a *goyisha* service. Most of the people, if they drove, they'd park the car two or three blocks away. My father didn't have a car at the time.

CL: What were you wearing? Did you get a special Bar Mitzvah suit?

AS: Yep. You could go to B. Gordon on Allen Street, and you could get a blue suit with a pair of longies and a pair of knickers - two pair of pants. I think I wore the longies. I got a *tallis*. If I'm not mistaken, I think I got it from the rabbi as a contribution from the synagogue.

CL: Did you send invitations?

AS: If any invitations were sent out, they would have been sent out by my parents. But I think not, because the synagogue would announce that there was going to be a bar mitzvah. There were several bar mitzvahs announced on a fairly regular basis on a Saturday and Kiddush would follow. As far as any parties were concerned for the Bar Mitzvah boy and the family, that would usually be some place else in the neighborhood. Mine was held at my aunt's house. My Aunt Sophie lived in Flatbush where I had to give my bar mitzvah speech a second time... Everyone said, "Speech! Speech!"

ES: Did people get gifts for their bar mitzvah?

AS: Yes, but it was from their family. I don't think I ever received a bond. It the sort of presents that people in our economic position gave. I think I might have gotten a pen and pencil set by Parker. I went to a Bar Mitzvah years later of my cousin's kid in Long Island, and he got a set of golf clubs and a two-week vacation in some faraway place. It was a whole lot different in my neighborhood in my day.

### THE CLASS OF 1934

AS: They were having, I would guess, at least as many as fifteen or twenty Bar Mitzvahs a year. It was mainly a family thing because there's always a *kiddush* afterwards and then go their separate ways to family parties. We didn't necessarily go to other people's Bar Mitzvah parties, nor do I have any particular recollection of them coming to mine.

CL: Was there distinction made of the kids from the [Red Hook housing] project who attended the Sunday school?

AS: There was no distinction as far as the kids were concerned, but I have no doubt that there was a great deal of class discrimination among the trustees and the members of the synagogue excluding people like my father.

CL: Do you remember any kids dropping out of classes who couldn't afford the fare?

AS: The only thing I remember that would be appropriate to your question had to do with bar mitzvahs because if you could not afford a Bar Mitzvah on *Shabbes* you could be Bar Mitzvahed on *Mincha* service mid-week. It didn't cost anything. A Bar Mitzvah on *Shabbes* was an affair that they probably charged a certain fee for the synagogue and for the room in the adjacent building where the Talmud Torah was. There would be a contribution and a Kiddush, which would be an expense for the family. When there was a Bar Mitzvah on a Tuesday or Thursday, nobody asked why on a Tuesday or Thursday and not on a Saturday. Kids have a tough sensitivity about that.

ES: Was it a point of honor that you weren't Bar Mitzvahed on a Thursday?

AS: Of course. There was no question about that. People who were Bar Mitzvahed on a Tuesday or a Thursday at a Shacarit service, my mother had a great deal of compassion for them. It was a *shanda* and a *hara*. It was because they didn't have enough money.

AS: A lot people who had been members and attendees at the synagogue and had moved away, still were loyal and came back for various holidays. By and large, the size of the synagogue diminished during the period of time between my bar mitzvah and the next couple of years.

### SUNDAY SCHOOL AND TALMUD TORAH

I knew of no rabbi other than Rabbi Goldfarb. When I was preparing for my Bar Mitzvah, I received assistance from Rabbi Goldfarb, but there was also a teacher in the cheddar who was also involved, a man by the name of Irving Mirsky... I was taught the traditional things. I went to the rabbi a couple of times a week the year prior to my bar mitzvah, Talmud Torah every weekday afternoon and Sunday school. If my mother took me to services, I went to services on Saturday. I don't recall specifically how many and whether it was frequently. I did have other things to do on Saturday, and I was going to do them.

CL: What was the Hebrew School like?

AS: I went to Hebrew School when I was seven or eight years old [1928-1929]. I had the impression in retrospect that there was some conscious effort to make it seem like you were in an Eastern European *shtetl shul* with a long bench, and kids sitting at the bench. It was hardly your vision of contemporary educational methods. It was very, very structured. The teachers made the laws.

Usually there'd be an assembly after the Sunday school service. Around noontime, they'd come down and the rabbi would speak to the kids. There would be some kind of program based upon whatever holiday was approaching or occurring. On the second floor, there was an office that was a meeting room for the board of trustees, the Rabbi had an office off that room, and then the other rooms were Talmud Torah classrooms. The partitions in the classrooms were wooden on the bottom and glass above.

ES: Where did the Talmud Torah take place?

AS: The Talmud Torah took place after school, everyday. When I was little, I was walked there by a neighbor. My mother helped my father in the store.

ES: In Talmud Torah, did they separate you in classrooms by age? Did girls and boys study in the same classrooms?



AS: My recollection is, it was mainly boys, and yes, there was some separation by age. It was a pretty substantial curriculum. I remember I had books and workbooks. I was taught to read and to write in Hebrew. There were no craft projects, no singing. There was singing in the Sunday School.

The Sunday school had a curriculum in English. There was Samson Bendole's book, The History of the Jews, the holidays, the Yiddish religion from the point of view of Americanization learning about historical events. There were more kids who went to the Sunday school than the Talmud Torah. There were teenagers who attended, although I didn't choose to continue after my bar mitzvah. I never participated in any youth groups or field days.

CL: At the Sunday school, did you have to pay for your books and workbooks?

AS: I suspected that my mother paid for them, but she didn't ask me for a contribution, so I didn't know what she was paying for them, nor am I privy to any of the things that may have gone on between the rabbi and my parents concerning my progress or lack thereof. A lot of it was done by adults with adults. Mirsky was an old world teacher. They'd play a lot of pranks on him because he was rigid and very European. It was easy to make his life miserable. The Sunday school teachers were young women and young men. I think Rabbi Goldfarb's daughters were teachers. They tried to put together a faculty. It wasn't that easy. (CL: The teachers were volunteers) They were worth every penny of it.

## Confirmations of Faith

By Carol Levin

Congregation Baith Israel, Kane Street Synagogue's predecessor, held its first Confirmation for girls on September 1873 at the Boerum Place Synagogue. The Rev. Dr. Tintner led Confirmation services on Succoth for eight young ladies, the misses Ida Cohen, Fannie Bass, Sarah Levenson, Jennie Mauthner, Betsy Jacobs and Emma Pinner. By May 1890, Baith Israel's confirmation had become very elaborate. Brooklyn Daily Eagle article "Hebrew Rites" reported that eight twelve-year-old confirmants "were dressed alike in costumes of white, with full waists, puff sleeves gathered above the elbow, and dainty lace collars peeping from the waves of hair which flowed about their shoulders." The article describes the Boerum Place Synagogue, the floral decorations, the ceremony and includes Dr. Friedlander's address. ([click here for article](#)).

During the mid-nineteenth century, confirmations were held several times a year. Towards the turn of the century the rites were celebrated on Shavuoth, and both girls and boys were confirmed together.

Joseph Goldfarb, the son of Rabbi Israel Goldfarb has fond memories of the Confirmation services in the 1930s. "The Confirmation was the formal graduation ceremony for the Sunday school at the end of the eighth grade that took place on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of Shavuos. I still keep the programs in my Shavuos Matzhor. The ceremony was very impressive and very nice. For that occasion we opened the center door of the sanctuary. Usually for regular Shabbes services we used the two side doors. The girls all wore white dresses. I don't know how much of this is a direct copy of certain Christian ceremonies. I used to see Catholic girls all wore white dresses at Confirmation time or Communion. Anyhow, they wore white dresses and had corsages, and the boys had a carnation in their lapel. It took place on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of Shavuos. After the whole service was completed, we didn't sing "En Kelohenu" and we didn't say "Ohenu Mishebenu" until later. Then after the main part of the Musaf service, we had the center door open, the graduates would come in. The girls on one side and the boys on one side, girl boy girl boy and they'd match. And we had the choir performing at that time. If you look at the program, you'll see Anthem. We used to sing a beautiful anthem, "God I will extol thee now". Then the choir would sing "En Kelohenu" as part of the program. There would be small speeches by each one of the graduates, some kind of a presentation, and in between the speeches there would some music. We used to sing, "Entreat me not to leave thee" That's an excerpt from the book of Ruth when Naomi leaves her daughter-in-law Ruth and she wants to go with her and the mother-in-law Naomi says no you stay here in your country, you are a Moabitess. And Naomi said no, I will go with you. There are several settings of that to music. The one that we used to sing here was composed by Gounod, a French composer. The choir did those unaccompanied, and one or two other things, which the choir prepared. Then after we had done that, part of the ceremony, because Shavuos is the day for offering up the first fruits that were produced in the farms and in the vineyards, they had a presentation in the form of flowers, a dedication to the service of God, the floral offering. Then there would be a recessional and they would march down the aisles and out the doors and the graduates went their way. I suppose they had private parties."

Kane Street Synagogue held Confirmation services until the 1940s. When student enrolment dwindled, the school's classes for girls and boys were combined as coeducational. Confirmation services were discontinued and Bar Mitzvahs were rare occasions during the seventeen-year period with no Sunday school or Talmud Torah classes (1954 – 1970). Rabbi Henry Michelman remembers there was only one Bar Mitzvah during his tenure at Kane Street Synagogue, in 1969 with Matthias Futerman. In the 1976, with the infusion of young families, the Congregation organized a Hebrew School called "Prozdor." David Morris Cohen is the first Bar Mitzvah from the school. In 1978 Jane Abramowitz becomes our first Bat Mitzvah. With each decade since Kane Street Synagogue's revitalization, the number of Bar and Bat Mitzvah students grows. ([click here for the list of B'nai Mitzvot arranged by years](#))

In the last three decades, the congregation has celebrated numerous confirmations of faith of men and women of all ages. There have been Adult Bat and Bar Torahs who come to the bema before their marriage, when their children become B'nai Mitzvah or at the anniversary of their Bar or Bat Mitzvah. In 1976 Past President Arthur Lichtman began a Kane Street tradition of chanting his Haftorah on the anniversary of his Bar Mitzvah. At Ronnit Fallek's Bat Mitzvah in 1989, her mother and grandmother joined her on the bema, and three generations of women read from the Torah. In 2002, fourth generation member Esther Gottesman celebrated her "Bas Mitsve" with a speech about family and community. The Synagogue Journal includes Esther's D'var Torah for Shabbat Behar Bechukotai. ([click here for speech](#))

Esther Gottesman, Emily Socolov and Albert Socolov with Lottie's tablecloth in May 2002.



During the 1980s, Rabbi Jonathan Ginsburg sent B'nai Mitzvot candidates a letter inviting them to share their ceremony with a Soviet "twin".

# מזל טוב !

Mazel tov on soon becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah! And thanks for your interest in Soviet Jewry twinning. Once you become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, you will be counted as an adult member of the Jewish people. This means that you will take on responsibility - for yourself as well as for others. By participating in the Twinning Program, you begin to assume responsibility for the welfare of your fellow Jews. Your actions help show Soviet Jews that they are not alone, and increase their chances of reaching freedom.

Included in this kit are all the necessary instructions for corresponding with your Soviet twin, as well as suggestions for making your "shared" Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony more meaningful. Like you, Soviet Jews become Bar/Bat Mitzvah simply by virtue of turning twelve or thirteen years old. Because "coming of age" (marking the entrance into Jewish adulthood) is such an important milestone, we Jews usually mark the event with ceremony and celebration.

Usually, but not always. Young Jews in the Soviet Union do not have the freedom to gather with their friends and families and be publicly welcomed as full members of the Jewish community. You cannot really give them this opportunity, except in a symbolic sense. But the symbolic sharing of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah can have an impact on many people: your guests will learn about the plight of Soviet Jews and what they can do to help; your twin and his or her family will gain hope and encouragement through your letters; Soviet officials will be reminded that Soviet Jews have friends in the rest of the world who are concerned for them and are working for their freedom.

But one of the most important aspects of the Twinning Program is the effect it will have on you, the participant. Hundreds of young people from all over the United States have adopted Soviet Jewish twins as they approached the time of their Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Many have later said that the experience made them appreciate their own freedom, and made them feel lucky to be able to live as Jews. Participants continue to write to their Soviet twins and maintain their involvement in Soviet Jewry activities.

Keep in mind that the Twinning Program is not an end in itself, but a means of educating people about Soviet Jewry and, ultimately, a way of helping to secure the freedom of your twin's family. Someday, perhaps you will have a chance to greet your Bar/Bat Mitzvah twin in person when he or she finally reaches freedom. We hope that the day when all Soviet Jews are free comes soon. Until then, thank you for joining in the struggle to bring that day closer.

