

An Ongoing History of the *Beth Emeth* Congregation

Now known as *Beth Emeth-B'nai Yitzhok* Synagogue, it was planned in the late 1940s and formed in 1950.

A group consisting of 83 men signed a mortgage agreement to buy land for a new Synagogue. (See the enclosed list of names.) In an article in the Jewish Times, staff writer Rhonda Hoffman wrote "Humble beginnings in Oxford Circle ...Beth Emeth started in a little farmhouse." Beth Emeth, The House of Truth, found its first home in a farmhouse in Oxford Circle. After undergoing several major renovations (including a new entrance and wider front steps with railings), the farmhouse was converted to a Synagogue. It served as the home of the Congregation, Beth Emeth, for nearly a decade (1950 -59). Even after the new Synagogue was completed in 1959, the farmhouse still accommodated the religious school overflow, which at it's height had about

900 students. In addition, a tent was erected to hold the mass of worshipers during High Holy Day services.

“The building (Bustleton Ave. and Unruh St.) was ideal for classrooms because there were so many little rooms to accommodate all of the children.”

commented Mrs. Belle Vogel, an original member of the Synagogue and the congregation’s first woman vice president, serving along with Dr. Bernard Miller and Arthur Silverman.

Louis Strumwasser’s son Mark, and grandson Robert, both graduated from the religious school. His son graduated in the first class, while his grandson, who attended Akiba Hebrew Academy, was the first second generation graduate. The Rabbi fondly referred to them as “The Three Musketeers.”

The eldest Strumwasser recalled some of the original tent services: “ Carpets were laid on bare ground, and when the rains came they smelled to high heaven.”

So now we can appreciate what we have accomplished – starting from scratch and progressing to a beautiful edifice. It’s like when you’re either born with money or you go out and work for it. This is a workingman’s Synagogue.” he proudly said.

The following article is not in the Jewish Times report. It does precede the report in time:

In 1949 Ed and Shirley Toben invited 16 additional people into their home for a discussion on creating a new synagogue in the neighborhood. The area was just beginning to be built up with new homes. With a large Jewish population settling in Northeast Philadelphia, there was a need for an additional synagogue to be constructed. These people had the vision to see this and made plans to purchase the farmhouse on the corner of Bustleton Avenue and Unruh Street and turn it temporarily into a synagogue. The idea was to put up a new building in the future when funds became available. Because of these energetic and farsighted people, this Synagogue became a reality.

The 18 people involved in this historic meeting were Sid and Lois Dubin, Joe and Sally Kline, Ephriam and Sara Mantz, Sam and Minnie Sokoloff, Jack and Sally Shachter, Sam and Sima Shulman, Ed and Shirley Toben, Joe and Belle Vogel, and Herman and Lee Winthrop. We owe all these people a debt of gratitude.

The Jewish Times report continues as follows: Joseph Vogel, a charter member, recalls the patchwork carpeting which served as the first interior decorations

