

The Synagogue at Malden Bridge

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In Celebration of Pioneers

by **Judith Rosenman**

With great pride, fanfare, and elaborate cultural programming, the American Jewish community will commemorate its 350th anniversary in this new year. Historians admit that a few Jews – mostly traders – traveled to North America before 1654. Why, then, has this date earned honored status as the origin of the American Jewish community?

In September 1654, 23 Jews – men, women, and children from Northern Brazil – sailed on the *St. Cathrien* and landed on the shores of New Amsterdam. Their welcome was not a friendly one. Not only did the ship's captain sue the Jewish passengers for 2500 florins as payment for passage and food, but Governor Peter Stuyvesant petitioned the Dutch West India Company – the colony's management – to expel the Jews. Fortunately for these early Jewish settlers, the Dutch West India Company's decision was swayed by pressure from the company's Jewish shareholders and economic interest in increasing New World settlement.

The Jews were permitted to settle in New Netherland so long as they agreed to support their own poor.

From the start, the growing group of Jews began to constitute itself as a community by acquiring a Torah and buying land to serve as a separate Jewish burial ground. These community building efforts, however, did not assure the community's survival, and by the time New Amsterdam transferred to British rule in 1664, most of the early Jewish settlers had dispersed.

Why has this short-lived community assumed such importance in the timeline of the American Jewish community? What can we learn about the character of our community from these proto-New York Jews? First of all – and I believe most importantly – the selection of 1654 as the starting date of our community attests to the centrality of Jewish women in defining the American Jewish community. We choose to celebrate not merely the first Jewish foot set on American soil, but rather the arrival of families and the creation of Jewish homes here. In an historical context, women – traditionally the home-makers – nurtured and sustained the community. In our contemporary context, the emphasis on Jewish women's roles in creating community in the past demands that

we continually evaluate and expand what we include in this role in the present and future. What new communal possibilities may be created by the inclusion of Jewish women? This value is obvious at SMB, which would not run (let alone flourish) without the central contributions and creative innovations of its female members.

The ways in which the New Amsterdam Jewish community sought to establish itself also instructs us about the meaning of community. Rather than relying on an external structure – a synagogue building – to define them, these settlers instead chose Torah and burial – life and death – as symbols of their community. The Torah scroll, a borrowed and portable communal marker, represented the essential place of Torah in Jewish life as well as their awareness of the likely continued mobility of their community. The burial ground asserted the importance of supporting and honoring community members in life and death and their right to leave their mark on the land in which they

The Synagogue at Malden Bridge is located at the Wesley United Methodist Church in Malden Bridge, New York at the intersection of Albany Turnpike and Shaker Museum Road. Visit our website at www.maldenbridgesynagogue.org



lived. Had the community survived longer than ten years, it undoubtedly would have invested in a more permanent physical structure to serve as its public face. However, the fact that this was not the first step taken by the community implies that its own temporary nature should not undermine its status as a full-fledged community.

SMB builds on the heritage of these early New York Jews. Within rented Methodist walls, a small group has created a community that is warm, energizing, and inclusive. Following in the spirit of the first American Jewish community, SMB has placed Torah study at the center of its activities, is developing burial grounds, and is encouraging the participation of men and women, young

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and old, families and singles. As this growing community moves toward a future hopefully more permanent than that of its New Amsterdam predecessors (and perhaps including a beautiful building of its own), it will, I am sure, continue to reflect the values of the inaugural American Jewish community we celebrate this year

Judith Rosenman, a frequent visitor to SMB, is a doctoral candidate in American Studies at Brown University with a focus on Women's Studies.

View from the Bridge

It's never a dull moment at SMB. Events since our last issue have included...

- “A Day in the Garden” at the Swersey’s Shadowbrook Farm.
- Sukkoth Services with pot luck lunch at the Liebers
- An Or Rose weekend with Havdalah Service and Potluck dinner at the Kaufmans, followed by a Sunday morning workshop at the Careys in preparation for the High Holy Days.
- A Microcinema presentation of “Your Show of Shows.”
- Shabbat Services and a Sunday Morning Workshop on the philosophy of Abraham Joshua Heschel at Arthur and Elaine Greenberg’s home.
- Participation in a Community Interfaith Thanksgiving Service at the Canaan Congregational Church.
- Chanukah Workshop conducted by Rabbi Chuck Simon.
- Chanukah visit to the Barnwell Nursing Home organized by our Social Action Committee.
- Post Chanukah Party at the home of Mona and Lee Berg.
- Monthly Family Services
- Monthly Kinders Hul Events for Pre-Six Year Olds and their Families
- Weekly Hebrew School for Older Children.
- Shabbaton Weekend with Or Rose, featuring a Shabbat Teaching Service, and a workshop on “Models of Leadership” from Hasidic Sources at the Meyersons.
- Our first in a new series of Living Room films in the homes of Congregants.
- Dr Vamik D. Volkan author of Blind Trust: Large Groups and their Leaders in Times of Crisis and Terror, speaking in our “Conversation Pieces” lecture series.
- Continued development of our Jewish Community Cemetery in Chatham.

Welcome New Members

Stanley and Sondra Applebaum
 Maxanne Beja & Evan Messinger
 Charles Braverman and Julia Rosen
 Joel Merker and Joanne Gerstel
 Robert Ross and Patrica O’Gorman
 Lucille Salitan
 Jody & Bart Schoenfeld
 Seymour Schwartz and Judith Greene
 Dorothy and David Zaentz

We deeply value all of our members. In a Synagogue the size of ours, every membership counts. Please remember to renew!



Member's News

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the following members and supporters who contributed to our congregation since June 30, 2003, since computer glitches impeded us from doing so in the previous issue.

Harriet Yelin in loving memory of her husband, Bert Yelin, and their parents, Adele & David Grant and Anna & Louis Yelin.

Mark Greenberg & Ditte Nielsen to the Cemetery Fund in honor of Larry Machiz.

Steven Ostrow & Nancy Rothman for the Breakfast and Kiddush Fund in honor of Larry Machiz.

Nikki A. Hirsch in honor of Lydia & Bernie Kukoff.

Charles & Joyce Sarner
George & Janet Carey
Aaron Lieberman
Steve Beber & Sandy Parker
Carl & Shirley Bakal
Nataliya & Avram Dresner
Lawrence A. Levinson
Barton H. & Jody L. Schoenfeld
Leonard & Blanche Siegal
Elliott & Harriet Vines
Beth Kaufman-Miller & Mark Miller
Robert A. Ross & Patricia O'Gorman
Philip & Anita Pearlman

Alvin D. & Donna Miller Knoll
Arthur & Elaine Greenberg
Jean S. Albert
Elliot R. Pruzan & Susan Thal
Bernard & Florence Mehl
Richard J. Katz & Debra Kalmuss
Edward & Jean H. Stoller
Arnold & Gloria Kaufman
Cheryl M. Cohen
Aaron Lieberman
Myron H. & Jetta Gordon
Judith D. Albert
Frances Luskind
Mort & Roberta Meyerson
Bella Meyer & Martin Kace

And Thank You...

To all who sponsored Kiddushim and hosted events in their homes
To Rabbi Chuck Simon for leading the Chanukah Workshop
To Dr. Sandra Segan for arranging the lecture by Dr. Vamik Volkan

Mazel Tov to:

Nathaniel Levine Gelb on his acceptance to Oberlin College and on being one of thirteen boys named to

New York State's All-Star First Soccer Team (Small School Division).

Or Rose upon the publication of two books, **God in All Moments**, and **Abraham Joshua Heschel**.

Bernie Kukoff on the opening of his new play, "The Thing About Men."

Roberta and Mort Meyerson on the occasion of their 45th anniversary and Roberta, in advance, for her upcoming one-woman show of paintings at the Spencertown Academy May 15-June 27.

Charles and Mimi Lieber, grandparents, and Janno and Amy Lieber, parents on the birth of Frayda Ruth.

Sheldon and Lucile Lichtblau on the birth of their granddaughter Talia.

Julia Delain and Leonard Rubin on their engagement.

Nancy Rothman and Jim Farrell for their dramatic performance/play at Spencertown Academy.



The Psychology of Terrorism

On the afternoon of February 1, Dr. Vamik Volkan, internationally renowned expert on trauma and winner of the 2003 Sigmund Freud Award for Psychotherapy given by the City of Vienna and the World Council of Psychotherapy, addressed over 100 members of the greater community at the Synagogue on the psychological dynamics of ethnic violence. Dr. Volkan, Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia and Scholar in Residence at the Erik Erikson Institute for Education and Research at the Austen Riggs Center in Stockbridge, is the author of **Blind Trust: Large Groups and their Leaders in Times of Crises and Terror** (Pitchstone Publishing, 2004) and has served as an envoy, negotiator, and consultant for the

United Nations in Israel, Egypt, Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Kuwait, both halves of post-war Berlin, and the Soviet Union. We thank him for donating his time and imparting his wisdom, and we thank SMB member Dr. Saundra Seagan for arranging this event. Suggested donations collected at the event, which amounts to several hundred dollars, are being contributed to Refuge, a non-profit, Manhattan-based organization that assists individuals and families who have endured massive psychosocial trauma from war, torture, state terrorism, genocide, and political exile.

On Saturday March 20, at 7:30 PM, the Synagogue's Microcinema tentatively pokes its head out of its winter

hibernation to further explore the psychology of terrorism with a showing of the extraordinary Indian film **The Terrorist**. Inspired by the assassination of India's Rajiv Gandhi, **The Terrorist** follows a young woman as she assumes the role of a suicide bomber.

"Remarkable...unbearably suspenseful"—A.O. Scott, *The New York Times*

"A serious and morally complex drama that raises provocative questions about how difficult it can be to sustain a sense of personal responsibility in a society destabilized by political upheaval"—David Steritt, *Christian Science Monitor*

95 minutes. Tamil with English subtitles.

Living Room Films

On Saturday evening, January 24, 13 hardy souls braved the cold to join George and Janet Carey for the first of our Living Room Film series. After sharing some hot cider and personal introductions, we watched the Argentinian movie **Autumn Sun**, a delightful romance set in the Jewish community of Buenos Aires. The discussion that followed added dimension to the evening. Another added plus was the opportunity to meet new people in the synagogue community. We would like to continue these showings on a monthly basis at least through the winter months, and are looking for people who could host an evening. As a host you can select a date, determine the number of people you can comfort-

ably entertain, put out a few simple refreshments, and pop in a video that you've chosen independently or from a list of films that the synagogue owns. There is no need to have a very large TV or any special equipment—just room for anywhere from seven or eight to a dozen people. Carole Roseman will be hosting a film, to be announced, at her home on March 27. Check the weekly e-mail update for details and for the location of any February showings.

Interested? If so, call Janet Carey at 794-7379 for more information



“Real” Estate An Update

Although the Synagogue feels truly blessed to have been able to share space with our Methodist friends for almost five years now, we naturally imagine life in our own space. To that end, the Board formed a Real Estate Committee some years ago whose charge was to look for and look at properties that might be suitable for a permanent home. The Committee has viewed many such properties, including private homes, stores, restaurants, medical buildings, and more—but has never found one that it felt sufficiently positively about. The drawbacks have been insufficient space, insufficient parking, poor location, or steep price. Although we were fortunate enough to have been offered the gift of free acreage in Spencertown by our members Martin Kace and Bella Meyer, the costs of building from scratch are daunting. Recently, however, we became aware that the Chatham Town Hall in Chatham Center would no longer be used as such and might be available. Some of us went to look at it and loved its space, its light, its location, its parking facilities, and its modest feeling. A former schoolhouse, it is well-built and would suit our needs well...or so we think at this early juncture. The local papers got wind of our interest and blew it out of proportion. The reality at the moment is that we are in touch with the town about the building and are waiting to hear about the next steps in the process. We will keep the congregation apprised of any developments.

We Gather Together..

On the evening of November 25, 2003, about 20 members of SMB joined with members of other Columbia County faith communities, includ-

ing Christian (Quaker, Protestant, and Roman Catholic), Buddhist, Islam, Sufi, and Unitarian Universalist, at The Canaan Congregational Church in to share elements of their services and an understanding of the philosophies which underlie them. The SRO audience was treated to a sensory as well as an intellectual and spiritual experience. The SMB led off the program, with Isaiah Machiz blowing the shofar and Karen Levine leading the audience in “Hinei Ma Tov” (“Behold how good and pleasant it is to be together.”) We also had the opportunity to share the bells of the Buddhists; the incense of the Catholic service, as well as the guitar playing of Reverend Gary Gelfenbien, and the silent worship of the Quakers, followed by the anything-but-silent gospel choir of the A.M.E. Church.

At the reception which followed, it was clear to all of us that this had been an evening of true sharing and connection. We look forward to future opportunities to continue the process.

Buy Israeli

Editor's Note: Some of you may have seen the following e-mail. If not, we felt that the point it makes is worth noting here.

Dear Friends,

I came back from Israel 2 weeks ago after not having visited in 7 years. I was shocked by the poverty around me--the closed shops and restaurants in downtown Tel Aviv, the unemployment, the stories of hunger and hopelessness.

Living in the diaspora, we all have the power to help. Every time you go to the supermarket, buy at least one Israeli product (they have pickles, cheeses, olives, sauces, soups, chocolates, cookies, candy, tehina, chumous, ready salads and dips, pretzels etc.).

There are 300,000 Jews in Canada. If everyone bought an Israeli product every 2 weeks, that would be around \$300,000 making it to the desperate Israeli economy very few weeks just from Canada. If the idea caught on with American Jews, that could be \$5.2 million every couple of weeks. So, even if it you don't need it; even if it is more expensive than a Canadian or American product; even if it looks less appetizing than its North American counterpart, BUY IT.



Point of View

The Jews of Guatemala

By George Carey

I recently returned from a trip to Guatemala in which, among other things, I became interested in the situation of the Guatemalan Jews.

This small community, surrounded by a sea of Catholics, fundamentalist Christians, and Maya, is as affected as all Guatemalans are by the aftermath of an era of violence, death squads and assassinations which lasted 36 years and claimed some 240,000 victims. This is what I was able to ascertain about their present situation in an exhausted land.

Guatemala is a nation approximately the size of Ohio, with a population in excess of 11.5 million, whose reproductive rate is estimated as sufficient to double the population by 2020. Seventy five percent of the population survive on a diet averaging 2048 calories per day—less than the UN estimated minimum of 2250. While GNP per capita is about \$3800 per day, most of the rural population earns only about \$2 per

day. Seventy percent of the land is owned by three percent of the population. Yet over 50 percent of the population is in agriculture—more than half of these work land owned by others. Much more than half of the population is Mayan, nearly half are illiterate, and very many (especially in the Peten—the northern rainforest area) speak only one of the more than 23 Mayan languages—some mutually unintelligible. The mortality rate for children under five is 63 per thousand.

Antigua, only 30 miles from Guatemala City—a privileged ethnic island within an ocean of poverty. In turn, the Jews of Guatemala are a tiny minority within a minority—not unlike the case in other Central American Nations.

They comprise about 850 Jews in 310 families and, while Jews were established in the land as early as the 1880s, responding to the boom in coffee production, the majority of the current congregation has its roots in the

“They comprise about 850 Jews in 310 families....”

The UN, in its survey of 150 developing countries for inequality of income distribution placed Guatemala second to last.

Those Guatemalans whose mother tongues are European Languages are in the minority in Guatemala, comprising a majority only locally in such centers as the capital, Guatemala City, and the beautiful old Colonial capital of

post 1945 migration from Europe and the Near East.

It was a propitious time: the dictator, Jorge Ubico had been deposed, and a decade of civilian government was beginning, attended by social reforms aimed at economic development and the alleviation of socioeconomic stresses on the Maya population. The Jewish immigrants rapidly prospered as a group, joining the tiny



Guatemalan upper middle class. But in 1954, the Land Reforms proposed by Presidents Juan Jose Arevalo and Jacobo Arbenz aroused the active opposition of Encomenderos (large, powerful landowners) and the United Fruit Company. A series of military coups destabilized the Country and from 1960 to 1996, 36 years of war

ransom is a fact of life —not especially reflecting Anti-Semitism, since non-Jews are equally liable to be kidnapped. Joel Harbie, a developer, and Victor Cohen, an architect are building a 142 acre development called Har Carmel on land donated by Harbie in order to unify and strengthen the Jewish Community. More than half of the development's quarter

acre lots have been sold at a price averaging \$25,000, payable to an endowment fund that will help to build a community center and school. Donors will finance a

problem is not only a Guatemalan one: Mexican, Cuban, and Salvadorean Jews among others, have the same problem. So, curiously, discrimination within the Jewish community proved to be as much of a concern as discrimination from non-Jews!

...the present situation of the Jewish community? Defensive.

Alberto Senderay, International director for Community Development at the American JOINT, and one of the Conference's Sponsors, is quoted as saying, "Before, people normally didn't ask 'Is your Mother Jewish?' 'Is your Father Jewish?'"

He was followed by Moises Falchler, president of B'nai Brith, Costa Rica, who criticized the Orthodox Community, to which he belongs, for shunning the intermarried, or those who adopted children. "There isn't tolerance, and nobody's doing anything about it," Falchler said.

ravaged the country leaving some 240,000 Mayas dead—most at the hands of Government sponsored Death squads.

There is another problem, as difficult to address as that of security. The Ninth Meeting of Leaders of Latin American and Caribbean Jewish Institutions and Communities met in Antigua, Guatemala on Nov. 4—600 lay leaders and Rabbis from 22 countries attended. The young delegates from Guatemala said that it was common for young adults to disconnect from the community after High School—to work or study abroad, often to the United States or to Israel, never to return. Part of the problem lies in the fact that marriage choices are so limited in the small community, and if the young Guatemalan Jew marries outside of the faith, he or she faces problems of acceptance within the congregation. The

Summarizing, the small Guatemalan Jewish community today seems to find itself concerned about these issues: survival, as a precarious peace begins: security from social disorder; stemming the emigration of their youth, who represent their future; and confronting the tensions of intermarriage in a context in which it is almost inevitable.

Many Guatemalans fled into exile (including young Jews who didn't want to be drawn into the killing), and the country and the Jewish Community has been trying to recover through free elections, implementing the Peace Accord of 1996.

What is the present situation of the Jewish Community? Defensive. In the aftermath of the chaos, there is still civic disorder. Its residents call Guatemala City "the kidnapping capital of the world." Kidnapping for the purpose of



Coming Up

We are happy to announce our next Shabbaton with Or Rose.

The schedule for the Shabbaton will be:

- Saturday, March 13, 9:30 AM. Shabbat morning service.
- Sunday, March 14, 10:00 AM workshop. Topic and location to be announced.

Also-

- Saturday, March 20, 7:30 PM. SMB Microcinema will be showing "The Terrorist."
- Saturday, March 27, Living Room

Film at Carol Roseman's. Details are inside newsletter.

Getting the Weekly Update?

Don't rely on the newsletter for the most current SMB information. Dates change. Weather happens. And loca-

tions of events can shift. To receive our weekly update, email abswersey@taconic.net and add your email address to our list. The update will also offer you interesting insights into the weekly Torah parashah. Your email address is safe with us...it's confidential and is never shared.



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