

The Synagogue at Malden Bridge

Elul-Tishrei 5765 Vol. VI, Number 1 August/September 2004

The State of the Synagogue

by Lydia Kukoff

Our Synagogue differs from many other synagogues in that it functions solely through the volunteer involvement of its members in an egalitarian fashion, without a formal Rabbi, and with congregant-led Shabbat Services. We welcome Jews of whatever denomination or movement to join us on an equal basis.

As this year closes and I think about the state of the Synagogue I especially reflect that at our beginning, five years ago, most of the responsibilities fell to a few founding families. Now, the few have become many. Now our Shul's projects and activities are conducted in their diversity by a much broader membership.

Our numerical growth has continued to be impressive. With numerical growth has come growth in the scope of the activities in which we engage. I am happy to report that new committees, created by our vibrant and engaged SMB membership are doing wonderful things because SMB members have made them happen:

1) **The Social Action Committee**, our largest committee has initiated:

- Pre-holiday visits to Jewish residents of Barnwell Nursing Home;
- A grant from the Berkshire-Taconic Foundation to provide CSA shares for two needy families, along with nutrition education (see article below);

- The collection of paperbacks and magazines for patients at the Columbia Memorial Hospital;

- The development of a mentoring project at Berkshire Farm School

- A Plan for a connection to LINC, an early literacy program in Hudson.

2) For the first time, we have an active **Membership Committee**, which not only reaches out to prospective and new members, but works to involve and retain current members.

3) **Family Activities:** We've always wanted to involve families in the life of SMB. This year, we've done so significantly:

- An enlarged Hebrew School with an innovative curriculum;

- Family Congregation

- Monthly programs for families with young children.

Needless to say, we also continue to build on our already-established areas:

-The Ritual Committee:

The Shavuot Tikkun again attracted a large and enthusiastic gathering, and has been included as part of SMB's ritual calendar;

We had a moving memorial service for Tisha b'Av;

We held our first aufrauf (the festive calling of the bride and groom to the Torah before their wedding);

A regular class is given in siddur Hebrew;

Members are redesigning our sukkah;

The **Program Committee** sponsored;

Our regular film series;

A member-led walk through the Sculpture Fields at Art/Omi;

A Poetry Evening, featuring the work of some of the poets among us;

A program on the psychological roots of ethnic violence.

The **Cemetery Committee**

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



continues to make progress in planning a Jewish Cemetery in Chatham. We are now well on the way to resolving legal questions which will enable us to proceed.

It has been especially gratifying to see how many of our members have opened their homes for workshops, services, parties, and all the other occasions when we seek a home. If we add all the above to the requirements of providing our weekly Shabbat services, our visiting scholar weekends, our weekly email updates, publishing our newsletter, and so many other efforts, we really can say we are the little shul that could.

Just as the Mishkan—the Sanctuary in the Desert—was built

**We really can say
that we are
the little
shul that
could.**

by those whose hearts were willing, so will our shul be built by each one of us as we give our time, talents and energy to our community—as we engage together in the sacred creative task of establishing a Shul where there was none before.

I thank each of you- officers, board, and members- for your generosity of spirit.

May the coming year bring blessings of sweetness, health, and peace to each of us, our families, Israel and the world.

LShanah Tovah Tikatevu!

View from the Bridge

Since last we spoke to you we have been quite active...

—**Saundra Segan** graciously sponsored a poetry reading at her home, in which a broad diversity of poems were read: some written by the poets among us, some written by poets visiting us, some favorites of members present.

—Our film program continued with two showings. One was “Capturing the Friedmans,” the other “Yossi and Jagger.”

—We were treated to a walk through the Sculpture Garden of Art/Omi by **Peter Franck** on a beautiful Summer day.

—**Janie and Larry Machiz** sustained us in an ancient spiritual observance: A Shavout Tikkun at their home in which insight and instruction on the meaning of Shavout was offered by Or Rose, Rabbi Chuck Simon, and others.

—**Chuck Simon** also sponsored a Tisha B’Av Service at the Simons’ home.

—**Or Rose** led us in a variety of spitual activities including:

*Four Sunday Morning Workshops

*Two Havdalah Evening Services and Potluck Dinners

*A Kabbalat Shabbat Service and Potluck Dinner

—**Dr. Vamik D. Volcan**, a guest speaker in our series of “Conversation Pieces,” addressed the Psychological Roots of Ethnic Violence.

SMB MISSION STATEMENT

We believe in equality at the Bimah, in a vital and searching study of Torah, in maintaining the tradition of Hebrew as part of the service, and in the ability of each individual to find his or her own meaningful relationship with Jewish culture, heritage, and religion. We believe a synagogue should play a central role in that pursuit, that a Jewish community is a blessing, and that being part of one is a mitzvah.

CONGREGATIONAL GOALS

- To provide a home for egalitarian religious worship in accordance with the principles of Judaism.
- To encourage and deepen a love and knowledge of Jewish practices, principles, and culture among our members.
- To be a source of education for our members, future generations, and the larger Jewish community.



Member's News

'In our small community, the efforts of every single member are invaluable. As we enter a new year, we are especially grateful for our members' contributions of talent, time, effort, and for their willingness to open their homes for community events. Hosting a Synagogue event is a special way to feel connected to this wonderful community we have created. If you are interested in doing that, please contact Alice Swersey at abswersy@taconic.net.

Thanks to Our Generous Hosts

Shirley Bakal, for a Workshop, and a Havdalah Potluck.
Janie and Larry Machiz for the Shavout Tikkun
Zvi Cohen for catering the Shavout Tikkun
Elaine and Arthur Greenberg for a Workshop
Sheila Silver and John Feldman for the Young Families' Bar-B-Que
Karen and Sy Balsen for a Havdalah Potluck
Carol Weir for a Workshop
Lee Gould for Shabbat Services and Kiddush
Saundra Segan for the Poetry Evening
Mark Feder for Kabbalat Services and dinner
Peter Franck for leading Art Omi Sculpture Fields Walk.

Mazel Tov to:

To Zev Balsen, son of Karen and Sy Balsen, graduated from Yale University in May 2004, receiving a Bachelor of Science degree with Distinction in Biology. He was also awarded the John Hersey Award for a body of journalistic work. Zev is spending the summer and early fall fighting forest fires as part of the United States Forest Service in the Klamath National Forest, California. After the fire season he will begin work in a neuroscience lab at the University of Washington in Seattle.
To Lily Balsen, daughter of Karen and Sy Balsen, who will be appearing as Rose in the Theater J production of "A Bad Friend," by Jules Feiffer in Washington D.C. from October 30-November 28.
To Julia Delain Rubin and Leonard Rubin upon their marriage. Our first wedding—conducted by Or Rose on Shabbat, August 21—was a joyous occasion, and an auspicious anticipation of the New Year. Congratulations to the happy couple.
To Judith Rosenbaum and Or Rose on their upcoming marriage.
To Elaine Greenberg, Guy Berman and Roberta Meyerson on joining the SMB Board

And Thank You to those who have hosted SMB programs in their homes:, Annette Schickman - Or's

March workshop; Shirley Bakal - April Potluck dinner and Havdalah; Alice and Burt Swersey - Or's May Workshop; Larry and Janie Machiz - Shavuot Tikkun. We thank Zvi Cohen for the dairy delicacies for the Tikkun, and Yehuda Hanani, Judith Rosenbaum, Chuck Simon and Or Rose for teaching at the Tikkun.

And Thank you to Beverly and Larry Bader for subscriptions to two Jewish periodicals .

Welcome New Members

Dorothy and Donald Zaentz of Chatham
Lenore and Stan Appenzeller of Ghent
Barbara Lax and Ken Kranz of Chatham
Henry and Edith Meininger of Austerlitz
Thalia and Isadore Cassuto of Spencertown
Beverly and Larry Bader of Ghent

Welcome New Family Members

Hoffer Kabak and Beth Ring of Old Chatham
Julia Delain and Lenny Rubin of Ipswich Mass

Thank You for Generous Contributions

Sidney D. and Anne E. Richter
Eve and Sam Beller
Bart and Jody Schoenfeld
Charles and Mimi Lieber
Sheldon and Lucille Lichtblau
Arnold and Gloria Kaufman
Alice and Burt Swersey
Bernard and Florence Mehl
Charles and Joyce Sarner
Lucille Salitan, "in memory of my dear friend Eileen Linton."
Dear "Anonymous", Thank You—Mark Feder"

Thank You for Sponsoring Kiddushim

Gloria and Arnold Kaufman
Julia and Lennie Rubin
And to Lee Gould for her Gift of the beautiful Mizrach for the Shul



POTLUCK: a la Swersey

When Burt and I made our permanent home at our farm at the end of June, 1988, our neighbors invited us to a 4th of July Potluck. "Bring anything. You're busy unpacking and settling in."

What we did not know was that this gathering was a welcome to us by all the town's people. The guests included the local merchants, the tractor mechanic, the general store family and a few farmers from our town. For ten years, as weekenders, we had been farmers. We grew special melons and organic strawberries, and had become rather well known by the locals for our agricultural exploits.

We arrived next door to a typical Potluck--potato salad, coleslaw, Jell-O molds, tuna noodle casserole and meatballs in sweet and sour gravy. and, of course, lemon meringue and blueberry pies. When I mentioned that the meatballs were delicious, our host pointed out the 'author' Mrs. Koepp, and when I told her how much I enjoyed her dish and she said, brightly, "Betty Crocker Page 238."

I love to cook, and you could say that I might be called a creative cook. Prodded by my imagination, I am always challenged by a printed recipe to invent--just a little bit. If it says basil, I'll try cilantro. Much to the chagrin of my family when they eat something they like, they know they will probably never get it again. Perhaps it's always Potluck in our house.

The Oxford English dictionary, traces

the term Potluck to the 16th century. Potluck: "One's luck or chance as to what may be in the pot- cooked for a meal." But I guess I really didn't get it when I was feted by my neighbors that summer of '88, because later that year I participated in a Potluck supper at the Stephentown Historical Society. It was an educational experience.

I was busy at work and at the last minute I remembered that I had to bring something for the communal table. I grabbed a jar of my home canned apple sauce from last summer, folded in some fresh made cranberries, chopped up dried fruit, squeezed a fresh orange, diced a few stalks of celery together with a handful of chopped pecans, Does this sound weird? Well maybe, but one thing you should know; I only use the best ingredients, natural, organic, home grown or home canned--never too much sugar. So could it be bad? (I sound like my mother.)

I put my concoction in a pretty glass serving dish (I did not know that Tupperware was de rigueur) and trotted off to the Potluck. I placed my contribution somewhere between the salads and the desserts- it could pass for either- and watched as the regulars walked right past my dish. "Who made this one?" was heard at one side of the room. "What do you think it is?" "What is it called?" I did not know it had to have a name.

After attending a few of these events I came to realize that there really was no room for my kind of creativity here. If you want to be a regular, you just have

to bring one of the usual dishes.

There must be some justice, somewhere, because I have been able to combine my creative cooking with my electronic aptitude and voila: SMB Jewish Potluck suppers created in Virtual Space! No tuna noodle casseroles here. No franks and beans or macaroni and cheese-- surely not at the same meal anyway! The miracle for me is that these Potlucks happen, almost effortlessly by the magic of email. It's always a delightful surprise to receive the responses. I always worry a little bit that we'll have too much of this or too little of that, but true to form, these Potluck suppers always work out.

Our version of this American standard has to be Kosher--either dairy/vegetarian, or chicken/vegetarian. Our Potlucks are high in quality, high in carbohydrates, and heavy on desserts. But today's contributor doesn't always sweat over the stove. She or he just knows where to get the best. "What can I bring that's easy?" is a frequently asked question. My reply: "Wine or challa is pretty easy!" But more than the food, (could there really be something more than the mighty morsel?) is the fun and fressing, the warmth and wisdom, the gemutlichkeit which is generated with each SMB Potluck. We gather together, we observe our ritual, we light candles, we break bread, enriching our lives with the spirit of community and camaraderie. Nu? Let's eat!

Book Note by Ginger Feldman

A terrific mix of romance and a look at anorthodox community in Brooklyn. Sound a bit strange? If you love this sort of 'eye candy', then Erich Segal's 1992 Acts of Faith will keep you going! Yup, the same Erich Segal of Love Story fame.

The characters: a Catholic boy (Tim) and the daughter (Deborah) of Rabbi

Moses Luria, the Silczer Rebbe . The settings: Brooklyn and an Israeli kibbutz. The pace: fast and fun.

I can't tell you that serious questions are addressed in any academic fashion. Nevertheless Tim and Deborah, with the timely interceding of Deborah's brother, Daniel dance across this 500 page book asking questions about the

Orthodox, Reform, Catholic and secular worlds, and answering them in an engrossing and entertaining fashion.

A peek into the lives of both an Orthodox family and the Catholic hierarchy. I recommend that you pick up this book when you have plenty of time, I read it in one sitting!



Point of View

Finding the Past

By Joyce M. Sarner

A year ago, at a family funeral, I met a cousin I had not seen in years. We began an email correspondence which culminated in a trip to the land our grandparents left. We both wanted to find evidence of the family's existence in Romania and create a visual record for future generations. The trip took a different turn when we found a culture and people long gone.

In May we traveled to Iasi (pronounced Yash), the capital of the Moldavia province in northeastern Romania. All we knew of our grandparents was that they came from Iasi in an area called the "Red Bridge", made their own wine, had a cow, and left some time in the 1880's. Since they had arrived before Ellis Island opened, it was difficult to locate records of their arrival at Castle Garden. I had been doing research at the National Archives in Pittsfield, working with microfilm and reading ships' manifests. It is very tedious work. In the near future they hope to provide access to a web site listing arrivals at Castle Garden. No one in our family had stories to tell of Romania or knew much about the past. Our parents' and grandparents' generations were long gone. We had little to help us.

The drive from Bucharest to Iasi was the first inkling that we were entering the 19th century. Surrounded by seven hills, Iasi is in a valley just beyond the Carpathian Mountains. Spread out on either side of the road were vast green farmlands dotted with small groups of families tilling the fields with rakes and hoes. An occasional

threesome of a man pushing a wooden plow behind another man pulling the horse in front was also a stunning sight. It would become a common theme as we traveled around this beautiful country. The people pride themselves on the fact that no chemicals are used in farming. Their poverty has also kept them from using modern farming methods.

While the roads are good they are shared by cars, horse drawn wooden carts, cows and sheep. We passed through many hamlets watching well fed cows return to their houses. Every dwelling was covered with trellises of grape vines.

Through new found friends on the Jewish Genealogy web site we made contact with the small Jewish community of Iasi. While we couldn't converse with them in Yiddish, many older people spoke French. Most of the younger people speak some English. In 1900, the population of Iasi was 90,000. Of that number, 50,000 were Jews. Today, a scant 600 remain. Most leave for Israel. Yet they do have a Hebrew teacher whose Yiddish/Romanian primer was given to me. Where once stood 127 synagogues, today only one remains—the Great Synagogue which has been there since the 1600's.

We were truly amazed to find out that Iasi was the birthplace of Yiddish theater in 1875. Avrom Goldfadn, its founder and the composer of the famous Yiddish song "Raisins and Almonds", is commemorated on a small monument in the park where the theater once stood. It is opposite the National Theater and the Opera House. Iasi is a city with a rich cultural heritage and the Jews were an important part of it. They were the writers,

painters, musicians and artisans.

At the one remaining cemetery, overgrown with wild flowers, we met Israelis returning to trace their families. We were told that the Nazis had used the head stones of other cemeteries to pave the roads. At the end of the war, members of the Jewish Community gathered what they could and brought them here, to the only one left undisturbed.

Before we left the States, we hired a car and driver who became our translator, friend and guide. Through him we learned of the corruption which stifles the country. Most people don't believe that they will be part of the EU in this generation. Their mentality is rooted in the Communist era, since the old guard is still in power but sporting different titles.

Virgil, our guide, joined us with his teenage son when we went to see "Marriage of Figaro" at the 19th century opera house. They had never seen an opera. We had a box to ourselves for \$4 a ticket. Much to our surprise, the opera was in Romanian. Three quarters of the house was filled with people under 40 which delighted us all. Virgil thought the opera sounded very good since Romanian, one of the romance languages, lent itself well to the music.

We were invited to dinner, by a member of the Jewish Community, in the area called the "Red Bridge". The bridge over the narrow Bahlui River did have red painted rails. We were on the ninth floor in one of the high rises which replaced all of the one story houses forty years ago. We stood on the balcony overlooking Iasi and the bridge, marveling that we were really here, preparing to begin the long, arduous trip to America.



SHABBAT SHALOM:

An Inside Look at SMB Shabbat Services

By Jody Schoenfeld

During the last monthly board meeting of the Synagogue, there was a discussion about attendance (or lack thereof) at Saturday morning services. It was suggested that members may not be attending because they are unaware of exactly what our Shabbat services are really like. Perhaps there's an element of trepidation relating to things like the inability to speak, read, or understand Hebrew, the imagined length of the services, or having to "dress up".

Being a relatively new member, I could identify with those sentiments and therefore volunteered to describe the services at the Synagogue at Malden Bridge from my point of view.

I would like to begin by explaining that while I was born into a Jewish family, I had no formal religious training. My family was totally nonobservant. My exposure to Judaism was through attending the occasional Bar Mitzvah and Friday night services at summer camp. My family exchanged gifts on Christmas day. Our Jewish holiday celebrations consisted of relatively large family gatherings during which mass quantities of delicious foods were consumed.

As I approached my early teens with its concomitant angst and search for self-definition, I realized

that I wanted and needed more of a Jewish identity. I began by lighting Hanukah candles and urging my family to exchange gifts then and not on Christmas, which I learned was not a Jewish holiday! Not knowing the prayers, I simply lit the candles, and connected with the tradition as best I could.

Fast forward to my sons' entry into Hebrew school at which point we joined the local shul and I began my Jewish education. Along with my two boys, I attended Saturday morning Junior Congregation religiously (sic!). For the sake of their exposure to Judaism, I decided to become more involved and attended all major

holiday services. To my surprise, even though I had no knowledge of Hebrew, I began to enjoy these. I felt connected and a sense of spirituality. I especially enjoyed the rabbi's sermons and English explanations of the Torah readings. Of course there were parts that I did not enjoy – the length of the services (3-4 hours), the length of the cantor's interpretations of the prayers, the unspoken but quite obvious dress code, and the lack of male/female equality. I joined the shul at Malden Bridge because it was close and convenient, honestly

not knowing what to expect.

This is what I discovered:

The service began at 9:30 A.M. I had the good fortune to attend my first service at a time when Or Rose, our visiting scholar, was leading. I received a wonderful warm welcome and "Shabbat shalom" from the president and congregation. It was a deeply meaningful and spiritual service. There were prayers in Hebrew, but many were in English, many transliterated in the prayer books, and many read both in Hebrew and English. If Or is not in attendance, a member of the congregation leads the service.

**...the highlight...was our
unusual approach to
the weekly
portion of the
Torah.**

There is no affiliation to the major movements, and therefore no Rabbi.

The congregants were invited to participate in the service individually, by reading portions aloud, as well as collectively by reading responsively. To my delight, women



were counted as part of the minyan. The prevailing style of dress was what I like to refer to as country casual – comfortable, but appropriately respectful. The singing of prayers and psalms was joyful and enthusiastic. But, the highlight of the service for me was our unusual approach to the weekly portion of the Torah.

Following the morning (Shacharit) Service, all present took seats around a large table. The Torah was then read in English as each person in turn read a portion, divided up according to aliyahs. After each portion was

read, there ensued a discussion of that portion. This discussion included scholarly, historical and rabbinical information contributed by several members and leaders who are experts in these fields. It also included observations, interpretations, and gut reactions from others. Questions were asked: some answered, some leading to other questions, some unanswerable. Not only is this a wonderful opportunity for learning, but it is also a perfect nonjudgmental venue for expressing one's own personal views and insights on Judaism.

The service was concluded with prayers and song. If someone sponsors a Kiddush, there is "shmoozing" with food and drink, or if not, just "schmoozing." "Schmoozing" is always an option! The service was completed by 11:30 A.M.

I began by attending sporadically, but now I try not to miss any services.

So, have no fear – the Shabbat services at the Synagogue at Malden Bridge are delightful, joyful, edifying and spiritual. I felt welcome and connected from the start.

Join us, and you will, too.

Social Action Committee

By Lucille Salitan

As a project of the Social Action Committee, I initiated a new program this year that connects needy families with local Community Supported Agriculture Farms (CSA), all of which produce organic products. At the same time it affords the congregation an opportunity to participate in the important doctrine of Judaism that says, "...the crops on the borders of the field are to be left for the poor and the stranger".

Two of the five Columbia County CSA organic farms agreed to provide a weekly share of produce to a family for the season which runs from early June up to Thanksgiving. Hawthorne Valley Farm in Harlemlville agreed to provide a share to Emmie of Valatie who has seven children, ages one to fifteen, and the Farm at Miller's Crossing in Claverack has given a share to Juliet and Kirn, friends from Hudson who wished to share the produce. They have six children between them. These families are also participants in the nutrition program of the Cornell Extension Service of Columbia County, and were recommended by the director of that program.

We received a grant of \$200 for each farm from, 'Share the Bounty', a fund administered by the Berkshire Taconic Foundation of Great Barrington. When I told the director and founder of that fund, Barbara Zheutlin about our project she offered to contribute some financial assistance thereby helping the farms defray some of the cost.

I will be staying in touch with these three women through the season, and will be helping out if they run into any difficulties. Some time during the summer other committee members and I will be meeting at the farms with them and the children for a social event.

The CSA farms in this area, along with the thousands of such farms throughout the country provide far more than a shopping bag full of fresh local vegetables and herbs. This direct marketing system makes it possible for local residents to help support local agriculture, thus contributing to the maintenance of open space and to a viable rural economy. It provides improved soil fertility and lower levels of environmental pollution which in turn produce healthy plants and animals for our local food supply. As part-time and full-time residents we have a huge stake in preserving these farms while we are able to help out our neighbors. Although this first year is only a small beginning, with the support of many more members of the congregation, next year I hope to be able to increase the number of families and CSA farms. If this proves to be a successful program it could serve as a pilot project that other congregations may want to follow.

For further information about how you can help with donations, please contact:

Ms. Barbara Zheutlin
Berkshire Taconic Foundation
Great Barrington, Mass.



SMB HIGH HOLIDAY SCHEDULE

2004---5765

ROSH HASHANAH

Erev Rosh HASHANAH
Wednesday September 15 6:30PM

Day One Rosh Hashana Thursday
September 16 9 AM – 1 PM Children's
Service 10:30 AM

Day Two Rosh HASHANAH Friday
September 17 9AM – 1PM

Tashlich at conclusion of service

Shabbat Shuvah Saturday September
18 9:30 AM

YOM KIPPUR

Kol Nidre Erev Yom Kippur Friday
September 24 6:30 PM

Yom Kippur Saturday September 25
9 AM

Children's Service 10:30 AM

*Services will end at sundown followed
by our traditional break fast*

SUKKOT

SMB celebration of Sukkot will be
Saturday October 2

Shabbat/Sukkot Service at 9:30 AM
at the home of Mimi and Charles
Lieber in Spencertown

POT LUCK Kiddush after services



The Synagogue at Malden Bridge
Box 18, Malden Bridge, New York 12115