

= Congregation Beth Israel (Scottsdale , Arizona) =

Congregation Beth Israel (Hebrew : ??? ?????) is a Jewish congregation located at 10460 North 56th Street in Scottsdale , Arizona . Formally incorporated in 1920 , it affiliated with the Reform Judaism in 1935 .

Abraham Lincoln Krohn was rabbi of Beth Israel from 1938 to 1953 , and during his tenure the congregation grew from under 100 to almost 600 member families . He was succeeded by Albert Plotkin , who served for almost 40 years .

Beth Israel 's original building in Downtown Phoenix , constructed in 1921 ? 1922 , is listed on both the city 's historic property register and the National Register of Historic Places . After being sold in 1949 , it housed churches until 2002 , when the Jewish community repurchased it . In 2007 the Arizona Jewish Historical Society started a \$ 4 million campaign to restore it and convert it into a museum .

As of 2014 , Beth Israel was the oldest synagogue in the Phoenix metropolitan area . The senior rabbi was Stephen Kahn , the associate rabbi was Rony Keller , and the cantor was Jaime Shpall .

= = Early years , first building = =

Jewish settlers in Phoenix began gathering for High Holiday services as early as 1906 . A formal congregation was established by Barnett E. Marks , a lawyer from Chicago , who held services in a room over Melczer 's saloon , and also organized a Sunday School to provide a Jewish education for his two sons . By 1918 the congregation was calling itself " Emanuel " , and holding services in English and Hebrew on the Jewish Festivals . In 1920 , the congregation incorporated as " Congregation Beth Israel " . Its first rabbi was David L. Liknaitz , and its first president was Charles Steinberg . Liknaitz would serve until 1924 .

Services were held in a number of temporary locations . In 1915 and 1917 respectively the local chapters of the B 'nai B 'rith and the National Council of Jewish Women were formed . Together they purchased a church in 1921 , and converted it for use as a Phoenix 's first synagogue by the Phoenix Hebrew Center Association . The Association soon became defunct , and the building was taken over by the Congregation Beth Israel .

That year the congregation raised \$ 14 @, @ 000 (today \$ 186 @, @ 000) and hired the architectural firm Lescher , Kibbey and Mahoney to design and construct a synagogue building near Central Avenue and Culver Street , in Downtown Phoenix . The building , a simple , stuccoed , gable @- @ end @- @ to @- @ the @- @ street Mission Revival Style structure , was constructed in 1921 ? 1922 , and an annex added in 1930 .

At the time the building was constructed , the Phoenix area had only 120 Jewish residents . The synagogue served as a cultural center for the Jewish community , including hosting communal Passover Seders , at a time when Jews faced discrimination at hotels and other places of public gathering .

During the 1920s the synagogue had difficulty keeping rabbis . Most would only stay for a few years , and one in particular was suspected of being a charlatan ; " [t] he rabbi college where he claimed he attended had no record of him . " A.I. Goldberg served from 1924 to 1925 , Adolph Rosenberg from 1926 to 1929 .

In 1930 , the congregation became divided over the need for the Jewish community to hire a shochet to ritually slaughter animals for kosher meat , and over whether the synagogue should hire a Reform or Conservative rabbi . More traditional members broke away to form the Beth El Congregation , affiliated with Conservative Judaism .

That year Samuel Dodkin Hurwitz was hired as Beth Israel 's rabbi . Born in Krychaw , Belarus in 1901 , his family emigrated to the United States in 1903 . He graduated from the University of Cincinnati in 1926 , and was ordained at Hebrew Union College in 1929 . His first pulpit , from 1929 to 1930 , was Temple Emanuel in Davenport , Iowa . In 1934 he was appointed to the board of the Phoenix Public Library . In 1935 he left Beth Israel to become rabbi at Temple Beth El in Benton Harbor , Michigan .

Philip W. Jaffa , ordained at Hebrew Union College in 1928 , joined as rabbi in 1935 . He adopted the Reform Judaism 's Union Prayer Book and its religious school curriculum , and added choir music to the services . That year much of the synagogue building was destroyed by a fire , and Jaffa 's whole library was lost . The congregation re @-@ built the structure , extensively remodeling the sanctuary , and added a religious school building / classroom annex . Jaffa would serve until 1938 .

= = Krohn era = =

Abraham Lincoln Krohn became Beth Israel 's rabbi in 1938 , replacing Jaffa , who was not well . At the time , the congregation had 100 or fewer member families , and 64 children in the religious school . Born in 1893 and named after Abraham Lincoln , Krohn was one of eight children of Russian Jews who had immigrated to the United States . His first career was as a social worker , but during a chance meeting , Stephen Samuel Wise was " so impressed with Krohn 's compassion , intellect and eloquence [that] he strongly urged him to consider a career in the rabbinate . " Krohn entered Wise 's Jewish Institute of Religion in 1926 , and graduated as a rabbi in 1930 . He then served as assistant rabbi of Temple Shalom in Plainfield , New Jersey for a year , then as senior rabbi at Temple Albert in Albuquerque , New Mexico for almost seven years , before joining Beth Israel .

Krohn was heavily involved in the community . According to Ira Morton of the Arizona Jewish Historical Society :

The organizations he served in the capacity of president or board member include B 'nai Brith , the Urban League , the Maricopa Mental Health Association and Child Guidance Clinic , Phoenix Public Library , Phoenix Elementary School District , the American Red Cross , the Roosevelt Council of Boy Scouts , the United Fund (later changed to United Way) and the Jewish Family Service (now Jewish Family & Children 's Service) , which Krohn founded . Krohn also served as president of the Valley of the Sun Symphony Orchestra , which later became the Phoenix Symphony , moderator of a Phoenix town hall lecture series , lecturer in biblical literature at Arizona State University and as a civilian chaplain for neighboring military bases and hospitals during World War II .

During Krohn 's tenure the congregation began calling itself " Temple Beth Israel " , and under his leadership the synagogue flourished .

During World War II , Beth Israel provided religious services for servicemen stationed at Luke Air Force Base , and hosted dances for the military personnel there . In 1942 , the congregation started its Judaica library , which initially consisted of 60 works on one shelf .

By the late 1940s , the congregation had increased in size to approximately 300 families , and had outgrown its original facilities . The congregation moved to a more suburban location at Eleventh and Flower in 1949 , and formalized its relationship with the Reform movement by joining the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now the Union for Reform Judaism) . The Central Avenue and Culver Street building was sold to the Southern Baptist Convention , and housed the First Chinese Baptist Church until 1981 , and then the Iglesia Bautista Central . By 2001 it was on the market again , and the Jewish community raised \$ 540 @,@ 000 (today \$ 710 @,@ 000) to purchase it in 2002 . The building is listed on both the city 's historic property register and the National Register of Historic Places .

When Krohn stepped down as rabbi in 1953 due to poor health , the congregation had grown to 538 families . Krohn had also been active in interfaith work , and in June , 1958 was named Man of the Year by the National Conference of Christians and Jews at its annual dinner . He was , however , too ill to attend , and died five months later .

= = Plotkin and Segel eras = =

By 1955 , Phoenix 's Jewish population had grown to over 3 @,@ 000 families , and the city still had two Jewish congregations , Beth Israel and Beth El . That year , with the support of Krohn , Albert Plotkin joined Beth Israel as rabbi . Born in 1920 and raised in South Bend , Indiana , his parents were immigrants from Russia . After getting an undergraduate degree from the University of

Notre Dame , he entered Hebrew Union College in 1943 ? on academic probation , because he had taken no Hebrew at Notre Dame . He was ordained by Hebrew Union College in 1948 , graduating with a Master of Hebrew Letters . Plotkin had started his rabbinic career as assistant rabbi of Temple De Hirsch in Seattle , his first pulpit after ordination . There he met his future wife Sylvia Pincus , whose family were long @-@ time members of Temple De Hirsch . They married a year later , and shortly after moved to Spokane , Washington , where Plotkin became senior rabbi at Temple Emanuel .

During his tenure at Beth Israel , Plotkin was heavily involved in Phoenix 's Jewish and non @-@ Jewish communities . He was a strong Zionist at Hebrew Union College , at a time when the movement was unpopular there , and was later a staunch supporter of Israel . He was an advocate for civil rights , and a supporter of the arts . He founded the Jewish Studies program at Arizona State University and taught there , and volunteered for 25 years as a chaplain at Phoenix Veterans Hospital . In 1972 , the National Conference of Christians and Jews awarded him the National Award for Brotherhood .

Beth Israel added a " cultural and educational wing " to its Flower Street building in 1967 , and in it Sylvia Plotkin founded a Jewish museum . The museum had three galleries : one " house [d] artifacts from a Tunisian synagogue , a second [held] a Judaica collection that chronicle [d] the history of Arizona Jewry and a third [was] used for exhibitions . " Sylvia Plotkin would direct the museum until her death in 1996 , acquiring and mounting many exhibitions there . Renamed the " Sylvia Plotkin Judaica Museum " the day before her death , it was " one of the largest and most respected synagogue museums in the United States . " After Plotkin 's death , Pamela Levin became the museum 's director ; she had begun working with Plotkin as a volunteer in 1985 , and eventually earned a degree in museum studies .

Albert Plotkin would himself go on to serve as the congregation 's rabbi for almost 40 years , retiring in 1992 , and becoming rabbi emeritus . He loved opera music , and two years after retiring , he sang professionally with the Arizona Opera . The Plotkins ' daughter Debra would become the founding artistic director of the Toronto Jewish Film Festival , and their daughter Janis was , for 21 years , one of the main forces behind the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival , and its executive director from 1994 to 2002 .

Plotkin was succeeded by Kenneth Segel in 1992 , and the following year Howard Tabaknek joined as cantor . In 1997 , the congregation moved to its current location at 10460 North 56th Street and Shea Boulevard . The 45 @,@ 000 @-@ square @-@ foot (4 @,@ 200 m2) building had a main sanctuary that seated 500 , and a chapel that seated 300 . The Torah ark was decorated with " fused glass surrounded by colored glass " .

Tabaknek left to join Temple Shalom in Succasunna , New Jersey in 2000 , and was replaced by Andrew Meyer as cantor and Michael Sokol as " cantorial soloist " . Meyer had previously served for five years as spiritual leader of Temple Beth Emeth in Scottsdale , Arizona . Sokol , who grew up in Phoenix and had his Bar Mitzvah at Beth Israel , was a professor of voice and opera at University of California , Santa Barbara , and sang with New York 's Metropolitan Opera for three years .

Segel would serve as rabbi for until 2002 , moving to Temple Beth Or in Montgomery , Alabama .

= = Recent events = =

Stephen Kahn became Beth Israel 's rabbi in July 2003 . By then , membership was approximately 1 @,@ 000 families , the largest Jewish congregation in Arizona . The congregational library , which was open to the public , had grown to over 20 @,@ 000 volumes , making it one of the largest Judaica libraries in the Southwestern United States .

For financial reasons , Levin 's job as museum director was reduced from 25 to 12 hours per week in 2004 , and the position made volunteer in 2005 . By then , the museum had 8 @,@ 000 visitors a year , regular traveling exhibits , and the number of artifacts in it had grown to over 1 @,@ 000 .

In 2005 , the congregation purchased a 1 @.@ 25 @-@ acre (0 @.@ 51 ha) lot across the street from its building , and the house on it , to accommodate future growth . At that time the synagogue had over 900 member families .

That year the congregation also reverted to its original name of " Congregation Beth Israel " . In Kahn 's view , " To me , a ' congregation ' represents people and community while the word " temple " represents a place or building . I would like us to be about the people . "

The Arizona Jewish Historical Society undertook a \$ 4 million campaign in 2007 to raise the funds needed to restore the original synagogue building and other related structures to create the Cutler @-@ Plotkin Jewish Heritage Center . The plan was for the Center to include a museum and other public spaces that would be used to show the connection between the history of the Jewish community as part of Arizona 's history . A \$ 150 @,@ 000 grant had been received in May of that year from the Arizona State Heritage Fund . By August 2008 much of the work of the first phase ? the restoration of the sanctuary and annex ? had been completed , and \$ 2 @.@ 1 million of the \$ 2 @.@ 6 million required for the work had been raised .

In 2007 , Beth Israel opened the Phoenix metropolitan area 's first mikvah (ritual bath) . It was , according to local Modern Orthodox rabbi Darren Kleinberg , " the first time in Jewish history that a mikvah has been built and approved under the auspices of Reform , Conservative and Orthodox rabbis . "

The congregation also hired Jaime Shpall as cantor that year , replacing Bruce Benson , who left in 2006 . Shpall , who graduated as a cantor from the Hebrew Union College in 1997 , had previously served as cantor of Congregation Beth Israel in Austin , Texas . Plotkin died in February 2010 .

As of 2014 , Beth Israel was the oldest congregation in the Phoenix metropolitan area . The senior rabbi was Stephen Kahn , the associate rabbi was Rony Keller , and the cantor was Jaime Shpall . The congregation also owned and operated Camp Daisy and Harry Stein , a Jewish overnight camp in Prescott National Forest near Prescott , Arizona , the only Jewish camp in the area .