

= Congregation Baith Israel Anshei Emes =

Congregation Baith Israel Anshei Emes (Hebrew : ????? ?????????? ????????? ?????? , " House of Israel ? People of Truth ") , more commonly known as the Kane Street Synagogue , is an egalitarian Conservative synagogue located at 236 Kane Street in Cobble Hill , Brooklyn , New York City , United States . It is currently the oldest continuously operating synagogue in Brooklyn .

Founded as Baith Israel in 1856 , the congregation constructed the first synagogue on Long Island , and hired Aaron Wise for his first rabbinical position in the United States . Early tensions between traditionalists and reformers led to the latter forming Congregation Beth Elohim , a Reform synagogue , in 1861 .

The synagogue nearly failed in the early 20th century , but the 1905 hiring of Israel Goldfarb as rabbi , the purchase of its current buildings , and the 1908 merger with Talmud Torah Anshei Emes re @-@ invigorated the congregation . The famous composer Aaron Copland celebrated his Bar Mitzvah there in 1913 , and long @-@ time Goldman Sachs head Sidney Weinberg was married there in 1920 .

Membership peaked in the 1920s , but with the onset of the Great Depression declined steadily , and by the 1970s the congregation could no longer afford to heat the sanctuary . Membership has recovered since that low point ; the congregation renovated its school / community center in 2004 , and in 2008 embarked on a million @-@ dollar capital campaign to renovate the sanctuary .

= = 19th century = =

= = = Origins = = =

Twelve Bavarian , Dutch , and Portuguese Jews gathered at a private home on January 22 , 1856 to discuss their " earnest desire [to] effect the incorporation of a synagogue and congregation for divine service " , and in March that year they founded Congregation Baith Israel . The group had originally organized in 1855 as the United Brethren Society , a benefit society that provided members with medical and burial assistance . Hiring the Reverend M. Gershon as cantor (the person who leads the prayers) , they first met in various homes , then rented space at 155 Atlantic Street , now Atlantic Avenue .

Gershon 's appointment was controversial ; after a background check , the board decided by a 10 ? 9 vote on April 6 , 1856 , that he had never held the position of cantor in any other congregation , and was therefore not " sufficiently acquainted with the actual requirements to fill said office " , and was furthermore not " a competent reader enough to read the Sepher Torah " . As a result , services were led by laymen , except during the Jewish holidays , when a professional cantor would be brought in from Manhattan .

An 1886 Brooklyn Eagle article states that until the founding of Baith Israel " [h] itherto the Hebrew residents in Brooklyn had been under the necessity of finding their way across the East River in all kinds of weather , when they wished to go to their place of worship " . According to synagogue legend , the founders had grown tired of rowing across the East River each Friday to celebrate Shabbat in Manhattan . Carol Levin , however , writes that a ferry service from Whitehall Street in Manhattan to South Ferry , Brooklyn (at the foot of Atlantic Street) had existed since 1836 (see South Ferry (ferry)) , that the Atlantic Street synagogue 's location , so close to the ferry terminus , " must have seemed convenient to many " , and that " [f] erry service was fast , frequent and inexpensive ... In the year 1869 there were almost 52 million passengers . " Thus , in her view , the story of the founders growing tired of rowing across the East River is a " folk tale " .

= = = Attempts at reform and amalgamation , construction of first synagogue = = =

In the congregation 's early years , tensions existed between traditionalists and reformers , and in 1861 , 41 of the latter left Baith Israel to form the Congregation Beth Elohim , a Reform synagogue .

That year Baith Israel hired the Reverend Joel Alexander as its religious leader . Alexander , the synagogue 's first full @-@ time rabbi , was a graduate of the Jews Seminary in Münster , and had been ordained both in Posen and by Hermann Adler , the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom .

In 1862 , the remaining 35 members purchased two lots at the corner of State Street and Boerum Place in Boerum Hill for \$ 3 @,@ 000 (today \$ 71 @,@ 000) , and on January 12 laid the cornerstone for a new building , the first synagogue built on Long Island . The building was completed on August 12 , at a cost of \$ 10 @,@ 000 (today \$ 237 @,@ 000) , and was consecrated on August 31 by Alexander and assembled dignitaries . The synagogue , which came to be known as the Boerum Schule , created a Sunday school soon afterwards , the first in Brooklyn , and at the time , an innovation . The school was free , and run by volunteers , with separate classes for boys and girls . By 1890 the school had 160 students , and at its peak the school had 500 pupils .

In 1869 reformers again left Baith Israel , and , joining with dissenters from Kahal Kodesh Beth Elohim of Williamsburg , founded Temple Israel . Though many reformers had left the congregation , several reforms in the service were nonetheless introduced : the congregation abolished most piyyutim and the Priestly Blessing , and , in 1873 , introduced a confirmation ceremony for girls , led by the Reverend Dr. Tinter . The confirmation ceremonies , which had initially been held during the holiday of Sukkot , were eventually moved to the holiday of Shavuot (the holiday during which the Reform movement held these ceremonies) , and continued for both boys and girls (in place of Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrations) until the 1940s .

Aaron Wise , father of Stephen Samuel Wise , was one of the synagogue 's earliest rabbis , from 1874 to 1875 . This was his first rabbinical position in the United States , before moving to Congregation Rodeph Sholom in Manhattan .

= = = Building renovations , failed mergers , traditionalism = = =

In 1876 , the congregation voted by a margin of over two to one to re @-@ orient the synagogue pews in the manner of Christian churches , and introduce mixed seating . However , nothing was done about this until 1879 , when the renovations were carried out : the front pews were removed , the side pews extended to the walls , and the vestibule moved outside the sanctuary . Led by rabbi Dr. E. M. Myers , the synagogue was re @-@ dedicated on September 7 .

In April 1883 , Baith Israel , Beth Elohim , and Temple Israel , Brooklyn 's three leading synagogues , tried to merge ; Beth Elohim and Temple Israel had both been formed in the 1860s by dissenters from Baith Israel . This was the third such attempt ; the previous two had failed when the members could not agree on synagogue ritual . The combined congregation , which would purchase new premises , would have 150 members (only heads of households were considered members at that time) . Members would be refunded half the purchase price of the pews in their existing buildings . The rabbis of Beth Elohim and Temple Israel were to split the offices of rabbi and cantor : Baith Israel , at the time , had no rabbi . Though this attempt also failed , in the following year the three congregations carried out combined activities , including a picnic and a celebration of the 100th birthday of Sir Moses Montefiore .

Baith Israel hired Marcus Friedlander as rabbi in 1887 . Born in Congress Poland in 1862 , he left Russia for England before he was twenty . Though speaking little English at the time , he graduated there from the London Theological Seminary , before emigrating to the United States . He was 24 years old when he assumed the post at Baith Israel , at the time the youngest man in New York state to be appointed to so significant a position of Jewish leadership . Friedlander served until 1893 , when he resigned to take a more lucrative position in California at the First Hebrew Congregation of Oakland . After Friedlander left , his name was , for reasons unknown , deleted from the synagogue histories , and the financial records and minute books dating from his tenure were removed from Baith Israel 's archives . He was succeeded by Joseph Taubenhauus , the brother of Dr. Gottheil / Godfrey Taubenhauus , the rabbi of Congregation Beth Elohim ; another brother , Jacob / Jean Taubenhauus was a famous French chess master .

In 1889 , the congregation again renovated the synagogue building , repairing it and replacing the

roof , increasing the seating capacity , adding a new vestibule and double entrance way , and redecorating the interior . At that time over half of the congregants still spoke German as their native language . The congregation had 50 members ? defined as " heads of families who own seats " ? by 1891 , and 300 congregants in total . By 1900 , the congregation had 160 members , and the congregational school , which held classes for two hours once a week , had ten teachers and 150 students .

Though the synagogue had undertaken innovations in some areas of Jewish law , it still insisted on strict adherence in others . In 1878 Tinter was dismissed for officiating at the marriage of a Jewish woman and Christian man , and Baith Israel was , for a time , the only congregation in Brooklyn that celebrated Jewish holidays for the traditional two days . In 1889 Baith Israel asserted it was " the only orthodox congregation in the city " , and that year the board forced the resignation of a Mr. J. Folkart , for transgressing the laws of Yom Kippur . In 1892 , when Hyman Rosenberg was expelled as rabbi of Brooklyn 's Beth Jacob synagogue for eating ham , the Brooklyn Eagle canvassed local rabbis for their views on the matter . While George Taubenhauus , rabbi of Beth Elohim stated , " I do not believe my congregation would expel me if I ate ham " , Baith Israel 's rabbi Friedlander responded , " While there are some differences between the reform and orthodox Jews , I do not think it is the place for any Jewish minister to eat ham . The reformers do not so strictly observe the old Mosaic law , but it does not seem to me a good example for a rabbi to set to his congregation . "

= = 20th century = =

= = = Decline and reinvigoration = = =

By 1904 , membership had fallen to 30 , and the synagogue nearly failed : mass transit had allowed Jews to migrate away from downtown Brooklyn , and a fire had nearly destroyed the Boerum synagogue building . Further innovations were attempted , including a pipe organ and a mixed @-@ sex choir , but these were removed after objections from Orthodox members . The congregation decided that the Boerum location was part of the problem , and made the bold decision to sell it , buy new premises , and hire a rabbi (the synagogue had , for many years , run without one) . In 1905 , they hired Israel Goldfarb , a 1902 graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary , as " Hazan [cantor] and Teacher " , his first and only pulpit . The following year Goldfarb was appointed rabbi , a position he would hold for over 50 years .

In 1905 , the congregation also purchased for \$ 30 @,@ 000 (today \$ 790 @,@ 000) its current building at Tompkins Place and Harrison Street (renamed Kane Street in 1928) , along with an adjacent school building and a connecting two @-@ story arcade . The Romanesque revival church building , erected in 1855 , had originally housed the Middle Dutch Reformed Church , and , from 1887 , the Trinity German Lutheran Church . The hiring of Goldfarb and purchase of a new building helped revive the congregation , and by 1906 (its 50th anniversary) membership had doubled .

Goldfarb was a talented musician , known to this day as composer of popular tunes for the songs " Shalom Aleichem " and " Magein Avot " used in most Ashkenazi synagogues . With his brother Samuel E. Goldfarb , he compiled The Jewish Songster for schoolchildren , the first American collection of Jewish songs . Israel Goldfarb also served as Professor of Liturgical Music at the Jewish Theological Seminary from 1920 to 1944 , and in 1949 founded the School of Sacred Music at Hebrew Union College .

In his Kol Nidre sermon of 1905 , Goldfarb emphasized the need for a Talmud Torah (providing inexpensive Jewish education for primary school children) , and it was immediately founded . Talmud Torahs helped synagogues in neighborhoods with small Jewish populations to attract young Jewish families , and were common in " second @-@ settlement areas of New York City such as Harlem and Brooklyn " . By 1907 ? 1908 the congregation had grown to 85 member families . The Talmud Torah , which held classes four days a week , had three teachers and 75 students .

= = = Merger with Talmud Torah Anshei Emes and growth = = =

In 1908 , Baith Israel merged with Degraw Street 's Talmud Torah Anshei Emes Synagogue , a growing congregation which had become too large for the row house in which it held services . Talmud Torah Anshei Emes 's membership was mostly made up of Eastern European Jews , who were stricter in their observances than Baith Israel 's mostly German @-@ origin membership ; to accommodate them , a special all @-@ men section of pews was designated at the front left of the sanctuary .

The merged congregations adopted the current name , a combination of the two previous names , and , with the assistance and encouragement of Goldfarb and synagogue president Harris Copland founded a sisterhood . Nevertheless , the combined membership was still not large ; in 1911 , the year the congregation renovated the recently acquired synagogue building , the Talmud Torah had only 45 students , 10 of them the children of non @-@ members .

The sisterhood had grown to 42 members by 1913 ; that year 11 men were accepted as new congregants , including " a dentist , an optician , a druggist , a lawyer , a butler and two store owners and a roofer " ? in general , middle class occupations . Baith Israel Anshei Emes also became one of the charter members of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism in 1913 , with Michael Salit , who had been synagogue president in 1906 , serving as the congregation 's delegate , and he , Rabbi Goldfarb and another synagogue member , Isaac Applebaum , were among the 22 individuals who initially founded the organization .

Aaron Copland celebrated his Bar Mitzvah at Baith Israel Anshei Emes in 1913 . The Copland family was active in the synagogue ; his father Harris became treasurer and chairman of the Talmud Torah in 1905 , had helped purchase the current building , served as president of the congregation from 1907 to 1910 , and was made a life trustee in 1936 . Aaron 's brother Ralph served as superintendent of the Sunday School . Goldfarb was instrumental in assisting Aaron Copland in his early musical career . While still in high school , Aaron had approached Goldfarb for his support in studying music : Aaron 's father wanted him to enter the legal profession . Goldfarb engineered an agreement whereby Aaron would study music for two or three years , and , if that did not work out , then study law . In his memoirs , Copland would later describe Goldfarb as " a composer of liturgical music and the possessor of a fine baritone voice ... a sensitive human being and an effective leader of the congregation " .

By 1916 , the congregation had installed 10 stained glass windows , electric lighting , a new pulpit , and two large bronze menorahs , and employed six people . Dues were \$ 12 (today \$ 260) per year , and Sunday school fees were \$ 0 @. @ 02 (today \$ 0 @. @ 430) per session . Membership had grown to 140 families by 1919 . The congregational school held classes daily , and had 400 students and 20 teachers .

Sidney Weinberg , who rose from the job of assistant porter to head Goldman Sachs from 1930 to 1969 , was married at Baith Israel Anshei Emes in 1920 . The Weinberg family , which had joined the synagogue when it was still on Beorum Place , was also very active in the synagogue ; Sidney 's mother , Sophie , was sisterhood president from 1912 to 1913 , and his father , Pincus , served as president from 1919 to 1921 , and the children all attended the Sunday school and Talmud Torah . The Weinbergs subsequently moved to Flatbush , where in 1924 Pincus became the first president of the East Midwood Jewish Center .

In 1924 , a fire almost destroyed the upper level of the school building , but the congregation repaired the damage . Another renovation was begun in 1928 , and included installing illuminated stained glass over the ark and bronze memorial tablets at the rear of the sanctuary , and repainting the sanctuary walls and columns in a trompe @-@ l 'il manner imitating Jerusalem stone and marble .

= = = Great Depression and post @-@ World War II decline = = =

On its 75th anniversary in 1931 , the congregation received a congratulatory message from President Herbert Hoover . Additional congratulatory messages arrived from Governor (later President) Franklin D. Roosevelt , Lieutenant Governor Herbert H. Lehman , Mayor Jimmy Walker ,

and Felix M. Warburg . Nevertheless , the Great Depression brought difficult times ; officers were no longer paid their salaries , and were informed in 1932 that they would have to " wait indefinitely " to receive their back wages . In 1933 , the synagogue abolished fixed wages entirely for its employees , and instead paid them on a " month @-@ to @-@ month basis " , depending on what the congregation could afford .

In 1932 women were allowed to join the choir . In deference to traditionalists , however , the choir was moved to the organ loft , so that the women would be less visible .

In the late 1940s and early 1950s , Herman Belth raised \$ 20 @,@ 000 (today \$ 200 @,@ 000) and contributed another \$ 20 @,@ 000 for another renovation of the synagogue . The building was fortified , the interior (except the front wall) repainted , and the exterior brick walls , which had been clad in " blue @-@ veined white stone " , were refinished with " brownstone type stuccoed slabs " . When the renovations were complete , the synagogue was re @-@ dedicated in January 1953 . Despite Belth 's efforts , membership continued to decline , as congregants moved to the suburbs . Though the Centennial Celebrations of 1956 " provided a brief burst of energy for the Congregation and produced funds to maintain the Synagogue " , during this period the choir was disbanded , the Sunday School and Talmud Torah closed , and paid staff reduced .

In the 1960s , following Goldfarb 's retirement , the synagogue hired a series of part @-@ time rabbis , including Goldfarb 's grandson , Henry D. Michelman , who served as rabbi from 1967 to 1971 . Michelman , who would later become the Executive Vice President of the Synagogue Council of America , was , like his grandfather , a talented musician , composing music for synagogues and churches , writing scores for television films for ABC , A & E , CNBC , and PBS , and serving as Chairman of the American Society of Jewish Music .

The membership decline continued in the late 1960s and early 1970s , as older congregants died and moved away , and dwindled to the point where the congregation could no longer afford to heat the sanctuary , and thought they would have to disband . Nevertheless , in 1972 the congregation established a nursery school and prozdor (high school) .

= = = Rebirth : 1980s and 1990s = = =

Changing demographics and new synagogue programs helped the congregation recover from its low point in the 1970s . In 1979 , Raymond Scheindlin , a Ph.D. in Arabic literature from Columbia University , and professor of medieval Hebrew poetry at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTSA) , became the part @-@ time rabbi of the congregation , replacing Howard Gorin , who had served since 1976 . Scheindlin had become a member in 1974 , after joining the faculty of the JTSA and moving to Brooklyn Heights , and from that point on read the Torah every week and served as cantor . He also encouraged the re @-@ constitution of a choir , which called itself " the DeRossi Singers " after Salamone DeRossi , the leading Jewish composer of the late Italian Renaissance , whose works the choir sang .

In 1982 Scheindlin stated that the membership had grown to the point where it again required the services of a full @-@ time rabbi , and the congregation hired Jonathan Ginsburg as its first full @-@ time rabbi since Israel Goldfarb 's retirement . Ginsburg developed adult education and young singles programs , and improved standards in the synagogue 's children 's education programs . Geoffrey Goldberg followed him as rabbi from 1987 to 1988 .

In 1994 the buildings ' stained glass windows , parapet tower , and brownstone were repaired , landscaping redone , and , with a grant from the Sol Goldman Charitable trust , the bimah and vestibule were refurbished . Membership had increased to almost 200 families by 1995 , and in 1996 Samuel H. Weintraub was hired as rabbi .

= = = Increasing involvement of women = = =

In 1961 the synagogue began granting women some pulpit honors , giving the Sisterhood President gelila , and in 1966 granting married couples hagbaha and gelila (the honors of lifting and re @-@ wrapping the Torah after it has been read) . In the 1970s , women became more involved in the

synagogue 's political and religious activities : in 1972 , the first woman was elected to the board of trustees , and in 1975 , the congregation began calling women to the Torah and counting women in the minyan , the latter just two years after the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly voted nine to four in favor of this innovation .

In 1980 , Nancy Fink , a Brooklyn Law School professor , was elected as the congregation 's first female president . Fink called a full membership meeting in 1982 to decide whether women could lead the services , blow the shofar (the rams @-@ horn trumpet blown on the High Holidays) , and whether daughters of kohanim (hereditary priests) could give the priestly blessing . Advised by Scheindlin , the congregation decided to make the services fully egalitarian , allowing women to perform all three functions .

Baith Israel Anshei Emes 's move to egalitarianism culminated in August 1988 , when Debra Cantor was hired as its first female rabbi , making it the first synagogue in the Northeastern United States to be led by a woman . Cantor , who was 33 at the time , had been valedictorian of that year 's graduating class at the Jewish Theological Seminary . The decision was not accepted by all congregants ; the Conservative movement had ordained its first female rabbi , Amy Eilberg , only three years before , in 1985 , and following Cantor 's appointment a number of families left the synagogue to form B 'nai Avraham , an Orthodox congregation in Brooklyn Heights .

= = 21st century = =

In 2002 Baith Israel Anshei Emes received a \$ 1 million grant for building renovations from Lillian Goldman , just weeks before her death ; she had previously donated \$ 20 million for the reconstruction and expansion of Yale Law School 's library , and \$ 5 million to Manhattan 's 92nd Street Y for a family center there . After raising over \$ 2 million more , including a \$ 54 @,@ 000 grant from the Jewish Communal Fund , in 2003 the congregation began re @-@ building the three story school / community center from the ground up , leaving only the historic facade . In 2004 the building was re @-@ opened as the " Sol and Lillian Goldman Education Center " , and a day @-@ time pre @-@ school launched . Though the sanctuary also needed extensive repairs , the renovations of the school / community center were undertaken first because the congregation decided " a venue for social functions is at the heart of every cohesive religious group " . The following year , the school received a \$ 25 @,@ 000 grant from the Edith Glick Shoolman Children 's Foundation " [t] o assist in the development of the Kane Street Kids program for pre @-@ school age children housed in the Congregation 's Early Childhood Center " .

Nearly 300 households were members by 2006 , and in the same year , the New York State Office of Parks , Recreation and Historic Preservation awarded the synagogue a grant of \$ 350 @,@ 000 for exterior restoration of the sanctuary . The grant was part of a million @-@ dollar capital campaign that the membership intended to carry out in 2008 , as the synagogue building still required extensive repairs : the roof leaked , causing interior damage , and (along with the gutters) needed to be replaced ; interior columns were taped to prevent plaster from falling off them ; the sanctuary doors needed to be replaced ; and the stained glass windows needed to be removed , the metal holding them repaired , and their wooden framing replaced . In 2007 the New York Landmarks Conservancy 's Sacred Sites Program awarded Baith Israel Anshei Emes grants totaling \$ 17 @,@ 500 , for copper roof and masonry restoration .

The congregation had been supportive of gays since at least the early 1990s , and following the late 2006 decision by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards to allow same @-@ sex commitment ceremonies , in 2007 Baith Israel Anshei Emes voted to follow suit . The day before Yom Kippur , 2009 , the synagogue was picketed by members of the Westboro Baptist Church , who shouted antisemitic and anti @-@ gay slogans .

Led by Rabbi Samuel H. Weintraub since 1996 , Baith Israel Anshei Emes is the oldest continuously operating synagogue in Brooklyn .