

= Temple Israel (Dayton , Ohio) =

Temple Israel is a Reform congregation located at 130 Riverside Drive in Dayton , Ohio . Formed in 1850 , it incorporated as " Kehillah Kodesh B 'nai Yeshurun " in 1854 . After meeting in rented quarters , the congregation purchased its first synagogue building , a former Baptist church at 4th and Jefferson , in 1863 . Strongly influenced by Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise , it rapidly modernized its services , and , in 1873 , was a founding member of the Union for Reform Judaism .

The congregation sold its existing building in 1893 , and constructed a larger one at First and Jefferson , later severely damaged by the Great Dayton Flood of 1913 . In 1927 , the congregation moved to still larger , multi @-@ purpose premises at Salem and Emerson Avenues , outside downtown Dayton , and began to use the name " Temple Israel " , adding a new sanctuary to the building in 1953 . Temple Israel moved to its current building in 1994 .

Synagogue membership grew steadily for over 100 years , from 12 families in 1850 to 150 in the early 1900s , 200 by 1927 , and 500 by 1945 , peaking at 1 @,@ 100 in the 1960s . By 1995 , however , membership was down to 800 families .

Temple Israel has had a number of long @-@ tenured rabbis who were influential both in the congregation and in the larger Dayton community . These have included David Lefkowitz (1900 ? 1920) , Louis Witt (1927 ? 1947) , Selwyn Ruslander (1947 ? 1969) and P. Irving Bloom (1973 ? 1997) . As of 2011 , the rabbis were David M. Sofian and Karen Bodney @-@ Halasz .

= = The early years , at 4th and Jefferson = =

What was later to become Temple Israel was originally formed as a Hebrew Society in 1850 by twelve Jewish men under the leadership of Joseph Lebensburger , a German Jew and first permanent Jewish resident of Dayton . The Society met daily for prayers in rented rooms : first above a shop in the old Dayton Bank Building (which was later the Steele High School , and has since been demolished) near Monument and Main Streets , and later in larger quarters in a building next to the Cooper building , a block south on Main Street . It also hired its first Torah reader , a " Mr. Wendel " , and purchased ? for \$ 100 (today \$ 2 @,@ 800) ? a small piece of land for a cemetery on what is now Rubicon Street .

The Society incorporated as " Kehillah Kodesh B 'nai Yeshurun " in 1854 . It moved to larger facilities , first near First and Main Streets in 1860 , and then , in 1863 , to the northeast corner of 4th and Jefferson Streets . There Kehillah Kodesh B 'nai Yeshurun purchased for \$ 1 @,@ 500 (today \$ 29 @,@ 000) its first owned premises , the building of a Baptist church whose congregation was moving to Main Street .

The structure required " extensive remodeling " , and Lebensburger , as building chairman , led the campaign to raise the necessary \$ 9 @,@ 000 (today \$ 173 @,@ 000) . Funds came not only from the membership but also from non @-@ Jewish members of many local societies , including the Odd Fellows and Masons . Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise assisted B 'nai Yeshurun 's then ? religious leader Rev. Mr. Delbanco with the dedication of what became " the seventh congregation @-@ owned Jewish House of Worship in Ohio . "

= = Move to Reform , and early rabbis = =

Influenced by Wise , the congregation implemented many reforms in its services . In 1861 they adopted Wise 's Minhag America prayer book . In that same decade they added an organ , did away with the prayer shawl , and started a religious school . In the 1870s the congregation removed yahrzeit candles from the sanctuary , and added family pews and a mixed choir (men and women together) . In 1873 B 'nai Yeshurun was one of the first thirteen founding members of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) , now Union for Reform Judaism .

By 1889 B 'nai Yeshurun had outgrown its original cemetery , and the congregation purchased 8 acres (3 @. 2 ha) on West Schantz Avenue in Oakwood . Oakwood was a " restricted community " ; Jews were not allowed to reside or own stores there . According to Leonard Spialter ,

president of the Dayton Jewish Genealogical Society , " if you were dead , you could be buried in Oakwood , but if you were alive , you couldn't live there " . Relatives began moving those buried at the Rubicon cemetery to the new " Riverview Cemetery " , including Lebensburger , who had died by this time . This process was not completed until 1967 .

In its first forty years the congregation had a series of generally short @-@ tenured religious leaders . These included Delbanco (1862 ? 63) , Moses Bauer (1863 ? 64) , L. Liebman (1864 ? 67) , Abraham Blum (1868 ? 69) , Leon Leopold (1870 ? 72) , Ben Weil (1872 ? 76) , Ephraim Fischer (1876 ? 81) , Godfrey / Gottheil Taubenhaus (later rabbi of Congregation Beth Elohim of Brooklyn , New York) (1881 ? 85) , and Israel Saenger (1885 ? 89) .

During this period the membership also transformed from immigrant @-@ born to native @-@ born . In 1881 the congregation 's " language of record " was changed from German to English , and in 1889 the synagogue hired its first American @-@ trained rabbi , Max Wertheimer .

A graduate of Wise 's Hebrew Union College , Wertheimer had been born in Germany to Orthodox parents . He was popular with the congregation , and Dayton 's Christian community highly respected him . Non @-@ Jews attended his Friday evening sermons , and he in turn was a guest speaker at many Dayton churches .

= = First and Jefferson building , and David Lefkowitz as rabbi = =

In 1893 the congregation sold its building at 4th and Jefferson , and constructed a new one at First and Jefferson . Wise again assisted with the dedication .

Wertheimer 's wife died young , leaving him with two small children . This tragedy made him question his faith ; in 1899 he resigned from the congregation , resigned his membership in the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) , and , in 1900 , converted to Christian Science ; in 1938 David Max Eichhorn wrote that " Mary Baker Eddy herself financed Wertheimer 's study " . Wertheimer later became a Baptist .

David Lefkowitz was hired as rabbi in 1900 , when the congregation comprised around 150 families . Born in Eperies , Hungary in 1875 , he had emigrated to the United States with his widowed mother and two brothers around 1881 . Due to financial difficulties , he and one brother grew up in the Hebrew Orphan Asylum of New York , where he later worked to help pay for his schooling . A graduate of both the College of the City of New York and the University of Cincinnati , he was ordained at Hebrew Union College in 1900 . Held in " high regard " by the membership , Lefkowitz was also " an active force in Dayton 's civic and interfaith activities " and an " ambassador of the Jewish Community to the Dayton area " . He was the first president of the Dayton chapter of the Red Cross and served on its Executive Board , and also served as president of the Humane Society .

Later president of the CCAR , Lefkowitz was also anti @-@ Zionist . He was one of the prominent Jewish signatories of a petition presented in 1919 by United States Congressman Julius Kahn to President of the United States Woodrow Wilson who " asserted their wish not to see Palestine ' either now or at any time in the future ' become a Jewish state . " In 1942 , he was one of the founders of the American Council for Judaism , " the only American Jewish organization ever formed for the specific purpose of fighting Zionism and opposing the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine . "

During Lefkowitz 's tenure , the synagogue building was severely damaged by the Great Dayton Flood of 1913 . Lefkowitz was " in charge of one of the districts outside the flooded area " . There he assisted around 28 @,@ 000 refugees in finding shelter , and " established a bread line to feed them " . However , his suggestion that the congregation move to a larger building in a new location outside downtown Dayton , while taken seriously , was not acted on .

Membership had grown to 206 families by 1919 . The congregational school held classes twice a week , and had 8 classes , 10 teachers , and 140 students . That year the synagogue 's total income was \$ 10 @,@ 000 (today \$ 136 @,@ 000) . In 1920 , Lefkowitz moved to Temple Emanu @-@ El , Dallas 's largest and oldest synagogue .

= = Salem and Emerson building = =

Samuel S. Mayersberg succeeded Lefkowitz as rabbi . He was " known for his oratorical skills and his crusades for moral and police reforms in Dayton " . His major goal during his ministry was to acquire larger premises outside downtown Dayton , which was realized in 1927 when the congregation moved to a new building at Salem and Emerson Avenues . Besides the main sanctuary , which had seating for 600 people , the structure included a social hall and kitchen , classrooms , and offices . It was at that time that the congregation began to use the name " Temple Israel " . Mayersberg left that year , and became the rabbi of Congregation B 'nai Jehudah of Kansas City , Missouri . During his tenure , membership increased to 200 families .

Louis Witt succeeded Mayersberg in 1927 . He worked on fostering interfaith relations , and , like his predecessors , was active in community and civic life . A tall man who sometimes wore a swallow @-@ tail coat when conducting services , he was a strong proponent of " Classical Reform " principles , and while he was rabbi , following his preference , no one wore a skullcap in the Temple .

In 1929 , at the second UAHC convention , Witt had asserted that America " by its very pleasantness and friendliness lures us away from our ancient loyalties . Its secularism is so delightful , its mutuality so penetrative , its universalism so delightful , that by a sort of sheer spiritual osmosis it incorporates us into itself and makes us look and become more and more like itself " . Witt argued that Jews had to resist this pull . Ten years later , however , in a 1939 article in The Christian Century , he argued that Jews should celebrate Christmas . In his view , Christians were now more liberal and celebrated " the inherent humanness and universalism " of Christmas , rather than any specifically Christian doctrine . Stating that his children had been deprived of the holiday 's pleasures , Witt asserted that Judaism was already a syncretic religion , and that celebrating the holiday was an ecumenical act which did not indicate that he was " thereby drawn even by the breadth of a hair nearer to the worship of an ecclesiastical Christ " . He concluded by asking " Is it neither treason of Jew nor triumph of Christian but partnership of Jew and Christian in the making of a better world in which the Christ can have part only by energizing and perpetuating and hallowing the partnership ? " .

During Witt 's tenure , Dayton experienced an influx of Jewish immigration , and the original German @-@ Jewish constituency of the congregation became more diverse . Family membership reached 500 by 1945 .

= = New sanctuary during Selwyn Ruslander 's tenure = =

Following Witt 's retirement in 1947 , Selwyn D. Ruslander succeeded him . Born in Pennsylvania in 1911 , Ruslander had graduated from the University of Cincinnati in 1931 , and was ordained at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1935 . He worked at a number of non @-@ rabbinic jobs (including as an Ordinary Seaman in the U.S. Merchant Marine) , and several rabbinic positions , including both pulpit and non @-@ pulpit roles . In 1939 he was appointed Director of Youth Education for the UAHC , and also became the first director of the National Federation of Temple Youth (now North American Federation of Temple Youth) . In 1942 , during World War II , he took a leave of absence from the UAHC to volunteer for the armed forces as a U.S. Navy chaplain . From 1943 to 1945 he served with the United States Eighth Fleet in the Mediterranean Sea , " the first Jewish chaplain in the history of the Navy to serve with a combat fleet " , and earned a Combat Star for his participation in Operation Shingle . He was released from active duty in December 1946 , and returned briefly to the UAHC , then went to South Shore Temple in Chicago , before taking the role at Temple Israel .

Ruslander brought some traditionalism back to the congregation ; he reinstated the Bar Mitzvah and inaugurated the Bat Mitzvah celebrations , and re @-@ organized the religious school and added Hebrew to its curriculum . Like his predecessors , he was very active in Dayton 's civic life , serving on the boards of a large number of community organizations . Ruslander was possibly Dayton 's then " best known clergyman of any faith " , and during his tenure Temple Israel experienced rapid growth . In 1953 , Temple Israel constructed a new sanctuary at its Salem and

Emerson location , and connected it to the original building . By the end of the 1960s membership increased to 1 @, @ 100 families , and Temple Israel hired Howard R. Greenstein and Joseph S. Weizenbaum as assistant rabbis . Ruslander died in 1969 , and for several years Greenstein and Weizenbaum served as interim spiritual leaders . In 1972 , Weizenbaum became rabbi of Temple Emanu @-@ El of Tucson , Arizona , where he served until 1993 . Greenstein joined Jacksonville , Florida 's Congregation Ahavath Chesed as rabbi in 1973 , and served there until 1995 .

= = The move to Riverside Drive , led by P. Irving Bloom = =

P. (Paul) Irving Bloom joined as rabbi in 1973 . He had previously been a U.S. Air Force chaplain , then rabbi of Congregation Sha 'arai Shomayim in Mobile , Alabama from 1960 to 1973 . Bloom introduced a number of innovations to the synagogue , including joint programs with other Dayton synagogues , a new curriculum for the religious school and Jewish studies classes for adults , and enhanced Friday programs and lay @-@ led services in the summer . Bloom strongly believed that Temple Israel should relocate to a more central location , as the Jewish community of Dayton had by then spread throughout Miami Valley . His vision was realized in 1994 , when the congregation moved to a new building on Riverside Drive , near downtown Dayton . The building at Salem and Emerson was sold to a Baptist church . As noted by Bloom , the congregation had " come full circle " ; it purchased its first building from a Baptist church in downtown Dayton , and had sold its most recent building to a Baptist church in order to return to the area . By 1995 , however , membership was only eight hundred families .

Bloom retired in 1997 , and was succeeded by Marc Gruber . A graduate of Brandeis University , Gruber attended Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem and New York , and was ordained in 1981 . A vegetarian , he also wrote a syndicated vegetarian cooking column from 1990 to 1993 . At Temple Israel he reformed the services and introduced Bar and Bat Mitzvah classes for adults . During his tenure , in 2000 , the congregation celebrated its Sesquicentennial , with a number of " religious , cultural , social and social action programs " throughout the year . Gruber also served on the Steering Committee for the UAHC Department of Jewish Family Concerns from 1995 to 2002 , working on " the inclusion of people with disabilities and special needs " . Gruber moved to Central Synagogue of Nassau County in Rockville Centre , New York in 2002 , and Michael Remson served as interim rabbi .

= = Recent events = =

David M. Sofian joined as Rabbi in 2003 . A graduate of Hebrew Union College and the University of Missouri , Sofian had served as assistant rabbi at Temple Emanuel in Worcester , Massachusetts , at Temple Shaarai Shomayim in Lancaster , Pennsylvania , and at Emanuel Congregation in Chicago , before coming to Temple Israel . Karen Bodney @-@ Halasz , a graduate of Northwestern University , joined as Religious School Director in 2003 and became Director of Education in 2005 . After her rabbinic ordination in June 2007 , she became Rabbi @-@ Educator .

Sofian retired in 2014 , Illene Bogosian was hired as interim senior rabbi and Bodney @-@ Halasz was elevated to associate rabbi . After an eight @-@ month search process , the temple 's search committee unanimously recommended Bodney @-@ Halasz become the next senior rabbi . The temple 's board of directors approved that recommendation in January 2016 , making Bodney @-@ Halasz Temple Israel 's first senior rabbi . She will officially take over July 1 .