

The image shows the interior of Temple B'rith Kodesh, a modern synagogue. The architecture is characterized by a large, circular, vaulted ceiling with a central circular light fixture. The walls are made of wood and feature large, arched windows with vertical slats. The floor is covered in wooden pews, and the altar area is visible in the background.

Affirming the Covenant



*A History of Temple B'rith Kodesh
Rochester, New York, 1848–1998*

By Peter Eisenstadt

For Luise, whose magnificent ark
inspires those who "commune"
with it while attending services
at B'rith Kodesh!

in great admiration,
Carol Sue Hai, Chair
Rabbi Philip S. Bernstein Society
Temple B'rith Kodesh

October 15, 2010

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Rabbi Philip S. Bernstein

In the last analysis history is made by ordinary people. The history of this congregation is not the history of its rabbis, however useful may have been their role. Nor is it the record of unusual events, like our fire, or a controversy or an interfaith service. It is the history of how ordinary men and women and their children remained loyal to the faith of their fathers. It is the record of people who, week after week, came to worship despite the difficulties of Rochester's winters and the growing diversions of community life. It is the story of children, who, generation after generation, came here to study however reluctant some may have been, and however inadequate may have been their instruction. It is a story of committees and of sisterhoods and of brotherhoods and of women who sewed upstairs and cooked downstairs. It is the record of those who, year after year, sustained a congregation with their resources and with their moral support.

We hail that little band of pioneers, not for being heroes or saints but for being typical Jews who were so deeply attached to the faith of their fathers and so profoundly concerned for the welfare of their children that, as their first common act, they established a synagogue and called it by the name, B'rith Kodesh.



—Rabbi Philip S. Bernstein, Rosh Hashanah 1948

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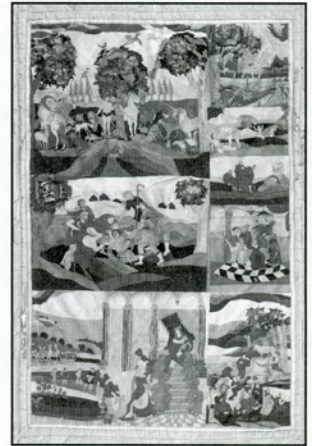
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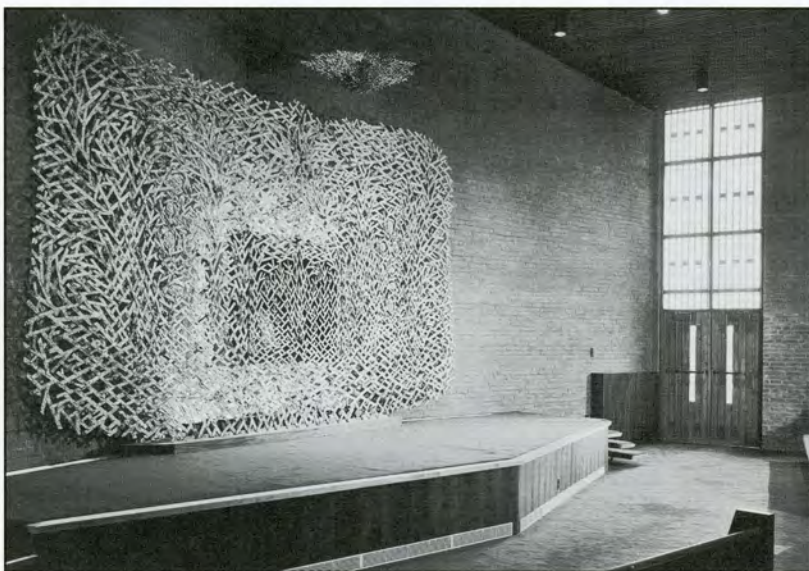
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This beautiful quilt, depicting scenes from the Bible, was a cherished heirloom of Rabbi Max and Miriam Landsberg. (Courtesy Rochester Museum and Science Center, Rochester, New York, photo by Paul Porell)



The new ark in the Benjamin Goldstein chapel with a close-up of the shredded metal ark doors, designed by Richard E. Filipowski, faculty member at M.I.T. (Photo by Molitor)



Jerome "Jerry" Gordon (1915–1995), executive director of B'rith Kodesh from 1958 to 1984, supervised the growth of the temple during the period of its greatest expansion.



Luise Kaish supervising the assembly of the sanctuary ark she designed and built.

The new sanctuary was set back a good distance from Elmwood Avenue, to keep the congregation separated from the bustle of traffic. The main sanctuary, named for Rabbi Bernstein after his death, was 65 feet high and 62 feet in diameter, with a seating capacity of 850. The twelve sides of the sanctuary correspond to the twelve tribes of Israel; the dome on the roof of the sanctuary represents the Ohel-Moed, the tent of meeting of the tribes of Israel in the wilderness. The auditorium has a seating capacity of 2,000, making possible a High Holy Day seating of almost 3,000 persons.

The new temple building was filled with distinguished art. The ark in the main sanctuary, designed by Luise Kaish, was unusual for its use of figurative representations of biblical characters. The ark in the Goldstein chapel, designed by Richard E. Filipowski in welded and meshed metal, was strikingly abstract. It presented an image which the designer described as a randomness that reveals after careful scrutiny a subtle symmetry. Herbert Bronstein described the ark as depicting "order

arising out of disorder, concord out of discord, harmony out of disharmony, structure out of randomness.”

The Elmwood Avenue building cost over \$2 million to build, in pre-1970s dollars. This called for creative fundraising, and the driving force behind this effort was Philip Bernstein. This would be, as he knew, his last great contribution to Temple B’rith Kodesh. He had long since overcome whatever diffidence he had about asking for contributions for good causes, and as one admirer put it, “he could raise water from a rock.” His success came about less from any high-powered style than the immense respect he carried with his congregants.

Working closely with Philip Bernstein in this endeavor was Jerome Gordon. He first came to B’rith Kodesh in 1940 as head of Hebrew instruction, in which capacity he directed the first Bar Mitzvah candidates at the temple in almost sixty years. Gordon left B’rith Kodesh in 1944, and later spent a number a years as educational director of a Conservative synagogue in Miami. Gordon returned to Rochester at the express request of Philip Bernstein in the late 1950s after the death of Benjamin Goldstein to take the position of executive director. Gordon headed the administration of the temple during the hectic years of the building campaign for the Elmwood Avenue complex. He brought a new level of professionalism to the management of B’rith Kodesh finances. Gordon remained executive director until his retirement in 1984. He was followed by Marvin Walts, who stayed through 1992. Rona Wyner was executive director from 1992 to 1997.

Garson Meyer was chairman of the Building Committee, and the individual most responsible for supervising the construction of the new temple. He brought to the task a wealth of experience as a practical chemist, and the perspective of a long-time officer of B’rith Kodesh. Meyer was born in Rochester in 1896, the son of one of the first Hasidic families in Rochester. After getting a degree in chemical engineering from the University of Rochester in 1919, Meyer was one of the first Jews hired at Kodak. (His regular tasks included waterproofing the hiking boots of George Eastman.)

Meyer joined B’rith Kodesh in the early 1920s because he felt his children, especially his daughters, would have a better Jewish education at B’rith Kodesh than in an Orthodox shule. He soon became active in temple affairs. Elected to the Board of Trustees in 1930, Meyer stayed on the board for over forty-five years, serving as president of the temple from 1954 to



Elmwood Avenue Temple under construction, 1961. (Courtesy Rochester Public Library)



The “clerk of the works,” Chairman of the Building Committee, Garson Meyer personally supervised every aspect of the building of the Elmwood Avenue Temple.

Garson Meyer,
Interview, 1976

I was originally scheduled to retire in 1963, which was beyond my 65th birthday, but Kodak wanted me to