

SEPHARDIC
BETH SHALOM



הכנסת ספרד
בית שלום

SPANISH HEBREW SOCIETY

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CINCINNATI SEPHARDIC BETH SHALOM CONGREGATION

THE BALKAN UPHEAVALS of 1907-1912 did it. Although the first Jewish immigrants in Cincinnati were of Sephardic origin, there were too few to organize an independent Sephardic Congregation here until the year 1907. In that year enough men came from the Shores of the Dardanelles (and later from Salonica,) to form the first Minyan of Ladino-speaking Sephardim. In 1910 Refael Mordehai Varon came and then Shemuel Telvi (in 1912) and Rabbi Avraam Shemtov Gargir came in 1916. The three men conducted the religious life of the "Judio Espanoles" until 1932.

The Kehila Fund was started in 1911 and a building was purchased at 412 Betts St. during the presidency of Hayim Habib, and later under Harry Russo.

The First World War caused many to move to New York City, but the new arrivals after 1918, helped to bolster the thinning membership. The rooms, or the gym of the old Community House at 415 Clinton Street, where services were held during the High Holidays.

The group reorganized in 1919 and on October 20, 1919, a charter was obtained. The organization was called The Spanish Hebrew Society, and it still bears the name. The first president was Isaac Benmayor, followed by Joseph Varon and Vitali Sedacca.

The untimely death of Mordehai Avraam Molinas in December, 1919, caused such hardships to the newly reorganized group that the first goal was the purchase of a half acre of ground from the Ohav Shalom Congregation in 1920, for the purpose of a burial ground. It is known as the Spanish-Hebrew Cemetery.

Tired of not having a permanent house of prayer, the group again launched a Kehila Fund and when Leo Telvis, Shemuel's son, became president in January, 1932, the goal of the Sephardim was to build a Kehila.

Rabbi Eliezer Silver helped and blessed the new project, and Walton Bachrach guided the legal matters of the building of a Sephardic House of prayer.

The death of Refael Varon in 1932 and the "Moses-like-end" of Rabbi Gargir, in 1933 a few months before the completion of the building, did not stop the ardor of the congregation, and the building was completed near the end of that year.

The void caused by the loss of two outstanding religious leaders, and the loss of Mr. Shemuel Telvi's eye-sight, caused a temporary lull. Isaac Benmayor replaced Rabbi Gargir until a Sephardic Rabbi could be found. Isaac Modiano, Morris Hazen and Vitali Sedacca helped conduct the prayers. The death of Shemuel Telvi in 1940 at the age of 93, made a change in the presidency, and Ralph Crespin became chairman for two years; Bob Holo, for one year; Morris Hazen, for one year; Sam Russo, for one year and Hayim Levy for two years. Since 1948 Ralph Crespin has been the chairman.

The services of Dr. L. Guberman were engaged in 1940, and after his passing in 1948, Dr. Schneider cared for the membership until 1954.

In 1946 Rabbi Hayim Hazen arrived from Yugoslavia, and with the help of Rabbi Silver, at long last the group had a religious leader, who teaches the children and guides the parents.

Compiled by Ralph Crespin, *President*

THE PRESENT OFFICERS OF THE CONGREGATION ARE:

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R. HOLORecording Secretary	MORRIS HAZENCantor
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