

Tradition sets synagogue apart

Orthodox Jews in Roselawn keep German roots

BY CHRISTINE WOLFF

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When New Hope Congregation was founded in the spring of 1939, in Avondale, it proved true to its name for a group of Jews who had fled Nazi Germany.

The congregation — which numbered just 14 people at its start — prospered, while managing to retain its Orthodox roots in the city which had become a stronghold of liberal Reform Judaism.

Today, New Hope is the only Orthodox synagogue in Greater Cincinnati retaining its German liturgical heritage and one of the few remaining outside New York City, according to Rabbi Zvi Hollander, the associate rabbi.

Overwhelmingly, Orthodox Jews in the United States came from Eastern Europe.

The New Hope congregation, numbering about 110 families, celebrates its 50th anniversary at a banquet Sunday in the Westin Hotel.

Back in the 1930s, Rabbi Eliezer Silver — then chief rabbi of the city — encouraged the new immigrants not to forget their heritage, Hollander said.

"He urged people to form ethnic congregations, congregations from their own background, so we wouldn't all melt into the pot," Hollander said.

"We wanted to keep our customs," said Manfred Rabenstein, 78, New Hope's senior rabbi. "In Cincinnati, when you spoke of German Jews, you spoke of Reform Jews."

New Hope opened its own cemetery in 1941, on Sidney Road, Price Hill. In 1959, the congregation moved into its current home on Crest Hill Avenue, Roselawn.

The congregation numbered about 176 families at its peak; today, many of its members are elderly and others have moved to other neighborhoods. Because Orthodox Jews do not drive on the Sabbath, they prefer to attend services close to their homes.



Michael Snyder for The Cincinnati Enquirer

Manfred Rabenstein, who serves as senior rabbi at New Hope Synagogue in Roselawn, prepares for the congregation's 50th anniversary.