

PLANTING
THE SEEDS—
THE NEXT
100 YEARS

BETH ISRAEL
CONGREGATION

CENTENNIAL
CAMPAIGN



\$1,000,000 for
Community
Engagement,
Education and
Leadership,
AND
Environmental
Sustainability



BETH ISRAEL
CONGREGATION

BETH ISRAEL CON

At Beth Israel, we WELCOME people of all backgrounds and meet them where they are. We ENGAGE our members and friends in creating meaningful Jewish practice, prayer, and life-long Jewish learning.

We WORK TOGETHER to make our Midcoast Maine community a better place for all people.

Photo left: the Ergas Family Bar Mitzvah by Katia Dermott; Below: Rabbi Vinikoor



BETH ISRAEL
CONGREGATION



DEAR FRIENDS,

I am honored to serve as Beth Israel
Congregation's rabbi and spiritual leader.

Since my first visit to Beth Israel a few years ago, I have been impressed by the warmth, caring, and participatory nature of the congregation, and of the community at large. Our members lead prayer services, teach and learn, cook and share meals, organize holiday celebrations, volunteer in the community, and educate our youth. Beth Israel is a hands-on synagogue. What a blessing it is to serve such a diverse and vibrant community!

Our historic synagogue and Minnie Brown Center, both located in downtown Bath, serve as gathering places for the Jewish community alongside friends and neighbors from other faiths, or of no faith, drawing people from Bath, Brunswick, Freeport, Damariscotta and surrounding towns. Our Hebrew School students enliven each week with their presence in our Minnie Brown Center.

At Beth Israel, we welcome people of all backgrounds and meet them where they are. We engage our members and friends in creating meaningful Jewish practice, prayer, and life-long Jewish learning. We work together to make our Midcoast Maine community a better place for all people.

The ancient rabbis tell the story of a man who plants a carob tree that, according to the tale, takes 70 years to bloom. When a passerby inquires as to why he bothers to plant a tree whose fruits he'll never eat, he answers that just as his grandparents planted trees that bore fruit during his lifetime, so too does he plant trees for the generations yet to come.

So we too, are planting trees for the children in generations to come who will learn, teach, and lead our Jewish community here in Bath, Brunswick and beyond. I am thrilled to be on this journey with Beth Israel Congregation and to engage in the sacred task of planting seeds for our future.

L'Shalom (In peace)



Rabbi Lisa Vinikoor





V **VISION:** AS BETH ISRAEL CONGREGATION approaches the 100-year anniversary of the opening of the community-built synagogue building in Bath, Maine, it is embarking on an ambitious \$1,000,000 fundraising campaign, which will increase the size of its endowment and provide money to upgrade the social and educational spaces available to the congregation.

To reach this goal will require active and generous participation of every member of the congregation and contributions from others in the Maine Jewish community and beyond who understand the value of maintaining Jewish life in small town North America. We also look to the broader Midcoast community to support the vibrancy of multicultural and diverse religious life in downtown Bath.

The campaign will ask for five-year pledges, with the goal of having all pledges initiated by the centennial date of January 29, 2022.

A **ASPIRATIONS:** THE ENHANCED PHYSICAL SPACE will allow the congregation to truly serve as a hub for Jewish community life in the Midcoast area and for Bath community life more generally.

The increased endowment will provide income beyond what is available from dues and annual donations to support the employment of a rabbi in this small, but vibrant, inclusive community and allow the expansion of religious, educational, cultural, and community programming to help the synagogue meet its goal to be a “light unto the nations” (or at least a light unto Midcoast Maine) for the next one hundred years.



Moving into our second century with a renewed commitment to Jewish life in Midcoast Maine.

BETH ISRAEL CONGREGATION FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN

THEME:
PLANTING THE SEEDS —
THE NEXT 100 YEARS

CELEBRATING:
OUR 100 YEAR ANNIVERSARY
in BATH, MAINE, in 2022

\$1M IS OUR CAMPAIGN GOAL

TARGET:
ALL PLEDGES IN PLACE BY —
JANUARY 29, 2022

PROVIDING
\$1,000,000

for Community Engagement
Education and Leadership
Environmental Sustainability

TOTAL WORKING FUNDRAISING GOAL: \$1,000,000
Honoring the past by building for the future in the
key areas of **COMMUNITY, EDUCATION,**
and **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY.**



BETH ISRAEL CONGREGATION

Centennial Campaign — SPECIFIC GOALS



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

\$ 150,000

- Upgrades to Minnie Brown Center to add a handicapped accessible restroom on the first floor, a meeting/adult education room, and a refurbished rabbi's study: \$150,000.

Upgrade our physical space for meetings, classes, and larger social programs so that our non-synagogue spaces are more physically accessible, creating an inviting environment in which to nourish and enhance the human interaction happening within its walls.



EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP

\$ 750,000

- Rabbi endowment fund: \$400,000.

Ensure that we can always offer a professional rabbi a salary and benefits commensurate with her or his education and experience.

- Jewish education endowment fund: \$250,000.

Young people are our future! Ensure the provision of the highest quality of Jewish religious and cultural education to all young people in the Midcoast Maine area, while maintaining our policy of tuition-free religious school education (with membership). Supplement annual giving funds to support adult education and family-focused educational programming.

- Increase the size and functionality of basement classrooms: \$100,000.

Grow our physical capacity for our programming in Jewish education, both for our youth and for adult members of our congregation.



ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

\$ 100,000

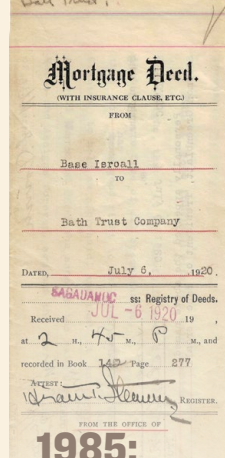
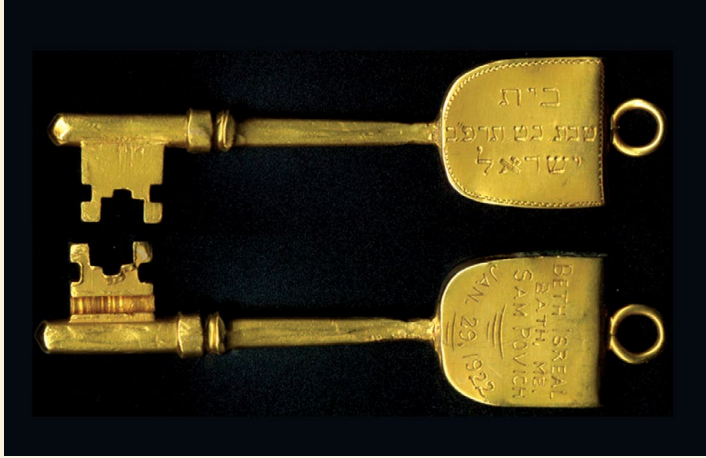
- Update insulation and heating and cooling systems in both our buildings: \$100,000.

Being environmentally responsible is a basic tenet of Judaism from its ancient roots as the religion of an agrarian people. We still pray for rain or dew in the proper season and celebrate the "Birthday of the Trees" every winter.

Currently, our buildings are cold in the winter and hot in the summer. We plan to address these issues in an environmentally responsible way.

The success of this CAMPAIGN will ensure that a small, regional, Jewish community can CONTINUE TO THRIVE in Midcoast Maine. Please be part of this worthwhile endeavor.





H

HISTORY: Brief History of the First 100 Years of the Congregation

1919:

Beth Israel members sign a pledge to build a synagogue. Beth Israel Congregation in Bath, Maine was founded by a small group of Jewish immigrants who arrived in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In November 1919, the founding members made a pledge to purchase some land and began building a synagogue.

1922:
First service in the newly built synagogue

After slightly more than two years, the new building was not finished but usable, and on January 29, 1922, the leaders of the congregation led a public parade carrying the Torah from downtown Bath to the new building. "The Hebrews Now Have a Church of Their Own" read the headline in the local paper.

*Photos: from top, clockwise: Also see, <https://www.bathjewishhistory.org/>
Founder's Key — 1920, Mortgage Deed; 1917, Morris and Dora Petlock Cohen — Morris S. Povich and storefront — Beth Israel Congregation Charter Members of the Congregation — 1885, Joseph Solovitch and Jenny Povich Solovitch — 2019, members on the front steps with Rabbi Vinikoor — 1922, Bath Synagogue Dedication*



1985:

Beth Israel opens Hebrew school in Brunswick/Bath

There were too many children to fit in one car to attend school in the Auburn congregation's religious school, so Beth Israel hired a teacher. Classes were held in congregants' living rooms. By the early 1990s, the number of children in the Hebrew School had grown beyond what could be accommodated in peoples' living rooms and classes were held in the Methodist Church in Brunswick.

1996:

Beth Israel hires its first professional rabbi

During the early years there were many itinerant rabbis who helped lead services, but it was a primarily lay-led community. In 1996, the congregation hired its first (very part-time) year-round rabbi, Rabbi Ruth Smith.

2002:

Minnie Brown Center is purchased to house the growing religious school

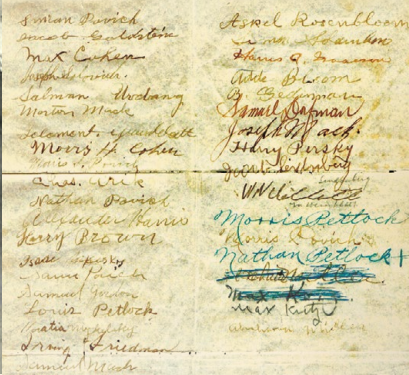
In 2002, the congregation received a legacy donation from a long-time Beth Israel member, Minnie Brown, which allowed the congregation to purchase a former church building one block from the synagogue to use for Hebrew School classrooms, an office, and a larger social hall. This building is now known as Minnie Brown Center.

2014:

The Congregation engages strategic planning professionals

After Rabbi Smith left, the congregation hired Cantor Daniel Leeman (again very part-time) to lead holiday and Shabbat services and work with the Hebrew School students. Yet by 2010, the size of the congregation had begun to dwindle, and the school population was substantially diminished. While the Jewish population in the Bath area had dwindled in the 1960s and 70s, this time the reduced numbers were not because Jews were leaving the area, but because there was a sense that the congregation was not doing a good enough job meeting the needs of the Jewish families in the area.

At the annual meeting in June 2014, congregants approved the board's recommendation to undertake a professionally facilitated strategic planning process to consider the future of the congregation.



The year-long planning process was affirming and productive. The survey and community meetings showed tremendous warmth and support for the congregation. Yet most respondents were not satisfied with the ongoing religious services and the lack of other Jewish programming. At the annual meeting, June 2015, a new strategic plan was approved with much hope for the future.

**2015–2017:
Implementing the strategic plan, affiliating Reform,
and hiring a rabbi**

During this period the congregation returned to being lay-led. Despite this, the congregation was able to maintain a schedule of semi-monthly Friday night services, weekly Saturday morning services, all holiday celebrations, and occasional educational or cultural programs. Attendance increased at all programs. The religious school also continued, thanks to its dedicated teachers and a newly hired school director.

Community meetings were held to discuss affiliation, and in March 2016, the congregation engaged in a congregation-wide referendum and voted overwhelmingly to affiliate with the Reform Movement.

Affiliation was followed immediately by the formation of a rabbi search committee. The synagogue board worried that the congregation could not afford a rabbi, however they believed that hiring a qualified professional, who could provide the level of programming and support the community was seeking, was the only solution to the frustration with the status quo. Like their synagogue ancestors 100 years before, in 2016, the board decided to take the leap, based on their heartfelt belief that Jewish life could continue to flourish in Bath, Maine.

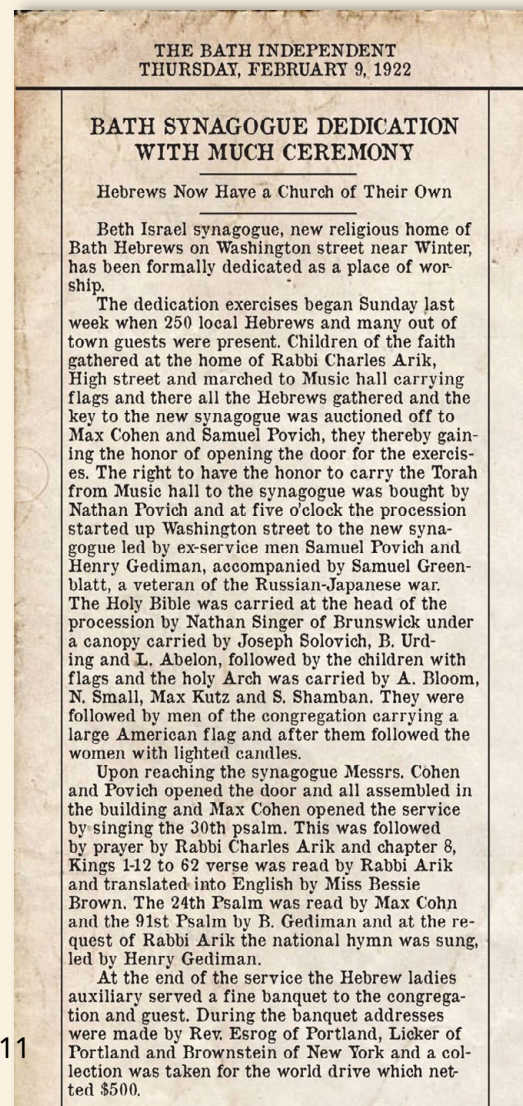
After an exhaustive search, the congregation was thrilled when their top candidate, Rabbi Lisa Vinikoor, a recently ordained rabbi from Hebrew Union College in New York, accepted the congregation's offer of a three-quarter-time position and began her employment August 1, 2017.

**2017–present:
Beth Israel Today**

Even during the two recent lay-led years, former members of Beth Israel returned to the congregation and new families joined. By the time Rabbi Vinikoor started, the membership was up from 68 to 80 members. It is now 110

members strong and the school size has nearly doubled. A lay-led monthly program for preschool aged children is well attended and family-oriented Friday night dinner and service regularly draw 45 children, parents, and other congregants.

With new members and greatly increased attendance to all events, there is a new feeling of optimism that the congregation can again become the focus of the religious and social lives of the Midcoast Jewish community. But there is more work to be done! As the synagogue building approaches its 100-year anniversary, the board has authorized a bold new fundraising effort "Planting the Seeds: The Next 100 Years." In much the same spirit as those congregants in 1919–1922, we need to ensure that the Jewish identity of the next generation will have the resources necessary to continue to provide a center for Jewish fellowship, religious observation, meaningful social justice work, and Jewish education for the entire Midcoast Maine community.



PLANTING THE SEEDS— THE NEXT 100 YEARS



Your Financial Contribution is Essential to Ensure a Bold and Vibrant Jewish Life in Bath, Maine for Another 100 Years.

TO RAISE MONEY TOWARD OUR GOALS OF *community engagement, education and leadership, and environmental sustainability* the congregation is looking for donors from within the community, from the greater Maine Jewish community, and from all Jews and non-Jews alike, who share the congregation's commitment to sustaining Jewish life and values in small historic communities.

We know there are others who share with us the excitement of the rebirth of vibrant Jewish life in small town America, breathing new life into historic buildings and Jewish communities and serving as a model for the value of pluralism and compromise that one-synagogue communities represent.

- In November, 2019, Beth Israel Congregation commemorated the 100th anniversary of the founding members signing a pledge to build a synagogue.
- On January 29, 2022, Beth Israel Congregation will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the opening of its synagogue building.

The vision of hope for the future that these moments commemorate is all the more powerful when one remembers that those newly-arrived Jewish merchants were also building new businesses and facing the expenses of their young, large families. The current inhabitants of that same synagogue have not only worked tirelessly to maintain the historic building, but even more importantly, to revitalize its central position in the community and to provide a similar vision of hope for Jewish life going forward. The success of this **Planting the Seeds—the Next 100 Years** campaign will ensure that a small, now regional, Jewish community can continue to thrive in Midcoast Maine.

Please be part of this worthwhile endeavor.

Donate: www.bethisraelbath.org/centennial-campaign



**BETH ISRAEL
CONGREGATION**

Beth Israel Congregation • PO Box 244, Bath, ME 04530 • ***For more information or to make a pledge,*** call Rachel Connelly at 207-837-9091 or write: info@bethisraelbath.org