

# Mount Zion Hebrew Congregation

## Historic and Pioneering

1856–1899

The first Jewish settlers to Minnesota founded Mount Zion and adopted Reform Judaism.



**Ullmann Store on Jackson Street c. 1862**  
Joseph and Amelia Ullmann hosted the first meeting of the eight founders of Mt. Zion. They were joined by Isidor Rose, Henry Cole, David Lavitz, Elias Lavitz, Jacob Newman, Hersh Heiman and Julius Mendelsohn, all from Germany. Isidor Rose, (second from right), took over the fur business from Joseph Ullmann who retired back to Germany. Isidor Rose and his brothers had boarded with Mt. Ullmann when they first came to St. Paul. They had been in the liquor trade originally, but started a fur trading business together because the payments for the liquor were often made in raw furs. Isidor Rose was President of Mt. Zion from 1873-74 and again 1881-84. His great grandson, H. James Seesel, Jr. was President of the Temple in 1973-75 and remains a member to this day along with his wife, Emily. Their daughter Ellen Seesel and her daughter Sarah Coleman are also members. While Joseph and Amelia Ullman left Minnesota, their great granddaughter Carolyn Glaser Kahn, married to Joseph Kahn, raised her family at Mt. Zion. Carolyn Kahn was a part-time cantorial soloist from 1959 until the mid 1970's; and her daughter Barbara married to Randy Trefethren have two children Joshua and Brandon and all are current members of the congregation.

From the photo archives of the Minnesota Historical Society and reprinted in *Jewish Pioneers of St. Paul, 1849-74*, by Gene H. Rosenblum.

**Second Temple building (right) at Tenth and Minnesota Streets constructed in 1881 at a cost of \$11,000.** Membership was 68. The women of the congregation held two fairs and retired the mortgage within two years. From *Mount Zion 1856-1956 The First Hundred Years* by W. Gunther Plaut.

**Temple gathering (below) at second Temple building at Tenth and Minnesota.** From the archives of Mt. Zion Temple.



### RABBIS

- 1871-73 Rabbi Leopold Wintner: *An early member of the CCAR with a liberal spirit. Hungarian.*
- 1874-75 Rabbi J. Burheim
- 1875-78 Rabbi Isaac N. Cohen: *A radical champion of Reform; he later moved to Minneapolis and founded Shaare Tou, which later became Temple Israel.*
- 1878-86 Rabbi Judah Wechsler: *Mount Zion officially enters the Reform Movement.*

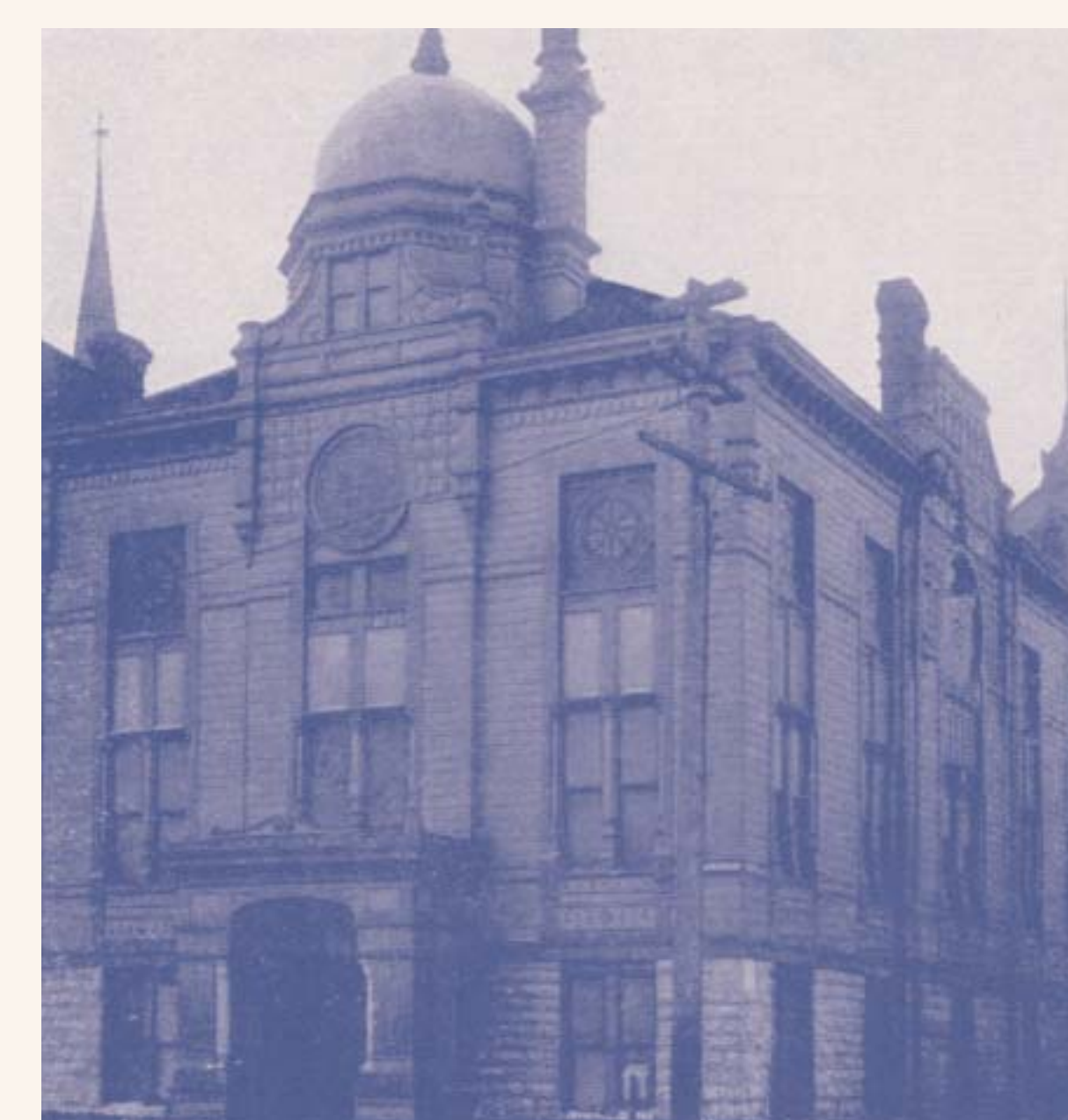


**First Temple building at Tenth and Minnesota Streets constructed in 1870 at a cost of \$800.** The lot cost \$1500. Membership of the Temple was 20. From *Mount Zion 1856-1956 The First Hundred Years* by W. Gunther Plaut.

*St. Paul, population 1200, had only been incorporated two years when eight Jewish fur traders, clothing and liquor merchants founded Mt. Zion in 1856. There was still no state of Minnesota.*

In 1856 the small group of Jewish pioneers conducted services in a rented second floor room in a three-story building on Robert Street between 3rd and 4th Streets, and hired Kalmon Lion to be shochet, mohel and cantor. Their organizational charter came from the Territory of Minnesota in 1857. Minnesota statehood followed in 1858.

The Jews were accepted into the fabric of St. Paul life from the very beginning because they were amongst the first settlers, and were from Germany like the others. (In 1846 there had only been a total of 30 families in St. Paul; in 1849 there had only been 142 buildings.) These pioneering Jews took leadership roles in all aspects of society. Many of the first settlers did not stay long, but the congregation continued with new arrivals.



### Original pioneers approach Reform

- 1862** The congregation reunited after being split for five years. Called itself "congregation"—not just association. Religious School began. A shochet/mohel/hazan was hired at \$400/year. Dues \$1/month. Assets: a cemetery and good record-keeping—in English from the beginning.
- 1870** In the first temple building at 10th and Minnesota, the service is still traditional but there are fixed service times and women sit with men. The shochet/mohel is also the hazan.
- 1871** In 1871 with 20 members, they hire the first rabbi, Dr. Wintner and rapidly increase activity; Ladies' Hebrew Benevolent Society is founded, the Religious School introduces a fixed curriculum, the women have the organ installed for Confirmation, and the name is changed to Mount Zion Hebrew Congregation.
- 1872** *Minhag America* (Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise's prayerbook for American synagogues) is adopted. Rabbi Wintner performs Minnesota's first Jewish wedding.
- 1874** Moritz Kafka, St. Paul's first Jewish policeman is hired as the first custodian of the Temple.
- 1875** An organist is obtained from a church and there are Christian singers in choir. Second day of Rosh Hashanah is omitted and recesses are introduced on Yom Kippur.
- 1876** *Minhag America* is adopted for High Holidays.
- 1878** Benjamin Plechner attends UAHC convention. He and Rabbi Wechsler are influential in getting Mount Zion involved in the national Reform Movement. Hanukkah celebration is introduced. Hebrew prayers are introduced at Religious School.
- 1879** First conversion.

Membership is approximately 70 people when over 250 immigrants arrive from Lithuania, Russia and Poland. The Painted Woods Colony is established on the Missouri River in North Dakota for the immigrants to homestead. Rabbi Wechsler and Mrs. Julius Austrian lobby the Mayor's office and the Chamber of Commerce to raise funds for the immigrants' care. At the beginning of the large-scale immigration from Russia and Eastern Europe, the Jews in St. Paul get help from the national Jewish community and even more help from city and state. The women in the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society cook meals and do all they can for the hungry refugees, and Mt. Zion members contribute heavily but ultimately the project fails, and when it does, Rabbi Wechsler resigns.

- 1880** First Confirmation class says its vows.
- 1889** Present cemetery at Payne and Larpenteur is purchased.
- 1890** Worship is conducted bare-headed and without tallit. Council of Jewish Women is started by Mt. Zion women.
- 1898** *Union Prayerbook* is adopted.

**Confirmands of the 1880's at their Coming Out party at the Standard Club, 1891.** Top row, left to right: Adele Harris, Carrie Rose, Frances Goodman. Second row: Minnie Smith, Flora Weiss, Carrie Lovenstein, Selma Wirth. Front row: Laura Morganstern. Caption from *Mount Zion 1856-1956 The First Hundred Years* by Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut. Photo from the archives of Mt. Zion Temple.



1899-1948

“Classical Reform” takes root among well-established second-generation Americans. Large waves of new immigrants expand the membership greatly.



**Third Temple building at Holly and Avon, St. Paul, 1904, built at a cost of \$80,000.** Membership was 119. From *Mount Zion 1856-1956 The First Hundred Years* by W. Gunther Plaut.



**Interior of sanctuary at Holly and Avon.** There were assigned seats. From the archives of Mt. Zion Temple.

**EDITORIAL AN APPRECIATION**  
It might be of interest to know just how this annual came about. Four years ago Edward Birnberg, '25, organized and edited the first issue of Temple Tidings. A four-page paper. The paper appeared from time to time during the past four years. This year the publication contained eight pages—the largest edition since 1925. Recently it was suggested that instead of publishing two editions of the paper for the balance of the year, all efforts be concentrated on the publication of an annual which should be bigger and more comprehensive than the ordinary quarterly edition. Accordingly, a committee of the first confirmation class of this year's Confirmation class, prepared the following editorial.



**1929 Confirmation Annual Editorial page.** Confirmation was the major life cycle event for Mt. Zion students. There was a Confirmation Annual published each year from 1929-1972 with pictures of the confirmands and the other religious school classes along with essays and poems by the students. From the archives of Mt. Zion Temple.

**Rabbi Harry S. Margolis with the Confirmation class of 1929 from the first Confirmation Annual.** Top row, left to right: Gerald Druck, Marjorie Wilenchek, Kalman Herz, Bernice Levy, Herschel Perlman, Rosalind Hirschman, Lewis Miller, Nelson Harris. Bottom row: Helen Dockman, Alan Ruvelson, Erna Goodman, Rabbi Harry S. Margolis, Janet Reuler, Victor Birnberg, Janet Ruben. From the archives of Mt. Zion Temple.



**Neighborhood House (above) at 151-57 Robertson at Indiana St., 1903.** In 1895 Rabbi Hess and the ladies of the Mt. Zion Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society contributed \$100 to the opening of an "Industrial School" to teach immigrants to be Americans, i.e. to learn skills of home and industry and study English. Winter classes soon followed in 1897. In 1900 Mt. Zion founded Neighborhood House as a settlement house on the West Side, where the immigrants from Eastern Europe lived. It became the central institution of life on the West Side of St. Paul. In 1903 Mt. Zion decided it to the City of St. Paul in a reorganized, wider and non-sectarian form, but Mt. Zion rabbis and members still serve on the Board of Directors. Rabbi Rypins taught English classes at night. Neighborhood House, now at 179 Robie St., has continued to welcome successive waves of immigrants to St. Paul. It recently received a 10 million dollar grant from Congress to help build a new structure in memory of Senator Paul and Sheila Wellstone who died tragically in 2002. From the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest.

**While the second generation flourished, there were also many new immigrants to the West Side of St. Paul.** "The first wave of early refugees all became peddlers after they settled into the West Side Flats. It was not uncommon to see these hardy entrepreneurs and their horse and wagons crossing back and forth over the Robert Street Bridge to peddle their wares." In time two of these West Side boys were to be elected to the presidency of Mt. Zion: Louis Melamed (1855-59) and Sam Singer (1967-69). Courtesy of the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest and reprinted and captioned in *The Lost Jewish Community of the West Side Flats 1882-1962* by Gene H. Rosenblum.

*Pioneers in building a just community in St. Paul. The era is marked by a succession of rabbis including two who make major changes during long tenures: Rabbi Rypins and Rabbi Margolis.*

**1899** Membership: 90. Rabbi Rypins discontinues almost all Hebrew; services are moved to Sunday. Most congregants believe religion is reason with little or no need for traditional trappings and symbolism. Congregational participation is minimal; the rabbi conducts the service and the choir sings hymns in English. Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society helps Rabbi Rypins form United Jewish Charities, the forerunner of the United Jewish Fund and Council.

**1900** Mt. Zion founds Neighborhood House—a settlement house for new immigrants on the West Side Flats. This settlement house has remained active to this day and is now being renamed in memory of Senator Paul Wellstone and Sheila Wellstone.

**1903** Mt. Zion gives Neighborhood House to community but Mt. Zion members and its rabbis still serve perpetually on its board. One hundred years later (2003) it will receive a \$10 million grant from Congress. The \$25 million building will be called the Paul and Sheila Wellstone Center for Community Building at Neighborhood House. Cornerstone for second site, third Temple, is laid at Holly and Avon. The building costs \$80,000. Women become eligible to be members in their own right.

**1904** Temple at Holly and Avon is dedicated on the western edge of the congregation's members.

**1906** Rabbi Hess is the first rabbi to be buried in Mount Zion Cemetery.

**1921** Freedom of the pulpit issues arise when rabbi delivers a sermon defending Germany while most of the congregants support President Wilson. Rabbi Rypins leaves the congregation "with no bitterness." Freedom of pulpit issues remain for several years.

**1925** Men's Club is started.

**1926** Temple Bulletin is introduced.

**1930** Temple library opens: Don Singerman, Librarian.

**1934** Stan Goodman becomes the first Bar Mitzvah in 50 years. Most families still go to other Temples for Bar Mitzvah.

**1942** Membership: 315. Kiddush is introduced into services.

**1943** Hebrew is reintroduced as part of the school curriculum.

**1946** Death of Rabbi Margolis. Temple Membership: 441. Religious School: 275 students.

**1947** Yom Kippur booklet started. Manfred Hecht begins Cantorial singing on High Holidays.

**Isidor Rose, a founding member of Mt. Zion and later its President (1873-74 and 1881-84), in front of his store at 6th and Wacouta (top row, second from the right) c. 1910.** In this picture you can see the growing prosperity of the business. Top row, left to right: Albert Rose Sr., Isaac Edgar Rose (grandfather of H. James Seesel), Nathan Rose, Isidor Rose and Louis Hill, Sr. We have not yet been able to identify the Native Americans in this picture. Photo courtesy of Ellen Seesel.



### CANTORS AND OTHER JEWISH PROFESSIONALS

- 1856-57 Kalmon Lion, *Cantor, Shochet*
- 1862-63 E. Marcuson, *Teacher, Cantor* ACCOMPANIST
- 1868-71 H. Cahn, *Shochet* 1922-47 G. A. Thornton, *organist*
- 1871 A. Appelbaum, *Shochet*
- 1871-73 A. Braun, *Shochet*
- 1947-48 Manfred Hecht, *Holy Day cantorial soloist*

St. Paul, Minnesota