

A JOURNEY THROUGH B'NAI MOSHE'S HISTORY

As presented by Norbert Reinstein

May 16, 1982

(References to the "Gunsberg" name have been bolded and italicized)

Distinguished Guests and Friends! Join me on an imaginary trip back into our history. Our "time capsule" takes us back to an evening in early 1918. We are peeking through a window at 517 E. Kirby, the house of *Sigmund Gunsberg*.

An intense discussion is in progress, in Hungarian, inter-mixed with German. Participating are the four eldest Gunsberg brothers, *Sigmund*, *Samuel*, *Ignatz* and *Louis*; their three sisters, *Louise Kellerman*, *Theresa Feder*, *Ethel Krause* and spouses. *Samuel Gunsberg*, on the Board of the fledgling Congregation Eliahu, founded in 1911, brings disturbing news: The new Synagogue Building at Garfield and Beaubien is in jeopardy. World War I is still raging. The building fund pledges have stopped and payments are slow.

Elias Einzcig holds title to the Congregation's name. He has offered to sell it to the highest bidder. *Sam* proposes that the family make a bid to name the Congregation after their father, *Moshe (Morris) Gunsberg*. Arguments pro and con ensue. Why should we do it? Pa doesn't even attend this synagogue! How much will it take? Can we afford it? Can the building proceed without this?

Finally, comes the clinching argument: "You know, this is a great Mitzvah. We are all worried about brother *Joseph*. We lost track of him in the War, somewhere in Europe. The Almighty will help us find him. Our liquor businesses are doing well. This community has been good to us since we came here in 1907. So, let's do it for *Pa* and *Joe*!"

So they pledged \$45,000. Thus, at the corner stone laying for the new building in 1918, we acquired the name B'nai Moshe (sons of Moses). So you see, we are not named after "Moshe Rabenu", but after *Moshe Gunsberg* and his sons. To commemorate this event, we are presenting this photo of the original "Sons of Moshe" to the Congregation. *Sam Gunsberg* became B'nai Moshe President in 1918. He served three consecutive terms. He acquired the first burial plots at Oakview Cemetery. *Sigmund Gunsberg*, *Harry's* father served as the first Chevra Kadisha Chairman. He also chaired the Talmud Torah for 25 years.

Since then, the descendents of *Morris Gunsberg*, and their spouses, have had an inter-locking relationship with the fortunes, the ups and downs, the destiny of B'nai Moshe. They have held every conceivable congregation and auxiliary office, including the presidency and vice-presidency. They have chaired a host of important committees throughout our history to this day. *Sam*, *Louis* and *Harry Gunsberg* occupied the presidency through eleven of our seventy-year history. *Dick Gunsberg* was Vice-President from 1953-55 during the time that Al Deutsch served as President. Five Gunsbergs, including *George* and *Richard*, were among the earliest members of our Men's Choir when it was organized in 1959. A great-grandson of *Morris Gunsberg*, *Mike Grand* is one of our current Vice-Presidents. I fondly recall my friendship with

Mike's father, Sol, who was treasurer under my presidency, and his mother, **Hattie Kellerman Grand**.

Let me now share with you a few other milestones in our history:

1. **Samuel Gunsberg**, a man of great diplomacy and administrative skills, was recalled to the presidency in 1924. The neighborhood was changing (when have we heard that before?). The question of whether to move northwest or stay "put" was hotly debated. Tempers were running high. **Sam** managed to "cool" everything and deliberate rationally. Thus, he and the Board carefully laid the groundwork for the eventual move.
2. In 1931, **Sam Gunsberg's** skills were needed again. The Congregation elected him as its president for 2 years during the most difficult depression era. Money was tight. Members could not pay their dues. B'nai Moshe almost went under. **Sam**, together with his predecessor, Joseph Kornfield, and his successor, Robert Rosenberg, steered the Congregation through this difficult period on a greatly reduced budget. They, and a few others often dipped into their own pockets to help the Congregation survive.
3. The **Gunsbergs**, by then successful meat-packers, were in the fore-front among those who supported the efforts of Presidents Harry Rosman and Robert Rosenberg to erect the Sanctuary on Dexter. **Louis Gunsberg** "cut his eye-teeth", as it were, as treasurer of the Building Fund.
4. In 1937, **Louis Gunsberg** was called upon to lead B'nai Moshe through another difficult two years. It was the peak of a "second depression". Money was tight. The Congregation needed forceful, dynamic, outgoing leadership to survive. It got it from **Louis Gunsberg**. To meet the budget, he pushed through reinstatement of the sale of High Holiday seats, which has been abandoned a year earlier. He also brought in Cantor David Katzman whose beautiful tenor voice would delight and attract members for 22 years.
5. Now, to a more recent period of our past. As I look around, I see a number of you who joined B'nai Moshe in 1955, like we did. Some of you will recall the evening when 35 couples met in the fall of that year in **George and Myra Gunsberg's** house. We had received calls to come together and become involved in Synagogue affairs. As we sat around the magnificent sunken living room having refreshments, we listened to an inspirational talk by our late beloved Rabbi Moses Lehrman. We heard from its leaders about future plans of the Congregation, and how they would affect our families. I truly consider this the start of the great "suburban push". It preceded our move out here, and resulted in a tremendous membership drive, bringing in close to 150 new suburban members.
6. Finally, I shall never forget the hot and crucial Board meeting in early 1956. The decision to move had been made. But there were those who wanted to build small to fit our "pocket books". There were those who wanted to quit and merge with another Synagogue. Then, there were those who wanted to build for 800 families. It was **Harry Gunsberg** who teamed up with our magnificent late beloved Rabbi Lehrman. Together they provided the inspiration and enthusiasm to proceed, with plans for this sanctuary, with only \$17,000 cash on hand.
7. Subsequently, **Harry Gunsberg** stepped into the presidency in September 1957 when Ben Weiss resigned due to ill health. **Harry** played a vibrant role in the

building of this Sanctuary, with his boundless energy, with his “pep” talks, with his devotion to our cause. He served as president during the major building phases, and at its ground-breaking. Later, he chaired our dedication proceedings and assumed the presidency again for one year, 1961-62, when Stephen Lanyi was unable to accept a second term. It was during this year that **Harry** presided over the Golden Jubilee Celebration. Also, at the start of his term, **Harry** invited me to serve as one of his Vice-presidents. This was a great learning experience for me. When I became President, **Harry** offered to, and did indeed “bail me out” in planning, preparing and erecting the large donor plaque that hangs between the Sanctuary and Social Hall.

The “Sons of Moshe” – Morris, have indeed managed well to perpetuate his name, a name which this Congregation has carried with pride for nearly 65 years. The six generations of his descendents must number in the hundreds by now. We are please that the Congregation has touched their lives, in many ways, and they are part of ours.

The great engineering genius and philosopher, Charles Kettering, once said: “NO BUILDING EVER ROSE TO TOUCH THE SKY, UNLESS SOMEONE DREAMED THAT IT WOULD; SOMEONE BELIEVED THAT IT COULD; AND SOMEONE WILLED THAT IT SHOULD!”

Today, we express our gratitude to this remarkable family for having contributed so many dreamers, so many believers and so many doers, among those major families who shaped the destiny of B’nai Moshe. On this historic occasion, we salute all the **Gunsbergs**, past and present, in presenting this Testimonial Resolution to **Richard Gunsberg** for the entire family. Since I covered the major points of the Resolution in my presentation, I am not going to read it. It is no my pleasure to formally present it to you, **Dick**

Photo circa 1930



IGNATZ GUNSBERG JOSEPH GUNSBERG LOUIS GUNSBERG
SAM GUNSBERG MORRIS GUNSBERG SIGMUND GUNSBERG