## COMMUNITY SYNAGOGUE OF MONSEY Birth and Earliest Years By Irving Eisenman

## Preamble:

It is inevitable that in any recounting of history, such as this is, errors and omissions may occur. Utilizing the limited information available, we have tried to be as accurate as possible. If we have erred unintentionally, we beg forgiveness in advance.

Monsey in 1953 was merely a small hamlet consisting of a one block Main Street. The commercial street included a Mom & Pop grocery, (owned by the uncle of our member, Eli Stern), Dave's Hardware & Locksmith Shop, the Shulman & Meyer Deutsch lumberyard and a few less-memorable businesses. At the end of the street was the Pontiac dealership of the Osborne family.

Although Monsey was home to a small group of year-round residents, the area was primarily a summer haven for city-dwellers who frequented Rubenfeld's and Arthur Sternfeld's small family-run hotels, as well as the Goldstein Family's Monsey Lodge bungalow colony.

A group of summer visitors, including Adolph Schreiber, Irving Eisenman, Bob Futterman and Aaron, Myron and Jay Goldstein, purchased a large tract of seventy seven undeveloped lots in upper Monsey, intended for their own use. After forming the Monsey Heights Development Company, they sold some parcels in order to settle the area and to help build a modern, orthodox community.

There were already three or four residences in the immediate area. Among them was an unoccupied, old farmhouse on Maple Avenue surrounded on three sides by working farms. Directly across the road was a large open field. This farmhouse was destined to become the Community Synagogue of Monsey.

On a late summer Sunday morning in 1953, several men met at the newly built home of Leon Spilky. Adolph Schreiber, Iz & Elliot Eichler, Harry & Elliot Aber, Jesse Eisen, Harold Ginsberg, Henry Zeisel, Aaron, Myron & Jay Goldstein, Joseph Dolinsky, Herman Sinnet and Irving Eisenman were present. They agreed to purchase the farmhouse, to make some modest renovations and to establish the first Synagogue in the area.

After completing minor modifications, chairs were delivered, a Sefer Torah was loaned, and on July 3, 1954, Parshas Chukas, the first Shabbat services were inaugurated for 20 or more men. From this humble beginning, the Shul now named the Community Synagogue of Monsey, grew. Now-familiar names joined the ranks: Willy Quinn, (Uncle Willy), Herman Fialkoff, Herbert Aber, Seymour Salb, Gerry Wind, Iz Van Gelderen, Phil Levine, Abe Eisenman and others.

We would be remiss if we neglected to acknowledge the ladies who played an integral part in the growth and flourishing of the Synagogue. Among these were Sylvia Schreiber, Ethel & Florence Eichler, Tess & Lonnie Aber, Gitel Eisen, Renee Ginsberg, Gloria Zeisel, Rose & Malki Goldstein, Fannie Dolinsky, and Carol

Eisenman. Shortly thereafter, Phyllis Wind, Ethel Salb and Hilda Van Gelderen joined the ranks of shul members.

There are many special memories of those early years in our shul, but a few stand out. In the early days, when the community was small, everyone was included.in every simcha. It was a tradition to stop for kiddush and cholent at the Dolinsky's after Shabbat services. Simchat Torah was an all day event and after davening, the entire congregation made rounds, visiting every home en route for a L'Chaim and the hostess's specialty. By Mincha everyone in shul was jolly. There was an unforgettable and lavish collation prepared by the Sinnets in the rear of the shul for breaking the fast after one Yom Kippur. There were many Kiddushim during the year, which served to cement the community in the spirit of Sheves achim gam yachad. The Shul resounded with the sound of the negunim and zmiros and the rounds of L'Chaim. There was, as well, the annual Simchas Bais Hashoevah celebration which included a cask of beer at Jesse Eisen's home.

We were blessed with an abundnce of able Ba'aley battim, who capably disseminated Torah Learning. Shiurim flourished in the sanctuary. Rabbi David Waxman taught Rambam, Mr. Sperling, (the self-educated father of Gloria Zeisel and Renee Ginsberg), seized every opportunity to avoid Bittel Z'man, learning from the Shulchan Aruch and Mishna Brura. Parshas Hashavua was led by Rabbi Shea Frankel and the many lay members who, every Shabbat would present a discourse on the connection between the Parsha and Haftorah. Rav Avi Shulman led a weekly Mishnayos class.

On a Friday night in July of 1955, (almost a year to the day after the first Shabbat), a tragic fire erupted, which forced the membership to seek temporary quarters while repairs were made to the building. Fortunately, the Sifrei Torah and Kley Kodesh were rescued, and the kehilla moved to the home of the Eisenmans. The damage was repaired in time to resume services in shul for the High Holidays in our expanded quarters (in itself a small miracle) and to permit the use of the facility for the initial classes of the Hebrew Institute of Rockland County (HIROC, now ASHAR). On weekdays, the shul was filled with the melodious voices of children learning Torah and Secular studies. On Friday afternoons, the dedicated crew consisting of Elliot Eichler, Irv Eisenman and Elliot Aber, rushed home from the city to prepare the premises for Shabbat Services. The short Fridays were especially trying.

It is of interest to note that our Makom Kodesh M'at, located in a corner of Rockland County, attracted many luminaries from the Orthodox World. Among the dignitaries who participated in our services were Mr. Zalman Shragai, Mayor of Jerusalem and a leading light in the Mizrachi Party; Rabbi Belkin of Yeshiva University, Mr. Moshe Shapiro an Israeli government minister, Rabbi Mordechai Kirschblum, President of the Mizrachi Organization and Rabbi Linchner of Boys Town. During the early years Rabbi Nachum Muschel ably served as Rabbi-protem.

We were blessed with Baaley Tfiloh of excellent caliber who added immeasurably to the dignity and enjoyment of our services. Harold Ginsberg, Henry Zeisel, Shea Frankel, Jesse Eisen, Rabbi Muschel and later, Heshy Greenbaum, Sam Silverstein, Joe Adler, Abe Eisenman, Hy Levy, Jack Prince & sons, Danny Sklar

and Dr. Mendy Ganchrow were all contributors to the growth and increased prominence of Community Synagogue of Monsey. Few of our early congregants will ever forget the tefilos and nigunim of our Chazan Rishon Harold Ginsberg. The walls trembled during his recital of Kol Nidre and Hinneni at Holiday services. We also acknowledge the current outstanding contribution to the kedusha of our services made by Dr. Yacov Tendler and Elliot Shapiro who is often accompanied by his A Capela choir.

Some light-hearted moments colored the history of our shul. Imagine coming into the sanctuary on a Simchat Torah morning and finding the seats completely reversed, with everything, including the schulchan facing the back of the room. On another occasion the Mechitza had been removed and couldn't be found. The ensuing uproar was sufficient to scare the perpetrators to the extent that they never returned it. Someone anonymously circulated a phony newspaper headline claiming that Leon Spilky was behind the entire episode. You can imagine the explosion that followed. To this day the Mechitza is hidden in an attic, a forgotten relic of a bygone era. (See the author to discover who really carried off this unfortunate prank.)

There is also the saga of ex-Marine Ezra Austern, a subsequent member. Ezra drove home from the city during a Friday afternoon snowstorm and had barely traversed the George Washington Bridge when he realized it was almost Shabbat. He left his Volkswagon in Fort Lee, and, unbelievably, walked to Monsey in the raging blizzard! Hours later, well after midnight, Ezra stumbled into Bais Medrosh Elyon, frozen and barely able to speak. Two of the chevra from the Yeshiva braved the elements and walked up the hill to the Austern house to tell his wife Esther that her husband was safe in the Bais Medrash. Imagine the shock of a frantic wife, having not heard from her husband since the previous afternoon, answering a knock at the door well past midnight and, upon opening it, finding two black-coated, bearded men.

Try to imagine Hymie Fein after duchening, unable to find his shoes anywhere. Undaunted, Hymie went to the coatroom and returned wearing almost twenty hats stacked on top of each other. "OK", he announced, "Where are my shoes?" Naturally, he got them back.

Many of us have fond memories of Abe Eisenman leading the services on a Simchat Torah, and during the Hallel, making all the proper naanuim with body motions at the recitation of Hodu Lashem Ki Tov. Those of us who were present, too, on Simchat Torah in 1986 will not easily forget his Drasha from the Bimah about the Pionites and the Feinites the composers of the piutim we say. There still exist the T-shirts he presented to the Gabboim, Abe Pion, Hymie Fein and Zach Greenfield imprinted, I SURVIVED THE CHAZZONIM AT THE COMMUNITY SYNAGOGUE, 1986! Rav Moshe Feinstein, ZTL, sitting in the front row, hid his big grin behind the sefer he was studying.

The years 1954 through 1960 saw a continuing growth in the membership. Herman Weissberger, Walter Kramer, Ernie Gerstle, Moe Rosenthal, Joe Adler, Mr. Biron, and Abe Stern joined our ranks, (and, of course, somewhat later, Israel Stern). Ruby Heisler, Phil Harris, Eli Fishman, Ira Usdan, Harold Weingarten, and his father-in law Mr. Weintraub, were also on the scene by then.

At this point we were bursting at the seams and the first major addition to the Shul was made in 1960. The open porch at the front of the building was closed in. The main sanctuary was then extended into this area, breaking through the front wall. The Aron Kodesh was moved into the space that was formerly the front opening and we gained a total of 32 seats. Special mention must be made of the efforts put forth in this alteration by Aaron, Myron and Jay Goldstein. This sufficed, barely, until 1962, when we had to split the Minyan for the High Holidays, with some of the membership davening in HIROC. Every effort was made to assure the same high quality of services at each location. This move went off amazingly well--the membership understood the problem and cooperated fully. (This led eventually to the formation of Congregation Hadar, a cordial breakaway Shul).

The list of new members continued to mushroom, now including the Fein Families, Jake Landa, Max and Les Levine, Aaron Krumbein, Dr. David Stein, Dr. David Maeir, (who left us to build Shaarey Tzedek Hospital into the institution that it is today), Joe Warburg, our perennial 1st minyan Gabbai Zach Greenfield, Rabbi I. Klavan, Rabbi Reichman, Morris Newman, David Katz, Seymour Levine, Alan Zelinger and Mr. Wechsler, who ardently pushed through the plans for the present building, but did not have the zchus to enjoy it. Others included Harold Horwitz, Ralph Hankel, Norman Solomon, Barry Hochdorf, (And Harriet, the Female Rights advocate), Herb Schlussel, Barney Barenholtz, Josh Ladell, Hersh Levitan, the Schlissers, Bernie Muschel, Irving Perles, Harold Klipper, Eddie Wolfe, Al Oppenheimer, Joe Appleman, Arnold Goldsmith, Ephraim Goldberger, Dr. Lenny Shapiro and Deanne, (who has climbed high in the Amit ranks), and Phil Ten.

In the 1960's Rabbi M. D. Tendler was on the scene. He rapidly, and ably added to the shiurim taking place, establishing the weekly Mishne Brurah shiur among others. He became the official Rav of the Community Synagogue of Monsey in 1967. His far-reaching reputation contributed greatly to the continuing growth of the Shul. His steady dissemination of Torah; his erudite knowledge in other fields, Science among them, spurred a great expansion of the role of the CSM in the community. Especially outstanding were his Layl Shavuoth all night sessions. These started with a small group meeting in the rear of the old Shul building, growing each year to the point where the audience consisted of several hundred people from all parts of Monsey. It was also during this period we were graced with the presence of Harav Yitzchak Isaac Tendler, ZTL and Harav Hagoen Moshe Feinstein, ZTL. It was awesome having the zchus of davening in our Shul during those years.

We have now reached modern Shul history - the era of the present building and its planning & construction. This phase took almost three years. Max and Les Levine and their father were very instrumental in the success of this phase. The first services were held Slichot night, (Saturday) in 1965, and continuously since then, (ad meyah v esrim shana).