

Reflections from Rabbi Karol

Compared to other members of our staff and faculty, I'm "the new kid on the block." Rabbi Fisher served our congregation for 31 years; Cantor



Trachtenberg is in his 25th, and final, year; Harvey Witman has been here since 1979; and John Gansle started as our accompanist in 1987. Some of our teachers have been on faculty more than 20 years; others, more than 10. And, of course, there are members of our congregation who remember when our buildings were constructed or were students in our Religious School and became Bar or Bat Mitzvah here.

So, it seems, at first, to be a daunting task for me to reminisce about the past eight years and to highlight my memories. Yet I can, because they include:

- Significant and positive changes to our sanctuary: the Ark, the Ten Commandments, the chairs, the carpeting, and the piano.
- Larger numbers of students continuing beyond Bar/Bat Mitzvah, increasing the size of Confirmation and Post-Confirmation (Atid) classes.
- The addition of annual trips to Boston, Washington and Philadelphia for the 10th, 11th and 12th grade students.
- Two congregational trips to Israel.
- So many students going to the URJ's Eisner and Crane Lake camps, our older members are reminded of the days when a busload went to Eisner.
- A vibrant Youth Group program for our 5th through 12th graders directed by Joanna Schess (a former student).
- An endowment fund-sponsored *Scholar/Artist-in-Residence Weekend* each March that featured such teachers as Arthur Kurzweil, Peter Pitzele, and Sister Mary Boys.
- Teens, college students and post-college men and women going on Israel trips sponsored by NFTY (North American Federation of Temple Youth) and Birthright Israel.
- Continuing Rabbi Fisher's interfaith activities (volunteering at Our Daily Bread Soup Kitchen, the Shalom Interfaith Project, and the Three

Village Clergy Association – which expanded its programs to *Open Doors, Open Minds, God's Open Houses, and Children of Abraham*).

- The Cantor's directorial skills: *Shabbat Shirah* and *Purimspiel*.
- Harvey's creativity in making our Religious School and Hebrew School both substantive and fun, and recruiting talented members of the congregation to teach Confirmation electives.
- The "above-and-beyond-the-call-of-duty" devotion exhibited by our administrator Nancy Cali, our bookkeeper Penny Gentile, and our Religious School secretary Irva Steinweis, who do far more than expected and do it so well.
- A dynamic Social Action Committee that provides food for the hungry, connects with Jewish soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, and supports Progressive congregations in Israel.
- A Sisterhood, Brotherhood and Parents' Association that make a variety of important contributions to the social, educational, social action, and financial aspects of our community.

In our 45th year, we are a congregation that can take pride in our stability, the quality of our services, the diversity of our membership, the variety of our activities, and the friendliness of our community. As I look to the future, I'm aware of the challenges that face us: hiring the Cantor's successor, strengthening our fiscal status, retaining current members and attracting new ones, countering the attractiveness of non-affiliation, and providing *you* with meaningful spiritual, educational, social action, and social experiences.

In addition to everything I do and enjoy now, I would also like to be involved in the creation of a more active pre-school program, an oral history project, another Israel trip, the revival of *Mix and Mingle* groups with our new Cantor, different approaches to services, and a new style of fundraising.

The families who founded Temple Isaiah in 1965 did what was right, and so must we. Much has been accomplished, and much more needs to be done. As it says in *Pirkei Avot*, "It is not your responsibility to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it." That seems, at first, to be a daunting task, but it's easy once you get started. Let's celebrate together, and then... let's get busy shaping our future!



Reflections from Rabbi Fisher

I came to Temple Isaiah in August of 1971 – following Ira Youdovin, a classmate of mine who was a student rabbi, and Gordon Geller.

My office was originally in what is now a broom closet, downstairs, in the old building.

By the following year, I was able to move upstairs.

Those early years were characterized by great dedication on the part of many to see the synagogue grow, and a great deal of openness to new ideas. After all, everything was beginning from scratch – without precedent. But it was also a period of strife. Idyllic, it wasn't.

A few early memories: before the main building was built, for *Sukkot*, we held a service out in the field, approximately where the stage of the new building is today. *Shabbat* services were in the downstairs sanctuary in the old building, where we tried services “in the round.” (Today, it's the lower lobby and youth lounge.) The custodian at the time had a hard time creating an oval with chairs, so we came in one day to find a wiggly, misshapen oval painted on the floor with red paint. My first High Holy Days here were held in two shifts in the old building. In subsequent years, we met at what was then the Holiday Inn (now Atria) or, as we called it, “The High Holiday Inn.” We also held a congregational *Seder* there. Later on, HHD services were held in a lecture hall at the University.

In the 60s and 70s, this area was booming. Many Jews came to live here. The Levitt developments were built, the University was on the march, the Smithaven Mall was built. North Shore Jewish Center, which recently celebrated its 100th anniversary, left its small building on Main Street in Setauket and, in the summer that I came, moved into its current building. Isaiah was founded and grew rapidly. Soon, a new building was needed.

The building we have now is actually the second design. The first design came in *way over budget*, so the second plan was modeled after the church on Oxhead Road.

In 1976, we dedicated the new building, which had only folding chairs, no A/C, no carpet, no doors to the lobby, no dividers and an Ark that was a copy of the very interesting Ark at the Brandeis Hillel. The landscaping was prepared by a congregant who bought hundreds of rooting cuttings, put them in pots and farmed the pots

out to many of us. I remember caring for dozens of them in our backyard. When the building was finished, they were large enough to plant and the lovely landscaping we have today began with that effort.

The procession from the old building was really festive and since the congregation had at one time held services at the Stony Brook Community Church on Christian Avenue, Rev. John Hankins was invited to speak. At that time, the congregation had two Torah Scrolls. Later, I was involved in a search for a third.

Purim was characterized by really wild times. One year, I dressed up as a baby and was wheeled around in a shopping cart by Betty and Eileen, our then secretary and bookkeeper. Another year, someone rigged up several bushels of Styrofoam peanuts, which they dumped on me as I read the *megillah*. Water guns were the weapon of choice, the only rule being not to wet the *megillah*. Me, I got soaked.

During the 70s and 80s, freeing Soviet Jewry was a major effort. Our Bar/Bat mitzvah students “twinned,” we had the name of Ilya Besprozvanny hanging on the Bimah for years. Later, he came to visit us. It was a very emotional time. I remember weeping when Sharansky was imprisoned – and then again as I stood listening to him after he was set free, as he spoke at one of the many Soviet Jewry rallies we attended in NYC.

A few highlights: Harvey Witman came to be our principal. I knew from the beginning that he was the real thing. He changed our school and had a positive impact on more than a generation of our children.

Later, in 1986, a dream came true: Cantor Trachtenberg came. He brought his beautiful voice and extensive knowledge of Jewish music, synagogue practices, Hebrew, and even Yiddish.

When I retired in 2002, Rabbi Karol came to lead the congregation. He has skillfully improved on what we did before, and added many new elements. I am very proud of what he has done, and what the congregation has accomplished over all these years.

I am also immensely proud of our new library and deeply honored that it bears my name.

We now have a congregation that the founders and I could barely imagine. It's nice to look back to see how far we've come; it's appropriate to acknowledge the countless congregants who have given so much of themselves, worked so hard, and been so generous over the years. We've come a very, very, very long way. We should be proud of what we now have and hopeful about a wonderful future.

As they say: “The best is yet to come.”

Reflections from Cantor Trachtenberg



The first recollection I have of Temple Isaiah is of a call I got from Rabbi Fisher. A replacement Cantor was needed in late May and June, and a very dear colleague, teacher and friend gave Rabbi Fisher my name. I was available for the dates needed, so I agreed. I thought to myself as I drove to the Temple: "Boy, this is far out."

When I arrived at this lovely building, I prepared my material, set out my robe (yes, we wore robes then, and for many years thereafter) and waited. Someone approached and asked if I was Cantor Trachtenberg. He also asked, "Did you go to Brooklyn Tech?" The questioner was the then-Chair of the Music Committee, Dr. Stephen Hiller, whom I sat next to in Glee Club for four years! In those days, with so many technology businesses on the Island, Temple Isaiah had its own alumni group: Abe Trenk, Steve Weitzman, the then-President Andy Feldman (among many others) were all "Tech" grads. I am glad Steve Hiller and I had the opportunity to renew and revive our friendship.

Working with Rabbi Fisher was easy: he'd ask for something, I would do it, and he was always more than appreciative. Some of the highest compliments I've ever received came from him. He acknowledged my rather small contributions to the music in his *T'u B'Shvat Seder* and *Holocaust Service*. He referred to me as "colleague and friend," a great compliment for me. As a young man, he was a member at the Forest Hills Jewish Center, where Cantor Tzvi Aroni, one of my teachers, served for many years. When I used a selection he had taught me, Rabbi Fisher would often say: "I remember that!" Upon his retirement, Rabbi Fisher wrote that I had made his Rabbinate better – a compliment I will always treasure.

Students never fail to teach me something. Being here for 25 years has given me the opportunity to see many of these youngsters grow into incredible men and women. Several have honored me by asking me to officiate at their weddings. That often gives me an opportunity to reconnect with even more of my old students, since many youngsters made friendships that are still strong after 20-plus years.

I've had what many would find a rather unique teaching style for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah tutor. I think I got it from a Master Teacher years ago in the Bronx. He said: "Remember, the key to success is to convince the kids you are crazier than they are." Doing the unusual seemed to help a number of students who, for whatever reason, had difficulty with the material. There have been a number of students who I could not give enough to do, and they did it well. There were those for whom the work was a bit more challenging. I know they came out feeling a great sense of pride and accomplishment.

Being here this long has also given me the chance to teach siblings. There was one young lady who had a rather rambunctious younger sister. Eventually, the only way I could teach my student was to sit her little sister on my lap and have her "read" along with her big sister. She ended up being able to chant the Torah blessings at age four! Perhaps the nicest "gift" I got from a student was a note, thanking me for giving her the confidence to try out for a special chorus in school.

Temple Isaiah's Religious School has also helped generations of youngsters develop. I was in my office with a student when I heard loud shouting in the hall. I looked out to the darkened hallway and asked a student running by what happened. "We're escaping the pogrom and going to America!" was the reply. Harvey Witman's Religious School is as unique as its Principal. I have never (never!) attended a meeting where he does *not* know, literally, everyone. As a Youth Leader, Teacher, and Principal, he has seen generations of Jewish leaders in Suffolk County grow and develop. Everyone who knows him marvels at his skill and dedication.

Rabbi Karol's dedication to our young people has led to a number of annual trips to visit them at camp. The first year Rabbi, Harvey and I went, we took my Honda Pilot with the back of the SUV filled to the brim with goodies from parents. Last year we drove in my Mustang with the top down, the three of us singing "Beach Boys" tunes!

When I announced my retirement, I said the *Simchas* far outweighed the *Tzuris*. There are a lot of memories and people in the past. But, there'll be more in the future. I look forward to "cheering from the sidelines." If needed, I will be "off the bench." Temple Isaiah started with a few people and an Idea. We still have ideas and dreams today. We can achieve them by remembering our past as we plan our future. Happy Anniversary! And, remember, the 50th isn't that far away!!

Enjoy this wonderful evening. Mazel Tov to us all.



Reflections from Education Director, Rabbi Witman

My days at Temple Isaiah began in January of 1979. I was interviewed for a position as Temple Educator.

At the time, I was employed at Temple Beth David in Commack as a religious school teacher for the sixth and seventh grades and also as Senior Youth Group Director, which was part of LIFTY (Long Island Federation of Temple Youth).

Temple Isaiah's youth program was booming with activities and events and I was also spending a good deal of time at Camp Kutz and Camp Eisner, attending conclaves.

My good friend, Victor Goldie, one of the founding members at Temple Isaiah, encouraged me to apply for the position. My wife, Maddie, daughters, Danielle (who was four at the time) and Michelle (who was two), instantly found a new home at Isaiah. Our son, Michael (who was not born until 1980) also grew up with Temple Isaiah as a part of his life.

Back then, all religious school classes were held in what is now the youth building. The youth lounge was divided into two classes, and the youth director's office was a classroom – as well as the present oil burner room. We were busting at the seams. Nevertheless, it was a great time for the Temple. Crowded, yes – but it certainly felt good!

Wonderful students throughout the years, coupled with a stable, dedicated religious school staff, helped develop Temple Isaiah Religious School into the success it is today.

A 1966 news article about Temple Isaiah's first "community presence," a thrift shop called...

This & That

TEMPLE ISAIAH SET WITH THRIFT SHOP

"This & That," on Main Street, East Setauket, now open for business, is a thrift shop, owned and operated by Temple Isaiah (Reform Hebrew Congregation). It sells new and used household items, clothing and bric-a-brac. Small furniture and antiques will be available from time to time. Paintings and other art works are also for sale.

The window decorations were designed and executed by Mrs. Gary Brooks of Stony Brook; the sign was created by Mrs. Victor Goldie, also of Stony Brook. The entire operation is under the direction of Mrs. Jennie Feldstein of Strathmore. Mrs. Feldstein has organized a team of volunteers who will help to keep the store open from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday thru Friday, and on Thursday evening.

A dedication and open house, complete with refreshments, was held on Saturday evening, June 4.

"This & That" will be glad to accept gently used merchandise, paintings and objets d'art on consignment.



Purim Photos from 1971



Recollections of Temple Isaiah's Birth, On the Occasion of its Bar Mitzvah Year

by Vivian Feldstein

Early in 1965 a small notice in the *Three Village Herald* (at right) invited all those interested in forming a Reform Congregation to meet at a home in East Setauket. So many people responded, the meeting had to be moved to the Suffolk Museum. The burgeoning State University and real estate development by Levitt & Sons and others

Meet Planned to Launch Reform Liberal Synagogue

A meeting is being planned for the near future to discuss the possibilities of organizing a reform-liberal Jewish synagogue in the Three Village-Port Jefferson area.

If the response is sufficient, a meeting will be held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Eli A. Kahn, East Setauket. All interested persons are urged to phone 941-4624 (evenings after 7 pm) or 941-9055 during the day.

drew many Jewish families to this desirable area. Two families who were actively involved in the Jewish community felt it an opportune time to develop a new congregation. They were Mr. and Mrs. Eli Kahn and Dr. and Mrs. Paul Michael. Eli Kahn served as the first President of the congregation.

The first service was conducted by Rabbi Daniel Davis of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in May of that year, in the meeting room of the Suffolk Museum, using a Torah brought from the *House of Living Judaism* in New York City.

All through the following summer, services were conducted at the Setauket Neighborhood House on alternate Friday evenings by guest Rabbis including Rabbi Malcolm Stern, author of *Americans of Jewish Descent*. During that time, a Torah borrowed from our friends at North Shore Jewish Center was used. Our musical tradition was established early on by our first Cantor, Donald Ritter, and his choir. At the beginning of that period, a constitution was approved and 38 families became Charter Members.

In the fall of 1965, the congregation of the Community Church on Christian Avenue in Stony Brook invited us to share their sanctuary and religious school building and we remained as guests for two years. The cordial relationship established between the congregations continues to this day.

It was at this point in its history, the congregation received its first Torah from an anonymous benefactor.

[An addition to this history, recalled by Vivian in 2009, as told to her son, James: Eli Kahn asked if I would accompany him into Manhattan to select a

Torah for the congregation, to be paid for by an anonymous donor. We went to J. Levine, which was then located on the Lower East Side. Eli was a learned Jew of Sephardic extraction. (His family had lived in Cordova until the Inquisition. He was raised in Greece.) He scrupulously examined several scrolls and selected one to his liking. With great pride, he lauded its exquisite calligraphy. Together we selected the mantle, silver breastplate and rimmonim. I recall the total cost was little more than \$1200. Perhaps swept up by the exhilaration of the experience, Eli told me who the anonymous donor was. A man named Abraham Muss. Not a member of the congregation, he was the principal developer of the Smithhaven Mall.]

In the spring of 1966 the congregation leased its first property and, under the chairmanship of Jennie Feldstein, established a thrift shop called *This and That*, in an old building on Route 25A at Gnarled Hollow Road. The property was owned by Jack and Maybelle Michaels whose family had lived in the community for several generations. The shop occupied the first floor and the upper level served as Religious School Office and residence for our weekend student Rabbi, Ira Youdovin and his wife, Susan.



At the 1967 Groundbreaking (l to r) Rabbi Ira Youdovin, Bernie Kouchel, Norman Orchant, Louis and Larry Person, Rabbi Daniel Davis, Eli Kahn (holding shovel) and Reverend John Paul Hankins (Stony Brook Community Church).

On June 2, 1967 a long-awaited groundbreaking ceremony was held for our first building, located at

the corner of a parcel of land on Stony Brook Road purchased from Levitt and Sons. It was more than three acres in size. The Temple was completed in three months, enabling the congregation to worship in its own sanctuary for the High Holy Days. The realization of this major step was facilitated by the tireless efforts of two later Presidents of the congregation, Bernard Kouchel and Norman Orchant. This milestone was crowned by the acquisition of a Holocaust Torah from Czechoslovakia.

With the escalation of the war in Asia, Rabbi Youdovin was called to serve as a Chaplain in the United States Air Force. The congregation welcomed Rabbi Gordon Geller, who came from a position at Central Synagogue in Rockville Centre. During the three years of this association, the membership grew and additional space was required. A Long Range Planning Committee, under the chairmanship of Dr. Gerald Fine, added on to the first building to increase the size of the sanctuary by one-third and provide two more classrooms for the religious school. As a family-oriented congregation, we all shared in the joy of Gordon's marriage to Elaine. In spring, 1971, Rabbi Geller left for Washington to further a career in Public Affairs Law.

The congregation then invited Rabbi Adam Fisher to serve as its spiritual leader. In the summer of 1971, he moved his family to our community from Lynchburg, Virginia.

Though certainly one of the youngest members of the UAHC, Temple Isaiah was at the forefront of future trends in religion. For the year 1971/72, we were one of only five reform congregations in the United States to elect a woman president. We were the *only one* to also have a female Cantor.

The number of worshippers at High Holy Days in September of 1971 required double services. The overwhelming needs of the congregation to have larger quarters for its programs led to the formation of a new Long Range Planning Committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Jerome Feldstein.

An architect, Mr. Henry Randall of Port Jefferson, was engaged to design a building to accommodate about four hundred families. The structure and open vaulted roof is designed with a simplicity of detail characteristic of early American Shaker buildings. Nonetheless, the Temple is clearly a work contemporary with its time, constructed in a manner so as to blend into the neighborhood. The floor plan is functional for all present uses yet considerable

flexibility has been built in for future expansion. Dr. Abraham Berlad designed the outdoor reception areas and designed and executed the landscaping of the entire site. On May 22, 1976, this building was dedicated – with much rejoicing.

That year we joined with neighboring congregations and Hillel at Stony Brook University, to establish a community Jewish education program called *Torah School*.

Our congregation and its members continue to be involved in interfaith activities. We host an annual Bible study day, and members serve the Smithhaven Ministries in various capacities, including a vice presidency on its executive board.

Rabbi Fisher is a member of the joint committee on social action of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. He was invited to the White House to attend a reception for Menachem Begin, the Israeli Prime Minister.

Our congregation has actively involved young people in the Reform movement's camping program and youth activities. Two members serve on the Camp Commission of the UAHC.

In thirteen years, the congregation has grown to almost ten times the original membership. On May 12, the founding was commemorated at a special Friday evening worship service. In recognition of the past, Rabbi Ira Youdovin was invited to speak and charter member families were honored.

The congregation continues through its current leadership to play a vital role in this community.



Rabbi Gordon Geller in an undated Pesach photo with students from Temple Isaiah's Religious School.



Temple Isaiah's Early Days Timeline

March 5, 1965 • Small Notice appears in *The Three Village Herald*

April 12, 1965 • Organizational Meeting at the Suffolk Museum

May 14, 1965 • First Worship Service held at Suffolk Museum

May 21, 1965 • *The Port Jefferson Times* reports the loan of a Torah from “the oldest synagogue on Long Island [NSJC] to the youngest [Temple Isaiah]”

July 15, 1965 • Temple Isaiah receives Certificate of Incorporation from NYS

October 22, 1965 • Dedication of Congregation

March 7, 1966 • Congregation Approves 1966/67 Budget Totaling \$17,000

May 23, 1966 • *This & That* Thrift Shop Opens on Main Street in Setauket

April 1967 • Bernard Kouchel is Chairman of the Building Committee
Gary Brooks Named Fundraising Chairman
Elaine Kouchel Chairs Sunshine Committee, creates cards.

June 4, 1967 • Groundbreaking Ceremony for Temple Building

September 15, 1967 • Opening of Religious School

September 16, 1967 • Dedication Dance and Journal

June 14, 1968 • Following his Ordination, student Rabbi Ira Youdovin announces departure for active duty in the USAF

September 1968 • Rabbi Gordon Geller comes to Temple Isaiah, from Central Synagogue of Nassau County in Rockville Centre

April 7, 1971 • Pulpit Committee Unanimously Selects
Rabbi Adam David Fisher as the Temple's next spiritual leader

September 3, 1971 • Cantor Sheila May Cline comes to Temple Isaiah

March 16, 1975 • Ground-Breaking Ceremony for New Building

June 20, 1975 • Temple Isaiah's 1st Adult Bat Mitzvahs
Doris Dvorken, Vivian Feldstein, Betty Halper, Arlene Lefkowitz, Renée Plevin

May 16, 1976 • Dedication of the New Sanctuary ~
Menorah Design & Creation by Joseph Donnelly
Parochet Design & Weaving by Sharon Fisher

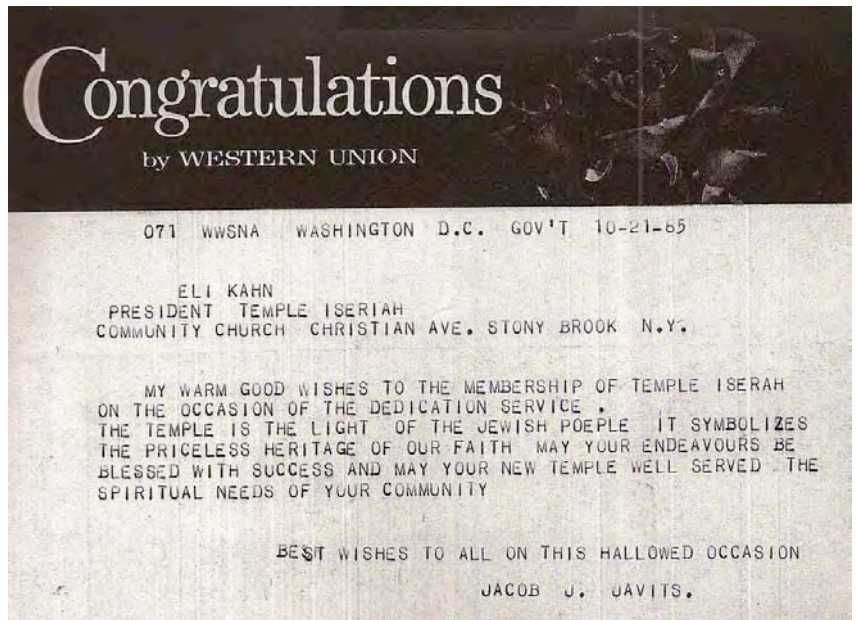
May 1978 • Temple Isaiah's Bar Mitzvah Year begins

**TEMPLE ISAIAH'S
CHARTER MEMBERS**

- Dr. & Mrs. Paul Baron
- Mr. Charles Blum
- Mr. & Mrs. Harold Boses
- Mr. & Mrs. Gary Brooks
- Mr. & Mrs. Julius Countess
- Mr. & Mrs. Edwin Dickman
- Mr. & Mrs. Julius Elias
- Mr. & Mrs. Henry Feinstein
- Mrs. Jennie Feinstein
- Dr. & Mrs. Jerome Feldstein
- Mr. George Fuchs
- Dr. & Mrs. Irving Gerst
- Mr. & Mrs. Mark Ginsberg
- Mr. & Mrs. Victor Goldie
- Dr. & Mrs. J.L. Goldstein
- Mr. & Mrs. Joel Gould
- Mr. & Mrs. Albert Greenberg
- Mr. & Mrs. Eli Kahn
- Mr. & Mrs. Bernard Kouchel
- Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Lack
- Mr. & Mrs. John Lawston
- Mr. & Mrs. J. Lettieri
- Dr. & Mrs. Melvin Levine
- Mr. & Mrs. Meyer Mehlman
- Mr. & Mrs. Jack Michaels
- Dr. & Mrs. Paul Michael
- Dr. Charles & Dr. Kate Miller
- Mr. & Mrs. Philip Miller
- Mr. & Mrs. Norman Orchant
- Mr. & Mrs. Joel Radin
- Mr. & Mrs. Donald Ritter
- Mr. & Mrs. William Roberts
- Mr. & Mrs. Leonard Schwartz
- Mr. & Mrs. Robert Segal
- Mr. & Mrs. H. Milton Shapanka
- Mr. & Mrs. Sidney Shapanka
- Mr. & Mrs. Mel Tessler
- Mr. & Mrs. Edward Vogel

The 1966 Executive Board

- President..... Eli A. Kahn
- 1st VP. Norman Orchant
- 2nd VP. Jerome Feldstein
- Treasurer..... Elizabeth Vogel
- Financial Sec'ty. Donald Klein
- Recording Sec'ty. Glenda Orchant
- Corresponding Sec'ty. Gussy Gerst



A "Best Wishes" telegram from US Senator from New York Jacob Javits.

January 22, 1968
Report of **Bernard Kouchel**,
Building Committee Chairman
**RE: Cost for Land, Structure
& Furnishings for Building**
ESTIMATE: \$61,000.00
ACTUAL COST: \$61,812.32
(1.33% over estimate)

September 5, 1969
**Religious School
Registration**
Principal **Leonard Brass**
Teachers were:
*Felicia Davidson, Jack Goldhaber,
Samuel Grenz, Yonah Hirshberg,
Aliza Meidam, Marcia Prager and
Alice Schleifer*

How many people can you recognize in this photo?
Hint: It's from 1978 – Temple Isaiah's Bar Mitzvah Year.

