

Welcome to all of you

My name is Marilyn Weinberg and I have the honor of representing our Beth Israel Congregation community today.

I am so pleased and thankful that you braved the snow and cold to be share this “simcha” or celebration.

I would like to mention a few people who are here and whose, great and in some circumstances great-great grandparents marched up that hill 100 years ago.

Sister and Brother Elaine and Lon Povich - Steve & Ben Singer and family.

There were lots of children participating that day a hundred years ago and we are so pleased to have some of our wonderful Beth Israel children here today. They are cherished.

Many of you know some of this story. During the late 1800's and early 1900's the Jewish citizens of Bath, and Brunswick, most of them Eastern European immigrants, came together for their services in multiple locations around town.

We know In November of 1919 a group gathered at a small tailor shop on Front St. owned by a young man named Harry Arenstam and 41 men pledged money to build a synagogue of their own.

What you might not know is that at the same time the ladies formed their own group called the “Bath Hebrew Ladies Society.” We have minutes of their meetings starting in early 1919. And they also began their own form of fundraising with dinners, dues (\$.10 a meeting) and all sorts of activities.

These were not wealthy people, but they persevered. Every Sunday they would ride to the various Jewish congregations in neighboring towns to present their need. Both the Gardner and Lewiston Jewish communities gave \$43 each.

What is also amazing is that they were also able to raise \$2400 from the non-Jewish population of Bath. The largest single contributor was Rupert Baxter of the Bath Trust Company who personally donated \$250. What a wonderful community this was and still is.

In early 1920 they were able to buy the house next door and an empty lot on which this building stands.

We know that on January 29, 1922, the building was completed enough to begin using it. There was only money enough to finish the downstairs, but they were happy.

At first folding chairs had to be borrowed and then later purchased. There was no heat except for a small wood stove that stood in the corner. There was no real kitchen so when they served meals (which they often did) the families brought their own dishes and food was prepared at home.

And here we are today. Our founders had just survived WW I and a 1918 flu pandemic. They were determined to follow their dream. Over the years there were some Rabbis who came to lead services, but in general the community was built on shared responsibilities and shared goals.

As Doris Povich Mensh stated in her speech for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration: “We have struggled, we have persevered, we have endured, and we have been blessed.” The same is what we can say for today.

Today we are here to honor our founders for having the will and determination to create this space for us to gather as a community. But we are also here to honor each and every one of you who have supported Beth Israel and enabled it to thrive and make this a place of faith, community, and love for all. We hope we are here for another 100 years.

I would like to introduce the current president of Beth Israel - Peggy Brown