



# Beth Am commentator

February 20, 1976

Miami, Florida

## Highlights Of Our History

**1955** — Dwight Eisenhower was President of the United States, the Dodgers and the Yankees were fighting for the pennant, Coral Gables was agog with a zoning squabble for a Burdine's, and a group of young Jewish families met to discuss the lack of available facilities to provide their children a Jewish education. Result: the South Dade Jewish Community Center, 100 members strong. They met at the South Miami Community Hall, held Hebrew and Sunday School classes at the University of Miami and the South Miami Baptist Church. A permanent home was needed . . . an ideal location on North Kendall Drive was found.

**1956** — After months of debate, the members voted to join the Union of American Hebrew Congregations as a Reform congregation. Later that year, a tall, lanky Virginian, recommended by the UAHC because of his multi-faceted talents, became the religious leader. His name: Rabbi Herbert M. Baumgard. He brought a fine wife, three lively children and an enormous zest for spiritual and executive excellence. Ground was broken for the first building, the Social Hall.

**1958** — The first religious service in the Social Hall was held in August, though the doors and windows had yet to be installed. The congregation voted to change its name to Temple Beth Am, "House of the People," as they truly felt it was.

**1959** — The Religious School had its own building with the construction of the Mark A. Light Memorial School. Youth programs were expanded; the Beth Am Nursery School became a reality; Summer Camp had its first registration.

**1963-64** — These were significant years in the growth of Beth Am. Three additional buildings were erected, our fine Sanctuary, a second building of the Mark A. Light Memorial School, and the Youth Lounge. The Temple grew to accommodate its constantly increasing membership.

**1970** — A momentous breakthrough in Reform Jewish education occurred at Beth Am; the development of a Reform Day School for the continuity of Jewish education. Classes are now held daily from the pre-school level through sixth grade.

**1974** — The new Teenage Building, designed especially to meet the needs of our youth, graces our grounds, now grown to eleven acres. A grateful congregation named it "The Herbert M. Baumgard Building" to honor their beloved and dedicated spiritual leader in his lifetime.

**1975** — Temple Beth Am in its 20th year gives spiritual guidance to over 1,300 families.

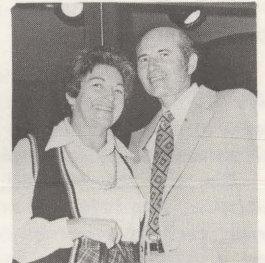
## Anniversary Weekend Here

This is the weekend we have all been waiting for. This is the weekend we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the founding of Temple Beth Am and the 25th anniversary in the rabbinate of Rabbi Herbert Baumgard.

The planning for the weekend has been under the guidance of our president, Bernard Goodman, Alan Kessler, chairman of the anniversary committee, and Herman Feldman and Barton Udell, who handled the programming. Geri Legow has been in charge of all publicity.

The original founding fathers first met in the spring of 1955 to try to organize a synagogue. They searched for a rabbi and called Rabbi Baumgard to their pulpit.

Rabbi Baumgard, a native of Virginia, spent his early years in Norfolk and his college years at the University of Virginia, where he earned his B.S. degree and spent a year in Law School prior to service in World War II. After military service, he studied for the rabbinate at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and served as founding rabbi at B'nai Israel in Elmont, New York. It was at this time that he met his wife, the former Selma Geller, of Lawrence, Massachusetts. In 1956, the family moved to Miami, where Rabbi Baumgard served as director of the South Florida Federation of Reform Synagogues, and worked weekends at a fledgling congregation in the southwest section of Miami, Beth Am. Shortly thereafter, he was asked to serve full time as spiritual leader of this growing temple, and they were on their way to becoming one of the giants among Reform congregations in all of the United States.



We are starting this weekend with a religious service at 8:30 p.m. on Friday night, keynoted by the appearance of Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn of Temple Israel, Boston. Rabbi Gittelsohn is an old friend of Rabbi Baumgard and is considered to be one of the foremost spokesmen for Judaism in America. After the service, we will have a special Oneg in the quadrangle under the stars.

On Sunday, the anniversary celebration, starting at 8:00 p.m., in the Sanctuary, will feature a visual presentation of the historical highlights of our Temple, narrated by our past presidents. There will be a short musical interlude by the Troubadours. Featured speakers will be the Reverend Canon Theodore Gibson, Miami City Commissioner, and close friend of Rabbi Baumgard for many years, and Dr. Paul Steinberg, Dean of the New York School of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Dr. Steinberg and our Rabbi have been friends and associates dating back to the time when they were both in rabbinical school.

A special presentation will be offered to Rabbi and Selma Baumgard in appreciation for their devoted efforts and service to Beth Am. The windup of the evening will be a light buffet, served in our large recreation room on the second floor of the Teenage Building.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20  
8:30 p.m.

### RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Adult Choir will perform  
Selma Baumgard, Choirmaster

Sermon By  
Rabbi Dr. Roland Gittelsohn  
Temple Israel, Boston, Mass.



SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21  
11:15 a.m.

TORAH SERVICE

FROM THE RABBI'S DESK

## The Congregation After Twenty Years

Over the weekend of February 20-22, Beth Am will celebrate its 20th year of existence. For those of us who were here at the beginning, when Beth Am was just a gleam in the eyes of its planners, this is a sobering moment. The feeling is somewhat comparable to that experienced by a parent when he/she beholds the child grown to maturity. He/she says to himself, "Did I give birth to that? Is it possible that I am responsible for that adult, with a mind of its own, making its independent contribution to the community?" The parent beholding his/her grown child hardly believes that the adult is real. It all seems to be partially a dream. There is something of unreality in it.

These are some of the feelings of the founders of Beth Am. We didn't quite intend to build what has emerged. Our hopes were more humble. We were not this ambitious. We thought of something more simple. It has become extremely complex.

We who started Beth Am built by placing one strand on another, one brick on another. We were intimately concerned with each of our members. When we planned the Sanctuary, we insisted that it be shaped so that those on the altar would have a close view of each person in the congregation. Each worshipper was to feel that he could walk up to the Ark and be a part of the service. Our goal was personal contact. We initiated a hospital visitation service from the beginning which was designed to encourage visitation to every patient who informed us of his illness. We planned the Bar Mitzvah program so that the Rabbi would be involved in the teaching program itself. No child was to come to the pulpit as a stranger. The Rabbi was involved directly in the confirmation program. When we started the conversion program, the Rabbi was to be the teacher. Similarly, in the religious school, the Rabbi was assigned as a frequent visitor to classes.

As the congregation grew, the problem of how to maintain the concept of intimacy became more complex. Members joined because they had heard of our personal orientation. Their joining was a challenge to us to try to maintain that intimacy. Beth Am now has three Rabbis on staff as it strives to give each member the same kind of consideration it gave the founding members. It now has three staff members visiting hospitals instead of one (and all report to the Senior Rabbi). The Rabbi(s) are still involved in teaching the Bar Mitzvah class, working with the confirmands, participating in the Religious School and youth programming. A good, executive type program has enabled us to maintain our style and goal. We are still a congregation that cares about its individual members.

As a congregation grows, however, it requires increasing cooperation from its members. We can't track down everyone in the hospital. They have to let us know where they are. We can't visit everyone's home. The member has to be gracious enough and helpful enough to call the Rabbi(s) and to visit him when he wants a personal meeting. The doors to our office are open wide, as wide as ever. I have concluded over the years that if the members are willing to help, we can relate to them as directly as ever.

Beth Am has reached its maturity. It is now a major community influence. We have turned in the last few years to developing our program internally. We want to reach in before we reach out. How successful will the next 20 years be? That will depend on how much our new (and older) members are willing to exert themselves. They have to help us to help them. Are we equal to the new strength which is ours? Will we use this strength responsibly and creatively? Or will we become lethargic and self-satisfied? I pray that we will avoid the latter fate, and I speak for all the staff when I say that we will do all that we can to avoid that trap for successful institutions.

## Oneg Shabbat Under The Stars For Anniversary February 20

More than 70 women volunteered to bake for this special Oneg Shabbat, said Esther Kessler, chairman of cuisine. Lack of space limits listing all the names, but the ladies will be remembered in appreciation with each delicious morsel.

Chairmen of the Oneg Shabbat are Helen Schwarz and Irene Ziff. Committee members are Virginia Altschuler, Florence Fox, Diana Elson, Evelyn Goodman, Ruth Leshaw, Rosita Levy, Marcia Silver, Marilyn Udell, and Barbara Weiner. Decorations are made by Faye Aronson, Evelyn Goodman, Doris Hoffman, and Mickey Lipton.

**ONEG SHABBAT BAKERS WILL PLEASE DELIVER THEIR GOODIES TO THE SOCIAL HALL KITCHEN BETWEEN 10 A.M. AND 2 P.M. ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20.**

## Candid Camera Sunday, February 22

One of the features of the Sunday, February 22, anniversary program is a slide pictorial history of Beth Am, narrated by the past presidents.

Pictures, both solemn and sensational, have been retrieved from dark recesses to re-live golden moments of Temple activity through the years.

You may see yourself larger than life on the screen in the Sanctuary in a photograph you were not aware existed.

The script for the narration was prepared by Joan Schwartzman, Barton Udell, Al Liebert, Herman Feldman, and Alan Kessler.

Past presidents of the Temple Herman Feldman, Robert Newman, Joseph Altschuller, Byron Cherkas, Alan Kessler, George Malin, Barton Udell, Dr. Maxwell Dauer, William Sanes, and our current president, Bernard Goodman, will read the script.

## The Ideal Rabbi . . . ?

He should be Jewish and the product of a well-rounded education. He should have a college degree in electronics plus the usual theological training. In order to relate well to young people, he should be under 30 years old, with at least 20 years of experience. He should be deeply religious, in an unobtrusive sort of way. He should be cultured and thoroughly familiar with the intellectual giants of Judaism and of western civilization. He should be an effective leader, but let the laymen run the congregation. He should be eloquent, yet excel as a listener. He should be a natural mixer, a "regular fellow," but also refined, spiritual and dignified. He should be a man of principle, yet flexible--firm in the courage of his convictions with the wisdom to suppress them. He should be able to lecture on the Bible, religious philosophy, questions of death and the holocaust, in a fun sort of way. Oh yes, the degree in electronics? He must know how to turn the congregation on!

--Exchange

*Bnai*

*Mitzvah*

Saturday  
February 21  
11:15 a.m.



Andrew, son of  
Dr. and Mrs. Henry Glick  
Todd, son of  
Mr. and Mrs. Morton Victor