

The history of Temple Sisterhood

By Jody Kolmen

**Temple Sisterhood president, 2022 to present
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In 2024 (two years from now), our very own Temple Sisterhood will celebrate 150 years of its founding (also our 3rd jubilee). Just as an interesting side note, Yellowstone national park is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year.

In terms of centuries, we span 3: 19th, 20th & 21st. And just so you know, the Kentucky derby is also 149 years old this year (thank you Tara Starr for watching the broadcast and picking up on this notable tidbit.)

Let's take a retrospective glance at some of the historical treasures I have discovered of our beloved Temple Sisterhood organization in terms of jubilee years:

The first jubilee period was from 1874 - 1924:

We started as the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society in 1874, one year after the congregation was founded.

According to Miss Ida Jacob's article "Jews of Des Moines: their progress and their prospects", the society organized initially to look after and attend to the needs of the poor; it was the first Jewish charity organization and first Jewish women's organization of any kind in Des Moines.

The first committees were the poor committee, the visiting committee and the auditing committee. They raised funds through dues as well as extra funds for poor relief by holding parties and socials. In the first 25 years, they raised money for carpet for the temple, and planned Chanukah and Purim entertainment for the children.

149 years of Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society/Temple Sisterhood charter members: Mrs. David Goldman, Mrs. Joseph Kuhn, Mrs. Isaac Kuhn, Mrs. Alexander Lederer, Mrs. Julius Mandelbaum, Mrs. Ludwig Samish, Mrs. Johanna Wolf, Mrs. Moses Strauss, and Mrs. Jacob Posner.

As the society continued their charity work in the community, in 1895, the ladies organized a second organization which was first called the Des Moines section of National Council of Jewish Women, then the Ladies Auxiliary of B'nai Jeshurun, then in January 1904 it became the B'nai Jeshurun Sisterhood, as an added note the first

president of this organization was my great great grandmother Babetta Frankel (zichrona l'vracha).

119 years of B'nai Jeshurun Sisterhood: first officers president - Mrs. Babetta Frankel, Vice President - Mrs. Bertha Sims, Secretary - Mrs. Emma Sheuerman, and treasurer - Mrs. Nora Friedlich.

The first expense for the new organization was to pay the salary of the janitor in helping them maintain the grounds of the Temple; other early expenses to note are the purchase and installation of a new toilet and radiator in the vestry room. All in all, the organization spent \$900 on improvements in the Temple and on the Temple grounds. This organization became one of the founding members of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhood (now known as [Women of Reform Judaism](#)) in 1913. Throughout the years, we [have continued to be a](#) supportive and loyal member. The society [and B'nai Jeshurun Sisterhood](#) merged as [the](#) Temple Sisterhood in 1914.

In 1916, they petitioned for representation on the Temple board and they have had a member on the Temple Board of Trustees ever since. The women's groups did their part to support the wartime efforts during WW1. At the annual

meeting of the United Benevolent Society the official name became Temple Sisterhood on May 7, 1920.

An interesting side note I discovered in a document that detailed the history of the women's groups at Temple was that in the time capsule that was placed in the cornerstone at 8th and Pleasant location in 1887 was the history of the congregation, and the time capsule with the history of the congregation was re-placed in the cornerstone at our current building in 1932. The history contains this beautiful tribute to these pioneer women: "This congregation is under lasting obligation to our beloved Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society for material aid at different times in the struggle for existence."

The second jubilee period was 1924 to our centennial in 1974:

at the sisterhood's 60th anniversary celebration in 1934, the members performed a dramatic presentation of "Board will be Boards". Just so you know there's an autographed photo of the 1934 members in the glass case with all the historical books and artifacts that you can see as you walk down the hallway to come upstairs to the social hall.

In 1939, the sisterhood held a mother-daughter luncheon. There were many dramatic presentations from the 1930s to the 1960s, rummage sales, a rabbi-led book club, and believe it or not, according to the temple bulletins from the 40s and 50s, our very own Sisterhood held Sisterhood services on the first week of May.

In the document about the Temple Sisterhood's the early years to the centennial, Ethelyn Swartz (zichrona l'vracha) included in her report that the sisterhood had three service committees at that time: religious, social/good fellowship, and improvement. She also noted three main achievements : the scholarship loan fund, the braille committee, and the sewing group.

According to an article in the 1940 bulletin, the scholarship fund has been giving out grants and scholarships since 1923; loans are made without interest to date of maturity of the note - a date set at two years after graduation of the borrower; the scholarships are granted to Iowa residents or a student at an Iowa college or university.

We're two years away from our third jubilee 1974 - 2024: to highlight some of our accomplishments to date: while we still run the scholarship loan fund, (of which if you have any college juniors or seniors interested in applying for a loan, please contact the sisterhood for an application and for more information) we have also been busy on a variety of different types of events and programs such as inter-friendship teas from 1995-2003, a 2002 Passover recipe swab cook book, and a 2004 report "Death and Dying the Jewish Way". In 2013, Women of Reform Judaism sent us a special service to help the national organization celebrate their centennial. We host We Do Luncheons, Breakfast Club, and Rosh Chodesh havdalas. We've presented hybrid zoom seminars on ethical wills and LGBTQ Jews, a zoom seminar on creating creative services, and made take home bags for High Holy days and Hanukkah. We also hold Lilith salons with havdalah service, supper in the Sukkah, schmooze and crafts chats, and a Sisterhood/Brotherhood-led Temple book club. We've hosted the temple's Kentucky derby party, and our latest program, a wine tasting.

We have also been continuing our outreach social action projects such as donating of books to the Ashcroft library so moms in jail will have a book and their children will have the

same book so the mom can read the book to their children, collecting donations for the immigrant children in south Texas which was in coordination with the McAllen synagogue, no sew blankets, knit/crochet blankets, plastic bags weaving into mats for the [Central Iowa Shelter and Services](#), and helping fund the creation and decorating of [The ISU 4U Legacy Lounge](#) at [King elementary school](#) in Des Moines.

These are the highlights of the extraordinary history of Temple Sisterhood's 148 years of service to the congregation and community. Now we can look forward with hope and happiness that the next 52 years will bring continued religious service, good fellowship and social action activities. And the sisterhood will continue to be a welcoming organization for everyone.

Thank you.
