

# Story of Temple

## 110 years of Reform Judaism in Montreal

(Dedicated to the memory of David Weiss, who conceived and wrote much of this article.)

**T**emple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom carries the distinction of being a Reform Jewish congregation from its very conception. Maxwell Goldstein, in his 1932 memoirs, recalled that he and his father and brothers attended the first meeting on August 24, 1882, to organize a Reform congregation. Rabbi Samuel Marks was Temple's first spiritual guide.

Temple leased the former Zion Church on Beaver Hall Hill. The services of an organist and choir were engaged, retaining for those who desired it, the tallit, the hat, and two-day observance of Rosh Hashanah. A large part of the service was conducted in English at Temple's first High Holy Days in 1882.

Those 35 pioneers stood alone in a community bound by tradition and resistance to change. They proclaimed a liberalism which sprang from their concern for Jewish renewal in a new society. Bravely they stood their ground against those who could not abide dissent. So it has been for the past 100 years of challenges and crises.

Soon after 1882, Temple encountered its first great trials. It was difficult in an Orthodox community to make headway. After moving into less expensive quarters on Stanley Street in 1892, Temple's home for 19 years, a growing membership required something greater. With the help of Sir Mortimer B. Davis in 1911, Temple erected and occupied its present building on Sherbrooke Street West.

The original building was unique in its Byzantine design. A catastrophic fire razed this building in 1959. Mr. Alfred Miller recently recounted the history of that time for the Boards, describing the tears on the face of Rabbi Harry Joshua Stern as he carried Torahs from the flaming building. By 1962 the Temple had been rebuilt in its present form, thanks to the generosity of its congregants and the strength of its leadership.

Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom's name bespeaks its dual origin, for Temple Beth Sholom, formed in 1953, united with Emanu-El in 1980. Temple Beth Sholom's history is a proud one too, as well recounted by past-president Harry Halton. In a mere four years, the congregation was able to erect a beautiful building on Terrebonne Street, where Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath led the dedication. Temple Beth Sholom had a large religious school and active membership. Its rabbis served with distinction, adding their creativity and sense of yiddishkeit to Montreal's Reform Jewish world.

As population trends took their toll, Mrs. Steffi Halton and others began to discuss merger with Temple Emanu-El. Ultimately a merger was arranged, with the last Temple Beth Sholom High Holy Days taking place in 1979.

Today's Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom is a congregation of 1000 member families, residing in all parts of the Montreal metro area. The pioneering vision of the past still quickens the men and women of our congregation. We are still committed to "preserving Judaism in all its pristine glory, and making it clear and comprehensible to those who will come after us."

As we reconsecrate the Temple at this 110th anniversary, may we continue into the second century what was so nobly begun, keeping faith with the past without ignoring the realities of the present. One hundred and ten years of Reform Judaism in Montreal demands this of us, and no less.

David Weiss