

# Beth Jacob: Its First Century

*by Rabbi Shlomo Jacobovits*

## **In the Beginning**

One hundred years ago the Jewish community of Toronto consisted of two very disparate segments: one Old, one New. But which segment was the Old, and which the New?

There was the group clustered around the Holy Blossom Synagogue, which at that time was Orthodox, concentrated between Yonge and Jarvis, both south and north of Queen Street E. This Congregation had been established almost a half century earlier, and in that sense they were the Old segment. But they belonged fully to the New World, their language was English, in tastes and lifestyle they were of the modern culture, and they identified with everything Canadian. The adjective new appeared to fit them better than the term old.

To the west, on the other side of Yonge, lived the East Europeans — recently-arrived immigrants from lands of persecution and deprivation. As newcomers they constituted the New segment, but in their ways they belonged to the Old World. Their language was Yiddish, their lifestyles and modes of Jewish prayers and observances were decidedly of the old style, and to a certain extent their own children, if born in Canada, looked upon them as somewhat old and out-dated. But for our purpose we refer to them as the New Community, and the Holy Blossom group as the Old Community.

Migration from East Europe to North America was minimal before 1881, but developed into a strong flow from that year onwards, with the accession of Czar Alexander III to the Russian throne. He, and later his son Nicholai II, aggressively intensified the persecution of their Jewish subjects, and their dictatorial rule extended over not only Russia and Ukraine, but also over Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and parts of Rumania. About half the world's Jews at that time lived under the Czar's yoke, and these two individuals, in their own malevolent way, did

more to generate the remarkable growth of Jewry in the English-speaking world, and in the Palestine of that day, than any other persons on earth.

Thus began Toronto's New Jewish Community. These newcomers kept themselves somewhat apart from the Old Community, but by no means did they attain unity among themselves. They grouped themselves according to the countries or cities from which they came, and the key word was *Landsmanschaft*. Whether the organization they set up was a synagogue, a benefit society, a school, or a cemetery, it invariably bore the name of an East European city or territory and served the migrants from that locality. They felt an affinity for each other, and for the *Minhagim* (modes of worship) of their European home-town.

## **Toronto's Polish Jews on the Rise**

In the 1880's the Lithuanians, the Russians, and the Galicians, each established their own synagogue. The Czarist persecution of those years was at first less intense in Poland than in other areas of Russia, so Polish Jews did not migrate to Toronto in large numbers till the late 1890's. When enough of them had arrived to form a viable nucleus they held *Minyan* services, at least occasionally, in a private home. There is no known record as to exactly when this started, but 1897 is about right. By 1899 they were numerous enough to organize a formal congregation, to be known popularly as the *Poilishe Shul*.

1897 had been a milestone year in Toronto, besides being the year of the first World Zionist Congress in Basle. That was the year Holy Blossom inaugurated its large and beautiful new synagogue on Bond Street - just north of St Michael's Hospital on the opposite side of that street (the building is still there today). The avowed purpose of some of its leaders — and this was reported and supported in the daily press — was to unite Toronto Jewry, and to have the New

Community join the Old Community through worship at this imposing edifice.

Nothing of the sort happened. The New Community was in no way drawn to Bond Street, and in fact continued to splinter into ever-more numerous geographical units, with no semblance of unity for many years to come. The Old Community gradually edged away from Orthodoxy, and in due course became totally Reform, and today Holy Blossom is called Temple, not Synagogue.

In fact to some extent the opposite happened. In order to attract the New Community, who were in general far less affluent, Holy Blossom offered reduced rates of membership fees, but with the stipulation that those paying less than a certain amount had no voting rights. The effect, if anything, was to repel rather than attract. So the East European congregations continued on their previous trajectory, and the influx of the next few decades was drawn to these congregations, including of course the new Poilishe Shul.

And something else began to happen. A few East European Jews had arrived in Toronto well before the rest of their countrymen. Some would worship at Holy Blossom, especially before 1881, when that was Toronto's only synagogue. In due course, as the new European congregations formed, they attracted their landsleit away from Holy Blossom. One such individual was Mendel Granatstein, originally from Poland, a very successful dealer in rags, and an active member of Holy Blossom. He joined his Polish countrymen in 1897, helped organize the congregation, and for the next 30 years was the leading figure in the Poilishe Shul, and remained its president until he died.

The congregation at first took the formal name Russo-Polish Jewish Synagogue Bais Jakov, which later was changed to Beth Jacob Congregation. Until it moved to its present location in 1966 neither name was commonly used. People referred to it as the Poilishe Shul, the Elm Street Shul, or the Henry Street Shul.

17 Elm Street was the site of its first building, previously a church, between Yonge Street and where the Sick Children's Hospital is now located. By 1906 the group had grown large

enough and successful enough to make this purchase, and they were the fifth Synagogue in Toronto to attain such ownership.

Membership continued to increase till the Great War broke out in 1914. (That conflict was not called World War 1 till the early 1940's.) All routes were closed during the war, but in 1919 the flow resumed, especially from Poland. Anti-semitic outbreaks were rampant in the newly independent Poland of the 1920's, and in Palestine the migration of those years was called the Polish Aliya.

### **More Jews Come to Toronto**

In 1897 when Beth Jacob started the total Jewish population of Toronto was still below 3,000. But it was increasing rapidly, and within the next ten years would grow 5-fold to 14,000, and then would double again, to 28,000, before the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914.

Added impetus to leave Russia occurred in the early years of the new century. Mob violence and atrocities in Kishinev and other cities in 1903-4 spread fear among Jews throughout Russia. In 1904-05 Russia fought Japan, and many Jews emigrated to escape military conscription. More social upheavals followed Russia's ignominious defeat. All these developments served to increase the westward emigration of Russian Jews. The flow to the west was also enhanced by persecution in Rumania, and by poverty in the province of Galicia, where organized persecution was not a factor, the imperial government of Austria-Hungary being friendly to Jews.

Poland had the densest Jewish population, and in the first decades of the twentieth century Toronto's Polish Congregation was the fastest-growing, despite its later arrival on the scene. The growth of this congregation continued apace, and eight additional, smaller Polish synagogues were established in the years 1905-1922. These were all Landsmanschaften bearing names such as Apte, Stashov, Ostrovtze, Kielce.

By 1922 Toronto's Jewish population was 36,000, and by 1931 47,000. Then the government set up barriers, and in the 1930's only 4,000 Jews migrated to Toronto, despite the pressure of Nazi

persecution, compared with four times as many in the first decade of this century. The ostensible reason for Canada's restrictions was the Depression, but anti-foreign and anti-Jewish sentiments no doubt played their part.

After World War 2 immigration resumed, despite restrictions. The Jewish population of Toronto, through immigration and natural increase reached 95,000 in 1961, 115,000 in 1971, 142,000 in 1981, 175,000 in 1996

### **Beth Jacob Moves to Henry Street**

Beth Jacob's growth was so strong that after only 13 years they outgrew their quarters on Elm Street. A plot of land was purchased in 1919 on Henry Street at Cecil Street for the construction of a bigger edifice. This area, comprising both sides of more northerly Spadina, was now the newer section, where Jews moved after rising in economic attainment. The main sanctuary had 800 seats, but at its inauguration the pews were not yet installed, so chairs were rented. The building cost \$156,000, an enormous sum in those days, and much of it had yet to be raised before pews could be purchased.

The inauguration of the new Shul in 1922 was an event to remember. Rabbi Yehuda Leib Graubart had arrived from Stashov two years earlier, and addressed the gathering — in Yiddish, of course. But in those days people sought to hear a Chazan rather than a rabbi, and the Shul brought in Cantor Yosef Rosenblatt and his own choir. The effect was that the interior was crowded beyond capacity, and hundreds of people stood outside unable to get in. The programme included Mincha, and the reporter for the Daily Telegram was present throughout. Next day, in its story headed Inauguration of the Polish Synagogue, the Telegram stated that prayers were recited in Polish. It also described in glowing terms the beauty of the ceremony, and proclaimed the music to be superior to that of any church.

But the editorial policy of the Telegram in this era was decidedly anti-Jewish. On the editorial page that week the paper used the occasion of the inauguration to write a scathing piece concerning the "unfortunate increase" in the number of synagogues and the population of Jews in

Toronto. The Globe printed some similar comments, but in language more subtle and less ferocious.

### **Four Decades as Henry Street Shul**

The Henry Street Shul was to be in daily use for over 40 years. People who knew it describe it as the most beautiful Jewish edifice Toronto ever had. No other synagogue can match it. In its heyday membership exceeded 400 families, and the Shul was reasonably full every Shabbath, and crowded to capacity on the High Holydays.

The Shul had its own Mikve, and this was widely used. As was the practice in Poland, some men would go there before Shul on Shabbath morning, and on Henry Street the practice became prevalent that between Mikve and Shacharith people would repair to the home of Itshe Meyer and Toba Korolnek, 2 blocks south, for Shabbath morning tea or coffee. It was quite normal for one or two dozen men, sometimes more, to be gathered at this home for pre-davenning refreshment and conversation.

At about the time construction on this shul commenced the congregation decided to establish its own cemetery. In the early days Beth Jacob had no designated Bais Olam of its own. There were other burial grounds, and people could join their societies as individuals. The fee before World War 1 was usually about \$2 per year, plus an optional \$1 to include funeral costs. In 1910 the various Polish congregations jointly established Adath Yisrael Anshei Poilen, and purchased land for burial on Roselawn (just north of Eglinton). Ten years later Beth Jacob bought its own ground on Royal York Road, and this cemetery is still used by the congregation to-day.

During the first 14 years of its existence the Poilische Shul had not sought to engage its own rabbi. First-generation East European Jews did not deem a rabbi as essential, particularly if there already was a rabbi in town attached to some other congregation, who could be approached when questions of Halacha (law) arose. Expense was a major consideration, especially among the newly arrived.

But by 1911 the congregation felt economically viable and large enough to engage their own first rabbi. They arranged to bring from Poland a scholar already known to a few of the members. When he arrived and faced the congregation their assessment was quite unfavourable, and he was rejected. Luckily for him he was flexible enough to make a living as a pedlar. Two years later they interviewed another candidate, and this one was hired. His name was Rabbi Yehuda (Yudel) Rosenberg, author of significant Hebrew works. But neither he nor the congregants were happy, and after 5 years he moved to Montreal. Thirty-four years elapsed before Beth Jacob again appointed its own rabbi. But for a few years they were served by Rabbi Graubart, as described later, who ministered to all the Polish shuls.

As a spiritual leader Rabbi Rosenberg was not successful. But in one respect he left a lasting imprint. He regularly used to teach a group of Beth Jacob children in his home. That group was the nucleus from which developed what today is Toronto's Eitz Chaim School. It was formally established in 1915, under the name Polish Talmud Torah, and at that point separated itself from Beth Jacob. It rented quarters on Chestnut Street, and, lest it be deemed to be still connected with the Polish Shul, its name was changed to Eitz Chaim in 1917. Shortly thereafter it purchased a building on D'Arcy Street, and for the next 45 years it was popularly known as D'Arcy Talmud Torah. The force behind its establishment, as an organized entity was Itshe Meyer Korolnek, a dealer in used bottles, (today's Consolidated Bottle Co.) and an exceptionally dynamic personality. For over half a century, the undisputed leadership of the school was in the Korolnek family - first Itshe Meyer, then his son Harry (Hershel).

### **Cooperation and Dissension**

Several of the leaders of this Talmud Torah were members of Beth Jacob, and they cooperated wholeheartedly in raising funds to build the Henry Street Shul. They and Beth Jacob, and the other Polish institutions stood together, at least initially, in the incessant quarrels which rent apart the Orthodox community during the inter-war years.

In those days Machlokeh (dissensions) were commonplace among Toronto's East European Jews. Virtually every activity and every institution became a bitter issue, especially the matter of organized Kashruth and Shechita. The Polish Jews, led by Rabbi Graubart and Itshe Meyer Korolnek, designated the United Polish Communities Khal Adath Israel, found themselves in disagreement with the other Orthodox congregations, who had organized themselves as the Kehilla of Toronto. On several occasions the in-fighting came before the secular courts, and this produced embarrassing daily reports in the newspapers. In one case the non-Jewish judge, recognizing his inability to deal with Jewish religious matters he could not comprehend, called in three American rabbis as a special tribunal within the Ontario Supreme Court. The judicial rulings invariably went in favour of the broad Jewish community — i.e. the Polish side lost each time, albeit the court specifically recognised the pre-eminence of Rabbi Graubart as a rabbinic scholar of world renown.

There was also no lack of arguments within the Polish segment. Beth Jacob had been in its first home on Elm Street only two years when an acrimonious confrontation broke out within the membership over the question of requiring tickets for the High Holydays. As a result the congregation split into two, and the breakaway group formed a new shul called Tomchei Shabbos on Chestnut Street, a few houses away from a long-standing shul on the same street called Shomrei Shabbos. (Shomrei Shabbos still exists today, on Glengrove.) It so happens that in the same year Shomrei Shabbos itself, the Galicianer Shul, also split into two. The breakaway group formed a new shul on Teraulay Street (now Eaton Centre) called Machzikei Hadas, and its name is today perpetuated as the Hebrew name of Clanton Park Synagogue. In the case of this split the dissension which preceded it was so intense that physical fighting erupted in shul on a Friday night and spilled out onto the street until someone called the police, and the next day the press reported it in detail.

Rabbi Graubart had been the Rov of Stashov in Poland, the home-town of Itshe Meyer Korolnek. In 1919 Korolnek brought him to Toronto,

primarily to serve Eitz Chaim, but he was accepted as the Rov by all Polish Jews. There were nine Polish synagogues at the time, of which Beth Jacob was the Polish Shul, and by far the biggest. Rabbi Graubart frequently davened there, and ministered to its spiritual needs. In due course he had a falling-out with Beth Jacob and thereafter he ceased to appear there. A few years later fierce antagonisms arose between him and some of the leaders at Eitz Chaim, and he then left town. A reconciliation was effected and Rabbi Graubart returned to Eitz Chaim, but not to Beth Jacob.

How could Rabbi Graubart detach himself from his main Shul without severely diminishing his livelihood? The answer is that in those days Orthodox rabbis in Toronto were not dependent upon synagogue salaries, and Beth Jacob paid no direct salary to the rabbi. Beth Jacob and the other Polish Synagogues did pay into the aforementioned Khal Adath Israel, whose main income derived from Kashruth and Shechita, and who paid Rabbi Graubart a small salary. His income was supplemented from servicing family simchoth and funerals, and from selling chametz and private tutoring. A few individuals, especially the more affluent, sent money or merchandise to the rabbi for Yomtov or other occasions.

About 1930 Beth Jacob withdrew from the Polish Khal, and most of the smaller Polish Synagogues followed. Itshe Meyer Korolnek saw to it however that enough of their members continued to contribute privately so that Rabbi Graubart's original small salary would still be met.

The Henry Street Shul was constructed without classrooms. Children received their Jewish education at Eitz Chaim, a few blocks south on D'Arcy Street, which then was still an evening school. One day there was a fire in part of the D'Arcy Street structure, and Eitz Chaim then decided to rebuild that section as a full synagogue. Beth Jacob objected vociferously and then sued in the secular court for an injunction against Eitz Chaim. That brought renewed disrepute to Toronto Jewry, especially to Orthodoxy. The judge admonished Beth Jacob, "Do you not subscribe to freedom of worship?" He then denied the injunction and thus ruled in favour of Eitz Chaim. Eitz Chaim built its shul and established

itself as a congregation, and for years thereafter relations between these two mainstays of the Polish community were severely strained.

### **Gradual Restoration of Harmony**

Today that animosity has completely gone. An interesting sideline: Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kelman was a member of the Eitz Chaim faculty, and his grandson Rabbi Jay Kelman is now Beth Jacob's new associate rabbi.

The years between the wars saw Prohibition introduced for a period in Ontario, and serving of whiskey in shul thus became a legal infraction. Nevertheless every Kiddush had its whiskey, especially in the Polish shuls, where Yahrzeit called for L'Chaim. Occasionally a policeman turned up, took the bottles, and laid a charge. Someone paid the fine, and the flow of bromfen (whiskey) continued the next day as theretofore. On this subject there apparently was never any disagreement within the community!

After Rabbi Graubart broke with Beth Jacob the congregation invited Rabbi Samuel Silverstein to serve as its occasional rabbi. He had been brought to Toronto by the Kielcer Shul, which was also Polish, and he was willing, in addition, to serve Beth Jacob without formal remuneration. Spiritual leadership of Beth Jacob enhanced the incumbent's prestige and brought him income from the individual members, but Rabbi Silverstein's contact with Beth Jacob as a congregation was limited.

By the late 1930's there was more internal tranquility in Toronto Jewry, but dark clouds had formed in Europe. Eastern European Jewry, and especially Polish Jewry, has experienced persecution for generations, yet the unfolding calamity we now call the Holocaust was beyond anything imaginable. When that tragedy occurred it had surprisingly little immediate impact on the community life of North American Jewry, and this was mainly because the magnitude of the disaster was such that people initially could not come to grips with its ghastly reality. In the 1940's life for Jews in Toronto was more affected by the war situation than by the Holocaust. But in the long run the consequences for world Jewry of the Holocaust were far greater and more lasting.

Seven years after World War 2 Beth Jacob engaged its own rabbi, the second one in its history. His name was Rabbi Benjamin Hauer, and now for the first time since its inception 55 years earlier did Beth Jacob have an English-speaking rabbi. Not all the Shiurim and sermons were switched to English, but from here on formal communication was no longer exclusively in Yiddish.

### **Time to Move**

The 1950's were the waning years for the Spadina area, and attendance at Henry Street, as at all the downtown synagogues, declined each year. Shuls which had previously been in competition now sought to amalgamate. If two downtown congregations joined and attended together in one building the inevitable decline and demise could be postponed for a few years. Some amalgamations took place within the existing buildings downtown, and in some cases the amalgamation was effected concurrently with the movement to northern locations. There were about 60 Orthodox shuls downtown, from shtibelech to large congregations, so there was ample scope for combining memberships and resources.

Beth Jacob entered into negotiations with the Hebrew Men of England, on Spadina, sometimes called the Londoner Shul. These two sizable synagogues were within a few minutes' walking distance of each other. There were those who argued that English and Polish cannot be bonded as one. Others countered that among the Hebrew Men of England some had only passed through England, and, having originated in Poland, could be counted upon to help blend the two groups into one. Still others maintained that what had divided the original immigrants no longer applied to the Canadian-born second and third generations.

Perhaps the ethnic differences, and the variance in the Nusach of Davenning could have been overcome. But there was a deeper cleavage which prevented the Shiduch from coming to fruition. At this time Conservative Judaism was widely deemed to be the trend of the future. Thus many an Orthodox congregation downtown re-emerged as Conservative in its new setting in the north. That sentiment was rife just below the surface

among the Hebrew Men of England, and indeed when they did establish their new sanctuary on Bathurst and Sheppard it turned out to be Conservative.

So Beth Jacob and its suitor parted ways, and the prospective amalgamation with the Londoner Shul came to naught. As fate would have it, however, these two shuls landed in their new locations almost as close to each other as they had been in their downtown locations. And when the Men of England sold their new quarters on Canyon to Ulpana they amalgamated with Beth Emeth, and are now on the same block as Beth Jacob.

Rabbi Hauer left Beth Jacob in 1962, which then was but a shadow of its former self, albeit the edifice was still the jewel of Toronto Jewry, as impressive as ever. And its membership was also still large, since many who moved away still retained their association. The congregation now appointed Rabbi Moshe J. Burak, and he took that pulpit knowing that his first major task would be to find a new location in the north, and there to hold together as many of the Henry Street members as possible. Louis Waxman, the last president of the Henry Street Shul also took an energetic role towards the implementation of this goal.

As time progressed it was to turn out that Rabbi Burak would serve as Beth Jacob's rabbi longer than any of its previous rabbis, and indeed longer than all previous rabbis combined.

Two matters called for early resolution: where to reestablish in the north, and what to do with the Henry Street building. Feelers were put out on amalgamation with several of the fledgling congregations in the developing areas of the north. Among these congregations were Bnai Torah on Patricia, and Shaarei Emuna on Wilmington. Rabbi Burak himself expressed a preference for moving onto virgin territory near Steeles, further north than any existing shul, but this option entailed significant problems.

### **New Location**

After years of search, the choice fell on Shaarei Emunah. Along that part of Wilmington, in the newly-developing area of Bathurst Manor, this

was the only Orthodox shul. Rabbi Amsel had a minyan in his house on Wilmington, but that was further south, near Sheppard. Beth Emeth was in the northern section of the Manor, but it was in the process of turning Conservative. Shaarei Emunah was a group of local residents who established a Minyan in 1960 which met in the basement of Rabbi Avraham Parshan's house, 160 Overbrook at the corner of Shaftesbury, with Rabbi Parshan informally serving as its rabbi. There were 17 families when they decided to build a shul and began raising funds, under the initiative of Arye Greenberg. The congregation incorporated in 1961. The area was fast-growing, and as word spread of the upcoming new shul more people joined, bringing membership to about 70 just before Beth Jacob amalgamated. The first president was Sidney Woolf, followed by Arye Greenberg.

By a stroke of good fortune, combined with effective bargaining, the congregation was able to purchase a favorably-located site for a pittance. The 70-ft-wide strip of land on Overbrook, stretching 560 ft from Wilmington to Shaftesbury, adjoined the city school building which later was occupied by CHAT (Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto). For that reason the owner was unable to obtain a permit for either residential or commercial development, and, through the efforts of Alex Mishevski he was persuaded to sell it to Shaarei Emunah for less than \$2,000.

Construction of the new shul had begun, but was halted in the middle due to lack of funds and faulty engineering. They had advanced only to the basement, and most of this was exposed to the weather. Drainage was through an open hole in the floor, and even so there was repeated flooding.

### **Amalgamation**

At about this point Beth Jacob arrived on the scene. The amalgamation was formalized at the end of 1966, and it was this influx of members and funds that made it possible for the new Shul to be completed. As always in such situations there were some vocal individuals who vehemently resisted this loss of local independence, but practical considerations prevailed.

The building cost approximately \$250,000, of which \$40,000 came from the Shaarei Emuna members, \$130,000 from Beth Jacob, and \$80,000 was a bank mortgage. To translate this into 1997 property prices these figures would need to be multiplied about 8-fold, to which perhaps \$1,000,000 would normally have to be added for land.

Beyond the initial outlay many further expenses were incurred in subsequent years. Carpeting, seat cushions, stained-glass windows, central chandelier, upgrading of the social hall, marble lobby floor, and other costly features were purchased as funds became available. The money was raised through the intense efforts of the Beth Jacob sisterhood, under the leadership of the Rebbetzin, Mrs Toby Burak.

The new Beth Jacob took a prudent step that other major downtown synagogues had neglected. The Henry Street Aron Hakodesh was a magnificent work of art, and it was taken apart and then carefully reconstructed and incorporated into the new sanctuary, as also the original Bima. It was fortunate that the craftsman who had sculpted it in 1922 was still alive to help install the Aron into its new setting in 1968. Only minor changes were implemented: for example the wooden lions at the top originally had the glow of electric lighting in their eyes, and now, without this lighting they seemed less fierce.

Most other major downtown synagogues allowed such irreplaceable appurtenances to be destroyed by demolition. In some cases this was due to lack of feeling for beauty and historical mementos, and in some cases the new generation deliberately sought to demonstrate their dissociation from the past, by replacing traditional design with modernistic style.

It is unfortunate that when Beth Jacob left Henry Street there was no movement in the broad community to maintain that edifice as a site of Jewish historical value and enduring beauty. By the time the community did come around to this idea only the Kiever shul was left, and that structure has neither the antiquity nor the size nor the architectural grandeur of the Poilische shul. Beth Jacob alone could not afford to hold onto the

building, although there were some in the congregation who advocated that path.

Finding a suitable buyer proved extremely difficult. The University of Toronto was approached, and CBC, and others. In the end it was sold to a private individual, and the price was said to be \$65,000. That would be only a small fraction, after inflation, of what it had cost to build four decades earlier. The buyer then sold it to an Eastern church for 50% more, and turned a quick profit.

### **The New Sanctuary**

After two years the new sanctuary was ready, and the festive inauguration took place on 8 June 1969. At the service the keynote speaker was Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld, spiritual leader of Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills in New York, and President of the Rabbinical Council of America. His brother-in-law, Immanuel Lord Jakobovits, Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, would deliver the sermon from the same pulpit, nine years later, on the occasion of the Bar Mitzvah of his nephew, Yoel Jakobovits. In the evening there was an Inauguration Banquet, and the guest speaker was Abraham Lieff, Justice of the Ontario Supreme Court.

It is somewhat surprising that the members of Shaarei Emunah did not request that upon amalgamation the new entity adopt the hyphenated name Beth Jacob-Shaarei Emunah. But seven years later the hyphen did appear — from a different direction. Congregation Linas Hatzedec Anshei Drildz had established themselves as a shul and social club on Markham Street in 1934. By the early 1970's that neighbourhood was bereft of Jewish life, and the group sold their building for a favorable price. They wanted to perpetuate their Landsmanschaft as an Orthodox synagogue, and they did this by amalgamating with their fellow Polish countrymen through the transfer to Beth Jacob of a few members and also part of the proceeds from the sale of their building — specifically \$35,000 in cash, plus their Torah scrolls, and most of their Siddurim and other books. Henceforth what was once the Poilische Shul was to be known as Beth Jacob-Anshei Drildz. But the Drildzer did not entirely disband;

they still have their congregation and mutual benefit society in rented quarters at the corner of Wilson and Collinson.

### **A Link Going Back Over 80 Years**

In 1986 the impact of Beth Jacob's first rabbi again surfaced in Toronto. Rabbi Yehuda Rosenberg was a person of very limited means, but of what little money he had, much was expended on the purchase of S'forim. Most of his library was inherited by his son Avraham Yitzchak, who served for over 30 years as the leading rabbi in Savannah, Georgia. Throughout his life he added to that library, and when he died his family sought to bequeath it to a Yeshiva — a school where there are people who understand these books. Rabbi Aaron Levine, previously principal of the day school in Savannah, had by then become principal of Yeshiva Ner Israel of Toronto. Through this personal association the Toronto Yeshiva was selected as the recipient, and this comprehensive library now reposes in the Rosenberg Room at Ner Israel. Thus many of the S'forim which originated in Toronto, and then travelled to Montreal and Savannah, are back in the city of Beth Jacob Congregation.

Beth Jacob and Yeshiva Ner Israel have been linked in various ways, of which the Rosenberg Library is just one. Among the leading founders and supporters of Ner Israel was Hershel Rubinstein, father-in-law of Rabbi Burak and a major contributor to Beth Jacob. To this day the name of the Ner Israel Kollel is Hershel Rubinstein School of Advanced Jewish Studies. Rabbi Burak himself was Chancellor of Ner Israel just before he took over his present pulpit. The fact that Ner Israel was so close to Wilmington before it moved to Thornhill, also brought the Yeshiva and the Shul together.

They shared the same caterer, Herman Klein, and this arrangement continues even now when they are geographically further apart.

### **Present and Future**

In its first 50 years Beth Jacob consisted of immigrants escaping the hostile environment of Poland. After World War 2 new waves of immigrants joined, most of them Holocaust



survivors. Many of these were indeed also from Poland, but more were from Hungary and Rumania. Other countries in Europe and the Americas were well represented too, and so was Israel, and of course Toronto itself and other parts of Canada. Several of these newcomers soon rose to positions of leadership in the congregation, both at Henry Street and later at the new location. In due course the membership was no longer a Polish affinity group.

The first president of the newly-amalgamated entity was Louis Waxman, who had been the last president, after Berish Goldhar, of the Henry Street Synagogue. He was followed by Arye Greenberg who similarly had previously already served as president of Shaarei Emunah. Next was Meyer Karoly, and then Robert Rosen, who served 14 years, longer than any president since Mendel Granatstein. He was followed by Dr Bernard Rubin, during whose term a by-law was enacted limiting each president to one 2-year term at a time. Joseph Joseph took over next, followed by Joseph Rosenthal. He was succeeded by the youngest president, Sruly Karoly, son of the aforementioned Meyer. During his term, in 1996, the congregation took the major step of appointing a young associate rabbi, Toronto-born Rabbi Jay Kelman. This decision is in consonance with the current major thrust of the congregation to bring in more young new members.

At one time membership had exceeded 300 and was in fact growing. But the movement to north of Steeles drew away many young couples, while older members decreased in numbers due to death. It is not at all unusual for synagogues and other organizations to undergo decline and then to turn around and experience powerful recovery. The Bathurst Manor neighbourhood has many amenities and distinct advantages over other areas. There is abundant reason for young couples to choose this part of town, and thus strong ground to anticipate a vibrant future for Beth Jacob as it embarks on its second century.