

Net House 535-2455



Congregation B'nai Israel

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PETOSKEY, MICH. 49770

had mail service here

According to the most authoritative sources, Temple B'Nai Israel was first organized in 1896 as the Hebrew Benevolent Association of Petoskey. The fourteen Jewish citizens who were founders met initially in various Jewish homes, then subsequently in a rented hall in Petoskey. The current building was purchased from the Parr Memorial Baptist Church in 1911. On August 26, 1911, the Congregation gathered at the old rented hall, and marched from there to the new home, carrying all the religious books, Torahs, and other belongings. Money was raised by auctioning off various honors and privileges at the new Synagog. A mortgage was taken on the balance, with the down-payment made through contributions by members and friends. In 1921, a new set of twelve windows were installed, a new basement, rest rooms and a new roof were added, with an outside entrance to the basement on the north side. Later, an inside entrance to the basement (now called "social" or "recreational" hall) from the Sanctuary was also added.

Due to changing times and trends, the transition began. From Orthodox, the Congregation went to Conservative, and then to Reform services. They became affiliated with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and 1925 brought the first student Rabbi from Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati, Ohio - a policy which originated with the Petoskey Temple, and which has continued to current days for the summer months and the High Holy Days. The women congregants became affiliated with the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods.

Meetings, elections, parties, dinners, and holiday gatherings helped to sustain the Temple thru the World War I years. It is remarkable testament to will and determination that it held together throughout those stormy years, and also years when there weren't enough finances to meet expenses. But, somehow the Temple endured and surmounted its difficulties, and the members' efforts kept it going. Many patriotic young men and women from the Temple have served in the Armed Forces during World Wars I and II, the Korean and Viet Nam conflicts. Temple members are active in the community and inter-faith programs.

The Association became incorporated as B'Nai Israel in 1909.

Temple B'Nai Israel has recently been renovated, and is now a lovely, charming edifice, simple and with spiritual essence. The renovation incorporated many of the old memorial items to add to its charm and warmth. Services are held every Friday evening at 8 P.M. with the summer Student Rabbi presiding. Each year brings a new Rabbi with his or her individual flavor. The services are traditional but also unique, reflecting the Rabbi's perceptions and feelings. Adult education/discussion classes are held during the summer months, as well as religious classes for the children of the congregants. Religious education for the children continues during the winter at home by parents and lay members, culminating in Bar and Bas Mitzvahs.

Due to the uniqueness of the membership built around a nucleus of five to ten families living in Petoskey itself, and the remaining members living distances from 20 to 75 miles, weekly services are not feasible during the stormy winter months. However, throughout the year, the various holidays are celebrated with gatherings for a lay service, potluck dinners provided by the women congregants, along with appropriate music, songs and programs for each occasion. The dedication and loyalty of the members is remarkable and can be credited for the continuation of the Temple thru many difficulties, and continuing for future generations. At times there have been as few as 10 to 15 member families, fluctuating to a high of 30 to 35 families in later years. However a large portion of these members are with us in summer months only. Membership has been increasing in the past few years with new people moving into Petoskey and its surrounding communities. Some of the present members are descendants of the original founders.

It is to be noted that many of the student Rabbis who served B'Nai Israel have gone on to become illustrious Jewish leaders and teachers on the national and international scene.

Temple B'Nai Israel has owned its own cemetery since 1911, which is a Jewish section within Greenwood Cemetery, the Petoskey city cemetery.

The Temple, with its warm and friendly members, creates a lovely social climate for Jews in the northern Michigan area living here year-round as well as for summer visitors. If one wishes to become a member, he can contact the President or Treasurer for the details. For a beautiful spiritual and friendly experience, come join us for a service and judge for yourself.