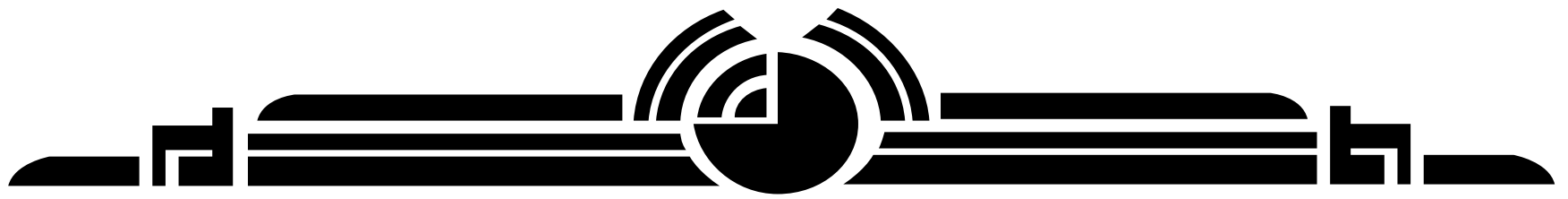


Squirrel Hill Historical Society



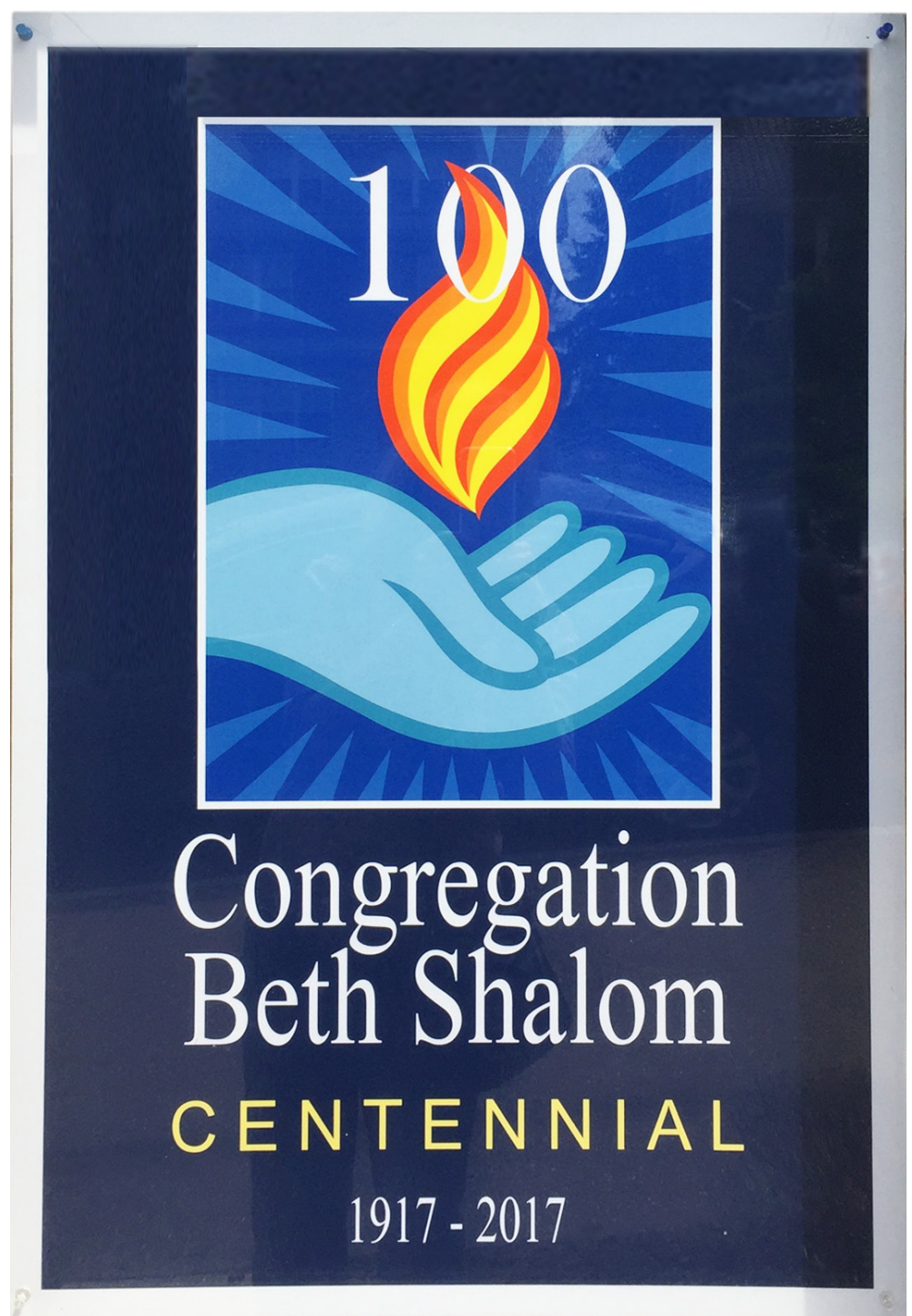
Beth Shalom

Celebrating 100 Years



The theme of
Congregation Beth
Shalom's Centennial
(1917–2017) is
**“Celebrating the
Warmth of the Past
and the Light of the
Future.”**

This display takes
a look at some
of the things that
happened during
the Conservative
Congregation's long
and eventful history.



The Beginning—1917

“Orthodox residents of Squirrel Hill observed Rosh Hashana services under most pleasant and favorable conditions. Several young men realizing the need of a convenient place to worship rented a large airy hall in the Orpheum Theater Building, Forbes street and Murray avenue.”

— JEWISH CRITERION, SEPTEMBER 9, 1917

In 1917, thirty-five Jewish families began holding religious services in a room above the Orpheum Theater at the corner of Forbes and Murray. Thus began the history of the first synagogue to be founded in Squirrel Hill.

Jewish Criterion, 1917

SQUIRREL HILL MINYAN HOLDS SUCCESSFUL SERVICES.

Orthodox residents of Squirrel Hill observed Rosh Hashana services under most pleasant and favorable conditions. Several young men realizing the need of a convenient place to worship rented a large airy hall in the Orpheum Theater Building. Forbes street and Murray avenue, en-

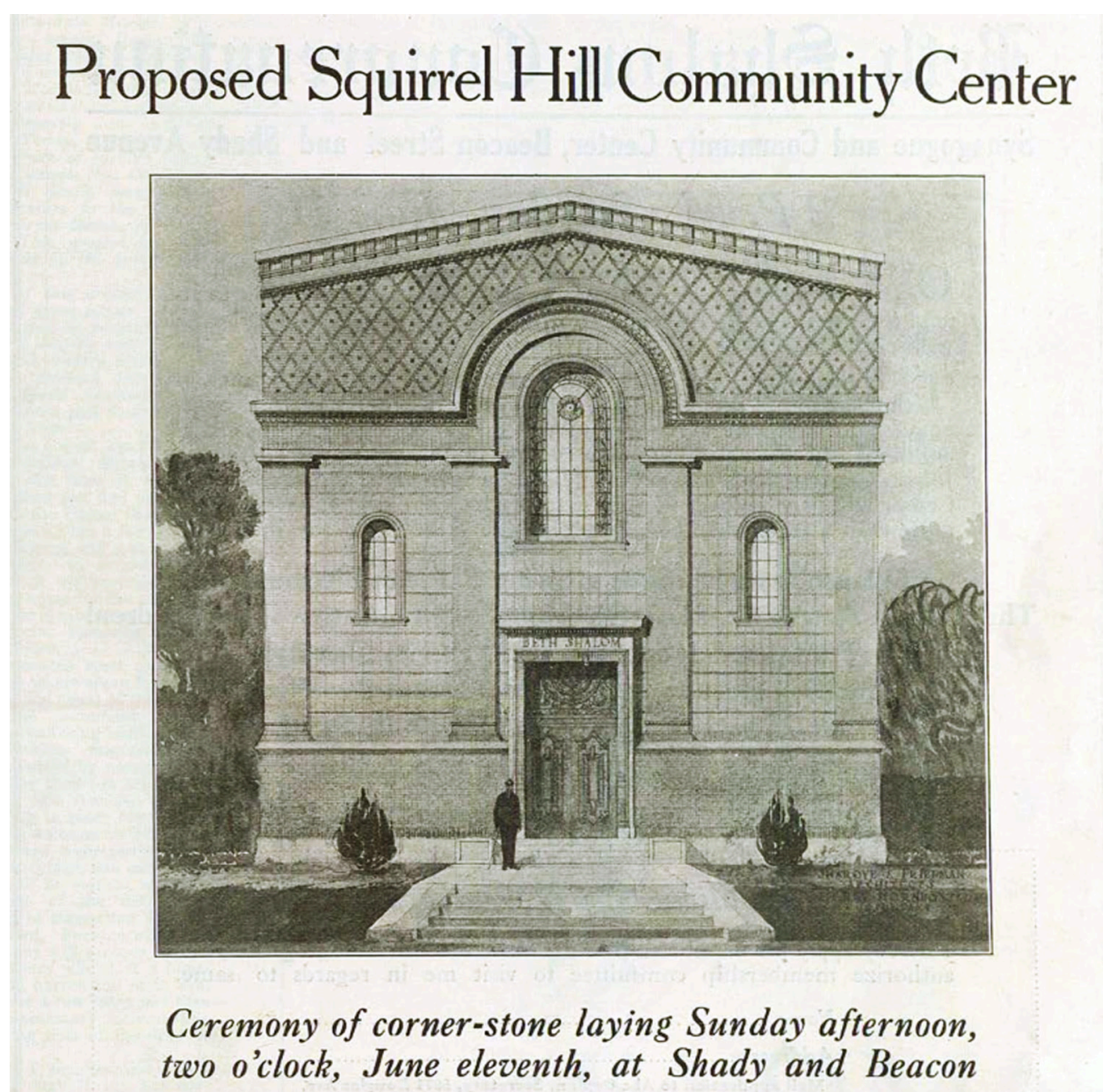


This 1926 picture of Forbes Avenue shows the still-remaining marquee of the Orpheum Theater, although the theater had closed the year before. The building still exists. The marquee was located where Uncle Sam’s Gourmet Subs is now.

The Early Years

Many things happened in 1919:

- The Squirrel Hill congregation adopted the name **Beth Shalom**, which means “House of Peace.”
- A Hebrew school was started. Classes were held at nearby Colfax School. Hebrew language instruction was provided by teachers from Pittsburgh’s Hebrew Institute.
- Jewish families, many from the Hill District, began to move to Squirrel Hill, and Beth Shalom membership steadily increased.
- A women’s auxiliary was formed.
- The congregation began planning for construction of a synagogue at the corner of Shady Avenue and Beacon Street.



Proposed Beth Shalom synagogue, *Jewish Criterion*, June 9, 1922

The Next Two Decades

In the 1920s and 1930s, Beth Shalom's growth continued:

- It became an active member of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.
- Ground was broken for the new synagogue at the corner of Shady Avenue and Beacon in 1922. It opened in 1923.
- Land for the Beth Shalom Cemetery was purchased and consecrated in Shaler Township in 1925.
- The Men's Club was organized in 1925.
- By the late 1920s, Beth Shalom was Pittsburgh's second largest congregation.
- Growth of the Jewish population in Squirrel Hill necessitated the addition of a larger sanctuary in 1931.
- A Community Passover Seder was held in 1932.

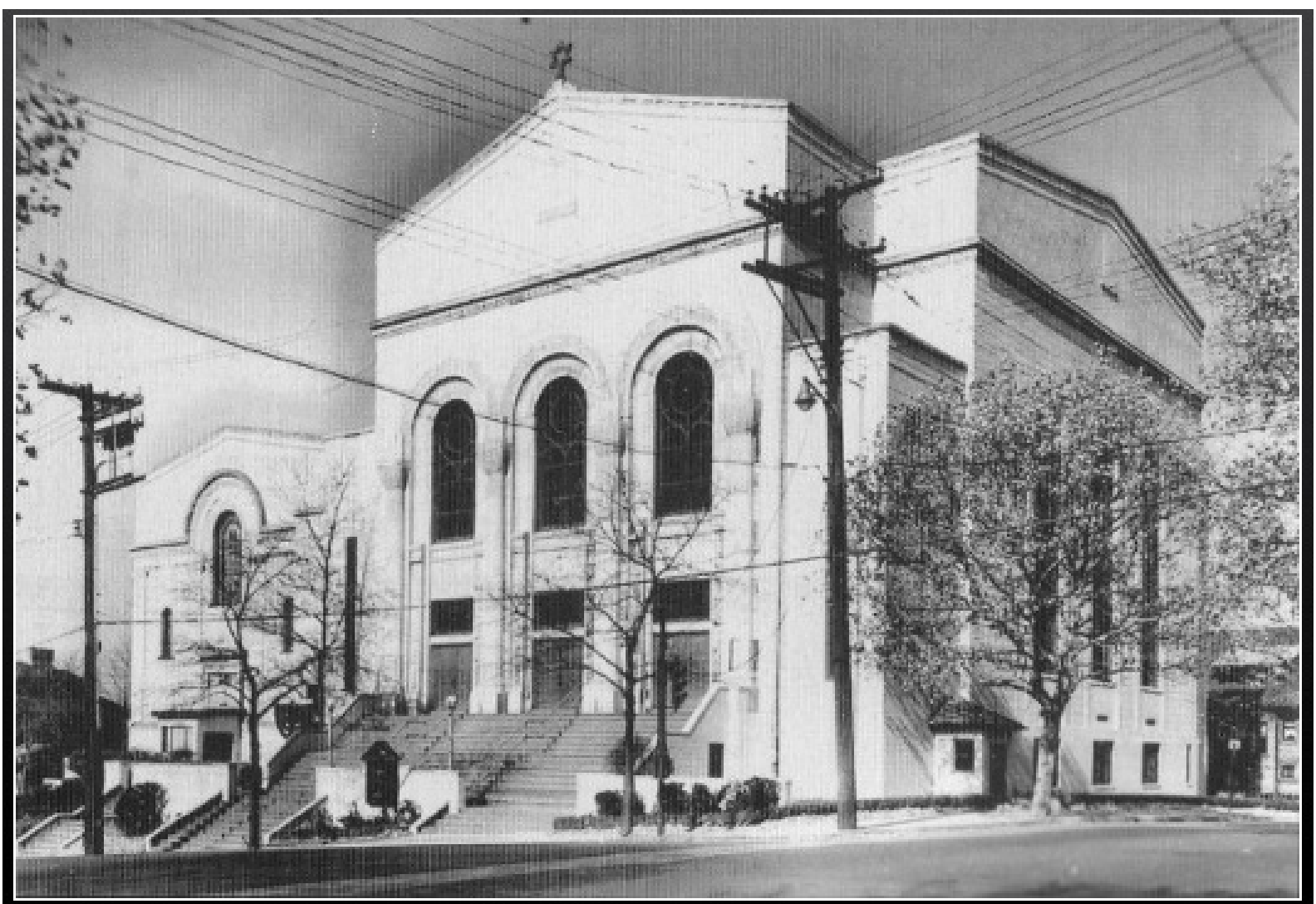


1923 Synagogue



Beth Shalom Cemetery

The 1931 addition



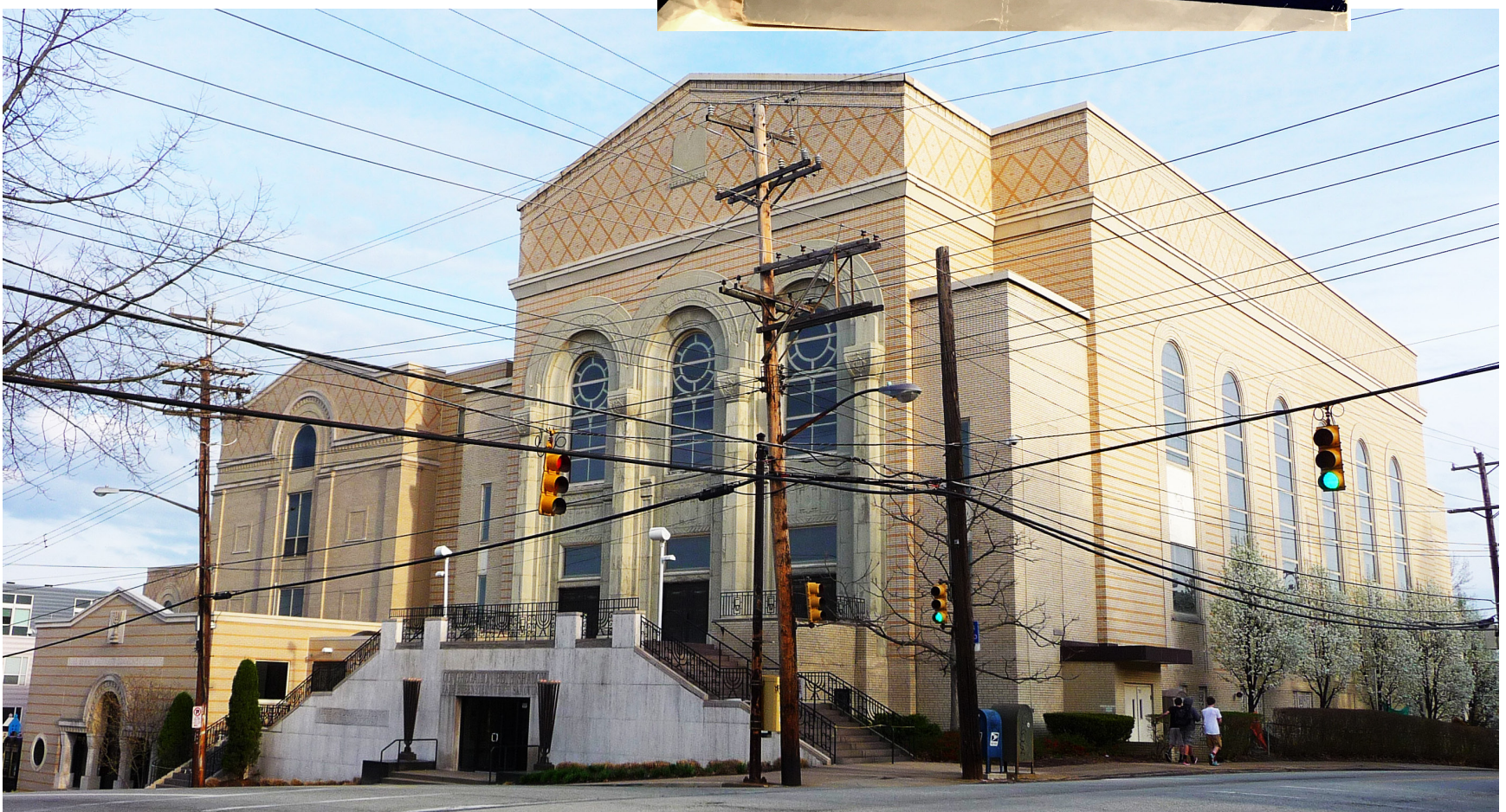
[Click here to return to SHHS Museum Board Exhibits](#)

Prosperity and Growth

Beth Shalom was enlarged and expanded through the years as its congregation grew. By 1967, larger facilities were again needed. The third major expansion was completed in 1970, with a new Sanctuary, a small chapel, a children's and adult library, a new school facility, a youth lounge, the Samuel and Minnie Hyman Ballroom, the Shirley and Alvin Weinberg Reception Pavilion and a renovated kosher kitchen.



Thirty-Fifth Anniversary Celebration at the William Penn Hotel ballroom, November 30, 1959



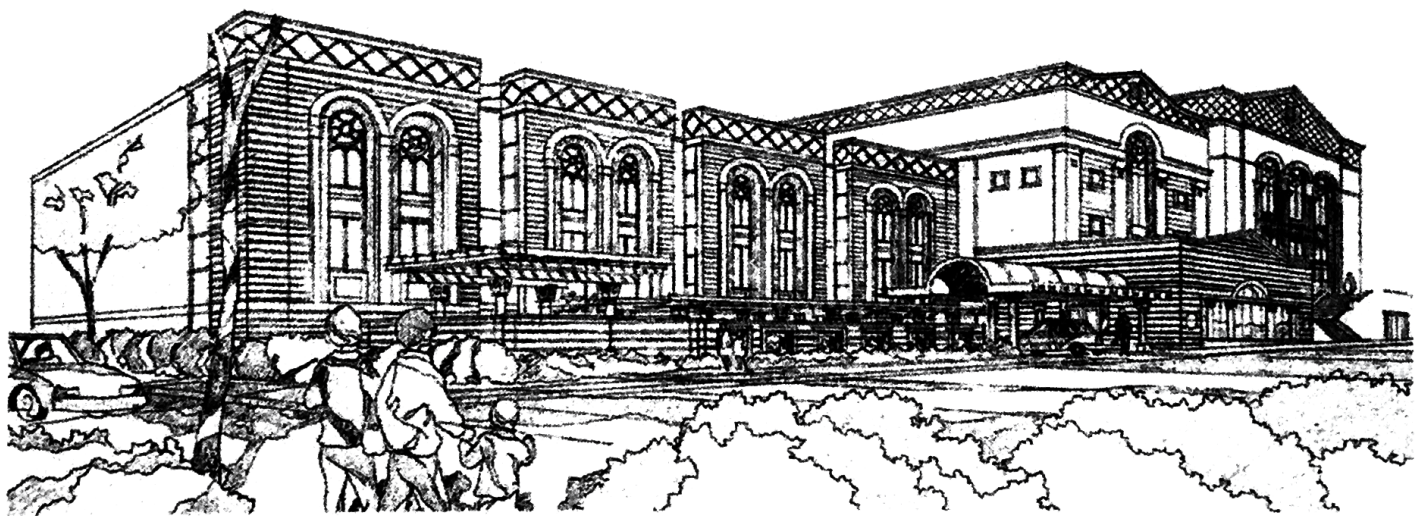
Building Progression

The cover of the Jendoco Construction Corp. binder illustrates the progression of Beth Shalom buildings—the first synagogue of 1923, the addition of 1931, another in 1970, and Jendoco's design for the restoration and enlargement of the synagogue after the major fire in 1996.



Congregation Beth Shalom

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



Submitted by:

JENDOCO CONSTRUCTION CORPORATION

Beth Shalom and Gene Kelly

As early as 1927, the Beth Shalom Sisterhood was hosting an annual dance recital, called a *Kirmess*, as a fundraiser. In 1932, Gene Kelly (1912-1996) was hired to replace the dancing instructor. The show he produced featured 200 children between the ages of three and thirteen and raised \$1,000.

Kelly continued to teach and stage Kirmesses, held in the Taylor Allderdice High School auditorium, until he left for New York in 1938, where he became a famous dancer, singer and actor. His classes were popular, and after he left, they were continued by his brother Fred and sister Louise.

A reminiscence about one of the dance recitals says,

“Two features that stand out in my mind are the roller skating routine performed as a special feature by Fred and Gene, and a sailor routine, performed by two senior students. We saw an almost identical skating routine in Gene’s movie Xanadu.”

Gene Kelly’s Beth Shalom dance recitals at Taylor Allderdice High School were publicized in the *Jewish Criterion*. Two of them were “Revue of Revues,” April 8, 1932 (right) and “Talk o’ the Town Revue,” March 24, 1933 (below).

Beth Shalom Children in Musical Production

In just a few days more, The Taylor **Allderdice** High School will be ablaze with light, the auditorium filled to capacity and the members of Beth Shalom will see their own children participating in one of the most color-



Eugene Kelly, Production Manager

ful and pretentious productions ever given on any stage.

Everything is in readiness for this “Revue of Revues” production which will be staged on Wednesday evening, April 13, at 8:15 P. M., a performance that has been perfected after many months of hard work by the children and that of Eugene Kelly, production manager, assisted by Mrs. Harriet

Beth Shalom Sisterhood

“Talk o’ the Town Revue”

All is in readiness for the annual production of the Beth Shalom Sisterhood dancing classes to be given as a “Talk o’ the Town Revue,” Tuesday evening, April 4, in the Taylor Allderdice High School auditorium. This mammoth event is being staged and directed by **Gene Kelly**, talented young artist and his capable associates, who need no introduction in dancing circles of this city.

The business end of this ambitious enterprise is being managed by Mrs. Max Greenberg and more than a score of able workers,

The Disastrous Fire

On October 8, 1996, only a year before Beth Shalom's 80th anniversary, a major fire damaged all parts of Beth Shalom. The traumatic event had far-reaching consequences. Heroic efforts were made to rescue priceless treasures. Neighborhood synagogues, temples and churches provided space for worship and education until the synagogue could be rebuilt.

The fire offered the Beth Shalom congregation the chance to "transform a negative to a positive ... to seize the opportunity to transform Beth Shalom's majestic synagogue building to a more functional facility while maintaining its elegance and beauty," as stated in a newsletter announcing the Torah Project Fire Rebuilding Campaign. Insurance covered \$4.15 million. An additional \$2 million needed to be raised.



The Past Restored

In a July 22, 1999, article in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Donald Miller writes about the restoration of Beth Shalom, providing information about the building, both before and after the fire. For example, the windows spared by the fire were “gorgeous German- and American-made leaded glass windows, first installed in 1917. ... With the completion of a \$9 million renovation ... they now glow again in sunlight with a large vocabulary of Hebraic symbols, both ancient and new, in a rainbow of colors. ... The *bema*, or altar, has been refurbished, but the original carved red Verona marble is still found there surrounding the ark containing 18 Torah scrolls. ‘Beth Shalom’ in Hebrew means ‘House of Peace.’ In its 82nd year, the synagogue, more beautiful than ever, is now ready for the next century.”

Beth Shalom has now entered its next century. Remodeling and expansion after the fire included the Halpern Center for Education Preschool wing, a new Sanctuary, and many other facilities.



The Beth Shalom sanctuary, which was gutted by fire in 1996, has a new ceiling and lighting, new chairs, carpeting and upholstery. A stained glass window, top, in the Squirrel Hill congregation's sanctuary displays the United Nations symbol and the flag of Israel. V.W.H. Campbell Jr./Post-Gazette photos

Milestones Remembered

The history of Beth Shalom is remembered through a large archive of photographs, yearbooks, programs, newsletters, articles, proclamations and other cherished keepsakes. This display gives just a sampling



of the memorabilia that illustrate the rich history of the synagogue.



June 11, 1922



May 19, 1968

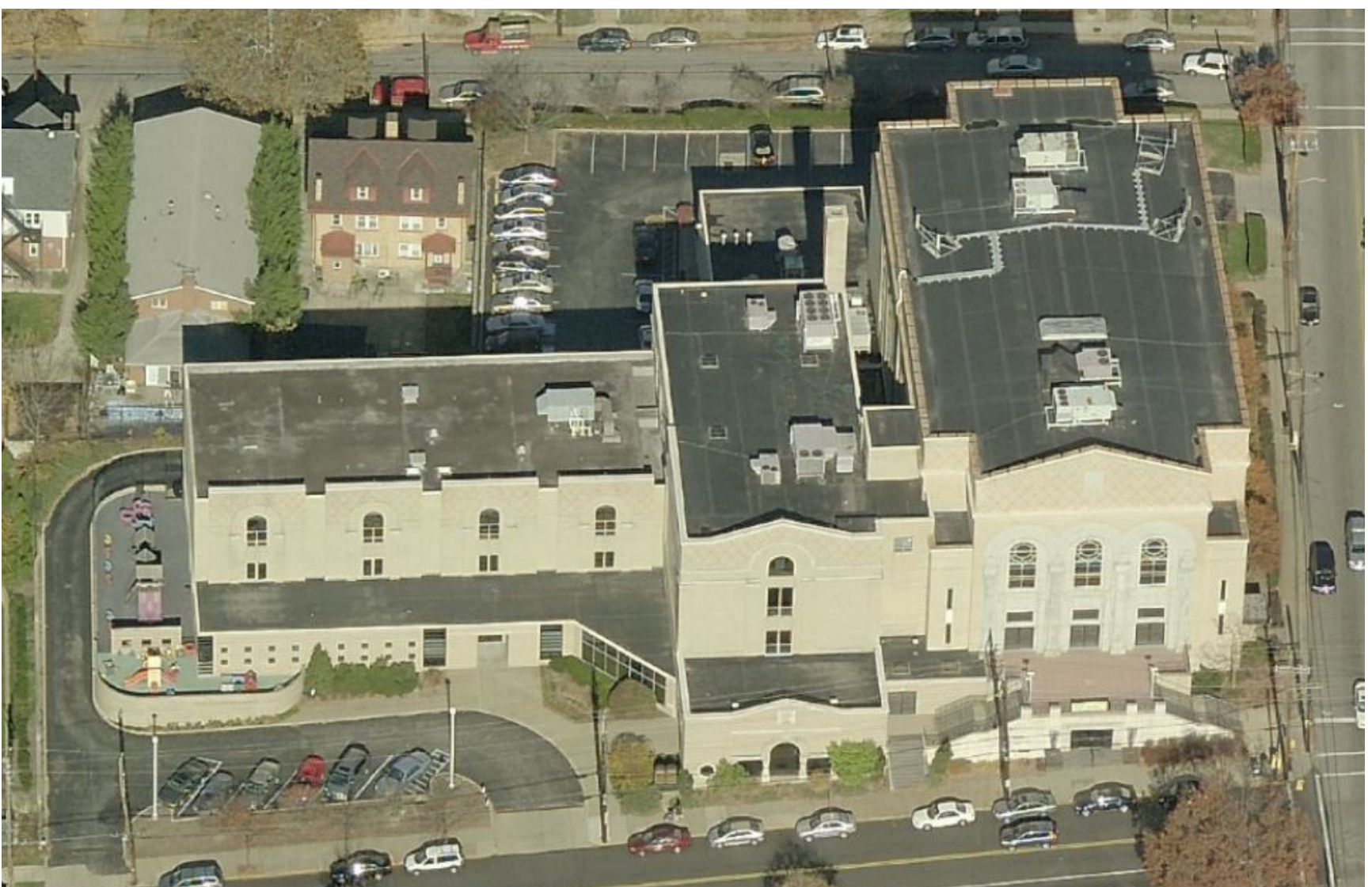


Beth Shalom Today

*“Enriching lives through
community, lifelong Jewish learning,
& spiritual growth!”*

Beth Shalom’s website proclaims, *“Congregation Beth Shalom is a vibrant and egalitarian Conservative Jewish community. Our building, with its magnificent sanctuary, has been a home to countless families for nearly a century. We continue to open our doors and hearts to new members, inviting them to join us as we live and learn Torah together.”*

Beth Shalom now serves nearly 800 families, offering not only religious services but many educational and social activities as well, including an Early Childhood Development Center, Youth Programs, Religious School (Joint Jewish Education Program of Pittsburgh), Adult Education Programs, and Sisterhood and Men’s Clubs.



Beth Shalom has grown to be an 88,000 square-foot facility, full of beauty and life.