

A SHORT SHORT STORY

(written by Simon S. Gittleman, November 1939)

Up to some time in February, 1936, Jewish Community life in Verona found no expression. Beyond a casual greeting when meeting on the street by accident, beyond an occasional visit between Jewish residents of Verona who happened to know each other, they seemed to have nothing in common. Those who sought social or communal work found it in spheres other than Jewish, or in communities other than Verona. For the most part Jewish education, whether from a religious, historic, or cultural point of view, was not available to Jewish children, or to their parents. Perhaps a fair appraisal of the entire situation would be to say that Jewish community life and Verona Jews had turned their backs to each other, and for years kept them turned.



But in February, 1936, a suggestion by one of the Verona Jews seemed to strike a responsive chord in 6 or 7 others. And they had a meeting and told each other: "Yes, we ought to have a Jewish Community Center in Verona." A month passed and another meeting took place. By this time, a few more families were added to the earlier group. The new idea found favor with increasing numbers, until in May 1936, in a meeting room provided by the Borough of Verona in its municipal building, the Jewish Community Center of Verona was organized, officers elected, committees appointed, and a constitution adopted which described the aims of the organization as four-fold: social, religious, educational, and charitable. And under this banner the newly formed group, with a membership already of more than fifty, embarked upon its career.

For the most part, however, the purposes of the organization remained an unattained goal until the spring of 1937, almost a year later, when the Board of Education of Verona offered to the Jewish Community Center the exclusive use of a classroom in the Grove Avenue School so that it might carry out its educational goal. And almost immediately thereafter a teacher was engaged to conduct classes in Hebrew and History. But the kind and friendly offer of the Verona Board of Education was never taken advantage of—for within a matter of weeks the Jewish Community Center was the proud owner of its own building at 56 Grove Avenue.

It was all so sudden. In May, 1937, the organization was celebrating its First Birthday at a restaurant operated by one of its members, when the spokesman of a self-appointed committee got up and announced the price at which the building of the Junior O.U.A.M., at 56 Grove Avenue, could be purchased. The response was by acclaim and within a half hour the sum of \$1,500.00 was pledged, and the transaction authorized. Contracts were drawn and within a matter of weeks the deed was recorded. And a building which, some five or six months before, they tried unsuccessfully to rent, had become the property of the Jewish Community Center of Verona.

This event was the forerunner of a series of moves that resulted in the firm establishment of this group as a well-recognized constructive factor in the religious and community life of the Jews of West Essex. Preparations were made for High Holy Day Services, which were so fully attended that accommodations were inadequate. At the Simchas Torah celebration the Center was likewise crowded.

A religious school was organized, with Sunday School classes, regular weekday sessions, and a 2-a-week classes for the intermediate group, with adult classes being discussed as the next step in the education program.

In the meantime, the younger group in the Community had formed themselves into a Junior League, and drew to its membership not only those of Verona but also numerous young men and women from nearby cities and towns.

Another auxiliary organization that took shape during this period was the Men's Club, with a representative membership of the men of the Community Center, having for its purposes the cultural and social interests of the group.

The most recent subsidiary group to be formed was the Women's Club, and already the membership of this group bids fair to becoming a powerful factor as a constructive force within the Jewish Community Center of Verona.

In the building that houses the activities thus started, alterations have been completed, the building painted inside and out, the grounds seeded and landscaped. A contract has just been made for the installation of an oil-burner and removal of the furnace from its present location to enable the downstairs portion of the building to be made into vestry rooms for reading and recreation.

On October third, 1937, the Jewish Community Center dedicated its first Torah, the gift of one of its members. This was an occasion of great festivity when again the seating capacity of the Center was taxed to the utmost.

With its social functions always well attended and their financial success already well known, the Jewish Community Center of Verona has attained a maturity hitherto undreamed of in such newly formed groups. Its attainment of this distinction is not due to the philanthropy or lavish giving of but a few, but to the wholehearted and sincere cooperation of the many. The Jewish Community Center that will perform a real service to and be a living force within the Jewish people.

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