

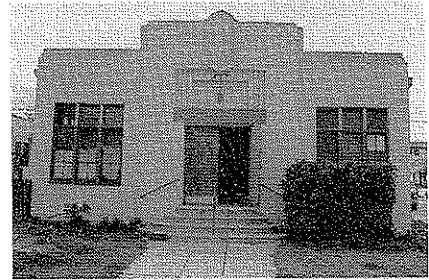
# שמונים לגבורה **At Eighty is Strength**

## **A History of Temple Beth El**

The roots of Temple Beth El go back to 1922 when the first organized Jewish religious services held in San Pedro were held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Levin. There were 25 Jewish families then living in San Pedro.

Prior to 1922, a group of Jewish men had formed a social club that met in a photographer's studio on Beacon St. In 1923, their wives established the San Pedro Jewish Sisterhood, dedicated to supporting a Jewish community and giving aid to the poor and needy in our community. This remarkable group of women donated our first Torah scroll in 1928 and became, in time, the primary force in raising funds for the growth of our community. It was the San Pedro Jewish Sisterhood that held the grant deed for the Center soon to be built.

As services and activities continued and grew, the "founding" men and women raised the money to build a Jewish Center. In 1935 the San Pedro Jewish Community Center was dedicated at the corner of 19<sup>th</sup> and Cabrillo. In 1936, the "Beth El Women's League" was formed for the primary purpose of developing a Religious school. Rabbi Dubin of the Wilshire Blvd. Temple helped develop its curriculum and trained the volunteers who would serve as its teachers.



The Jewish Community Center,  
Cabrillo at 19<sup>th</sup> Street, San Pedro

By 1938, approximately 75 Jewish families lived in San Pedro and the name "Congregation Beth El" was adopted. In 1944, however, the original charter was amended and we became the San Pedro Jewish Community Association.

It soon became clear that our Jewish community would outgrow that facility, and in 1942, several lots on Seventh Street were purchased for future development, though that was not to happen until 1955. In the meantime, we welcomed our first resident Rabbi in 1940, involved ourselves in the considerable support that San Pedro gave to the war effort (including San Pedro's most "infamous" Jewish resident, "Shanghai Red" Eisenberg) and we continued to grow through the post-war boom.



Ground Breaking Ceremonies  
Beth-El Temple and Center  
July 10, 1955

Program  
Ground-breaking ceremonies

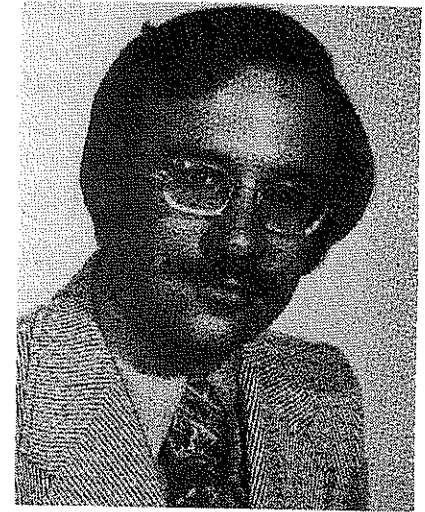
In 1955, the San Pedro Jewish Sisterhood sold the building at 19<sup>th</sup> and Cabrillo and donated the proceeds to the construction of our current facility on Seventh Street. The San Pedro B'nai B'rith Men and Women joined in the fund-raising as well, and in 1956, the Torah Scrolls were brought to our new home. It consisted of classrooms, offices, a kitchen and the combination Social Hall-Sanctuary. At the same time, the Beth El Women's League changed its name to the Temple Beth El Sisterhood,



Charlie Mandel and daughter Mimi at the 1955 groundbreaking for the present Temple site.

and joined the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods of the Reform movement. In 1959, following the lead of the Women's League, our charter was changed one last time and we became Temple Beth El, a Reform congregation affiliated with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Our beloved Sanctuary was dedicated in 1966. In 1967, we acquired our Torah from Ceske-Budejovice. The year 1971 brought Rabbi David and Estelle Lieb to our community. This was the start of Rabbi's 32 years (and counting) as our congregation's unsurpassed spiritual leader. In 1974 the Congregation sponsored its first trip to Israel. In 1975 we had an enrollment of 284 students in our Religious School and we welcomed our first professional Jewish educator. In 1976 we elected our first woman President and in 1977, we hired our first Jewish Cantor. As we grew into the 1980's, we chose to enlarge our Seventh Street facility, and on November 10, 1985 we consecrated the home in which we now reside, with the blessing of Rabbi Alex Schindler, President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.



Rabbi David S. Lieb  
circa 1973

In 1992 we celebrated our 70<sup>th</sup> birthday and in 1994, Temple Beth El received the "Freedom of Light" award from the Religious Coalition on Reproductive Rights for a special program on religion and reproductive choice. The year 1994 also brought us the musical gifts of our Cantor Ilan Davidson.



Our Sanctuary, 1966

In 1997 we were able to pay off the mortgage on our building thanks to the extraordinarily generous gift of Ivan and Vilma Halaj. In 2002, the Temple Beth El Peninsula Family Center was created to allow us to better reach the young Jewish families in Palos Verdes and the western communities of the South Bay.

Now, 80 years young, we stand poised on the threshold of a new vision, inspired by the devotion and generosity of so many people who have brought us here, לדור ודור, *L'Dor va'dor*, from generation to generation. תחזק חזק ונתחזק. *Hazak Hazak v'nit'hazeik*; may we go from strength to strength.

*Based on the meticulous research and loving devotion of Ida Frumes ת"ן Temple Beth El's first official historian.*