

Agudas Israel Congregation

Center of Jewish Living in Henderson County and Beyond

Agudas Israel, from the Hebrew Agudat Yisrael, literally translates as “a bunch of Jews.” An Agudah is originally an agricultural term for a bundle of ripe grain. A more modern translation is “Community of Israel.”



Patterson's Department Store 1950s. In 1921, according to the Hendersonville City Directory, the large majority of adult Jews worked at either Patterson's Department Store or E. Lewis & Son.

Anne (Williams) Kaplan (1921-2007) and Morris Kaplan.

Florence (Flossie) Williams (1922-2009) and Samuel Williams (1919-2003) gave many years of dedicated service to Agudas Israel, 1955.

Jack Schulman and Toni Schulman. Jack and his family had retail stores in many towns in North Carolina, including Sylva, Asheville, Bessemer City, Marion and Canton.

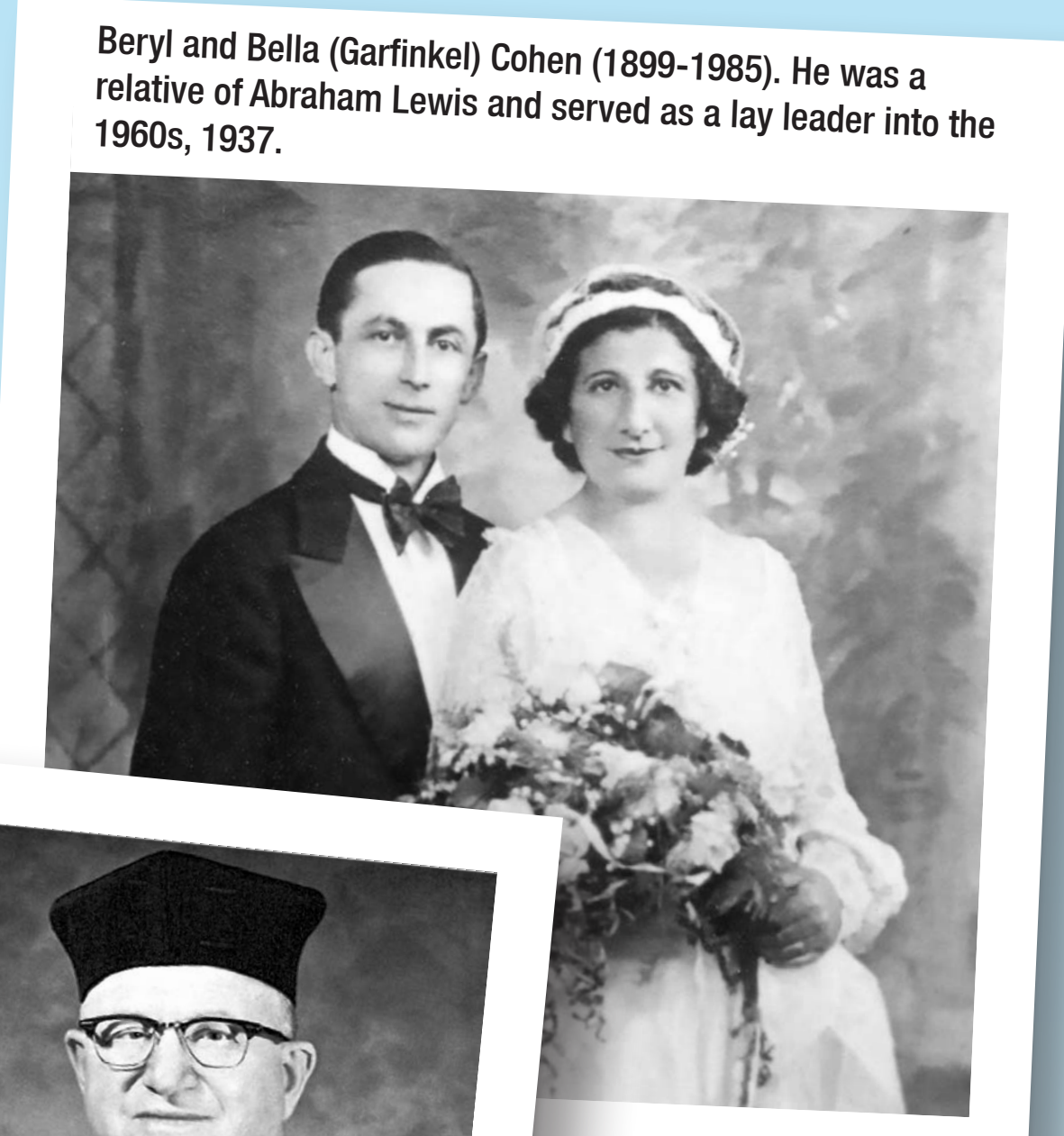


Rabbi Rachael Jackson (2015-present), Agudas Israel's first permanent woman rabbi.

Rabbi Phillip Bentley (2005-2010).

Rabbi Chaim Williamowsky (1927-1929), was an Orthodox rabbi from Lithuania, 1938.

Rabbi Charles Mantinband (1895-1974), summer rabbi in the 1960s.



Beryl and Bella (Garfinkel) Cohen (1899-1965). He was a relative of Abraham Lewis and served as a lay leader into the 1960s, 1937.



Wedding of Anne (Williams) Kaplan and Morris Kaplan at Agudas Israel.* Rows front to back -1st Row (L-R): Frances (Sherman) Gaeser, Hannah Kaplan (Morris' mother), Nachama Williamowsky, Minnie Williams (Anne's mother), Liba Sprague (Anne's grandmother), Lea Weisberg, Ruth Weisberg. 2nd Row (L-R): Joe Mottsmann, Hyman Kaplan (Morris' father), Louis Williams (Anne's father), Herman Weisberg, Morris Weisberg. 3rd Row: (L-R): Max Minsky, Seymour Kaplan (Morris' brother), Morris Kaplan, Anne Shirley Williams, Sarah Williamowsky, Rabbi Chaim Williamowsky, Jacob Williams (Anne's brother), 1945.

Duncraggon Inn, one of several boarding houses catering to Jewish tourists, run by the Wise family (1931-1965). *

Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Lewis. He was the son of Edward Lewis.



E. Lewis & Son Department Store with Busch crowd out front, early 1930s.



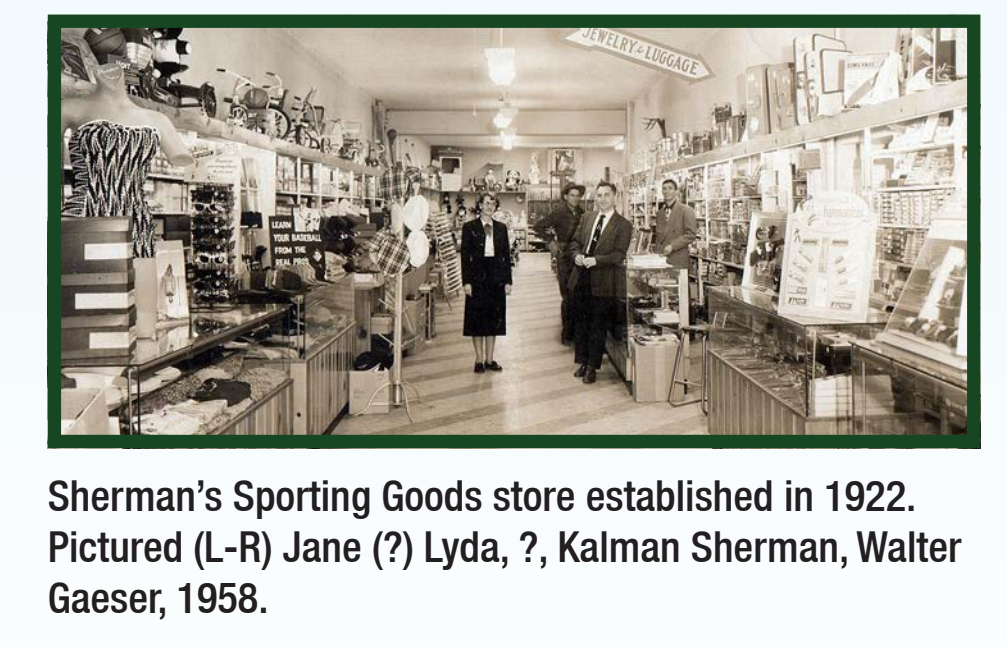
Pearl Mottsmann (1889-1955). Pearl spoke 5 languages.

Max Pravda in Rosenberg Men's Wear, his father-in-law's store, 1950s.

Ann Mottsmann Michalove Kolodkin (1912-2004) had a long and distinguished career in the field of social work, retiring at age 77, 1960.

Kalin's Department Store which was Sam Kalin's clothing store, 1950. *

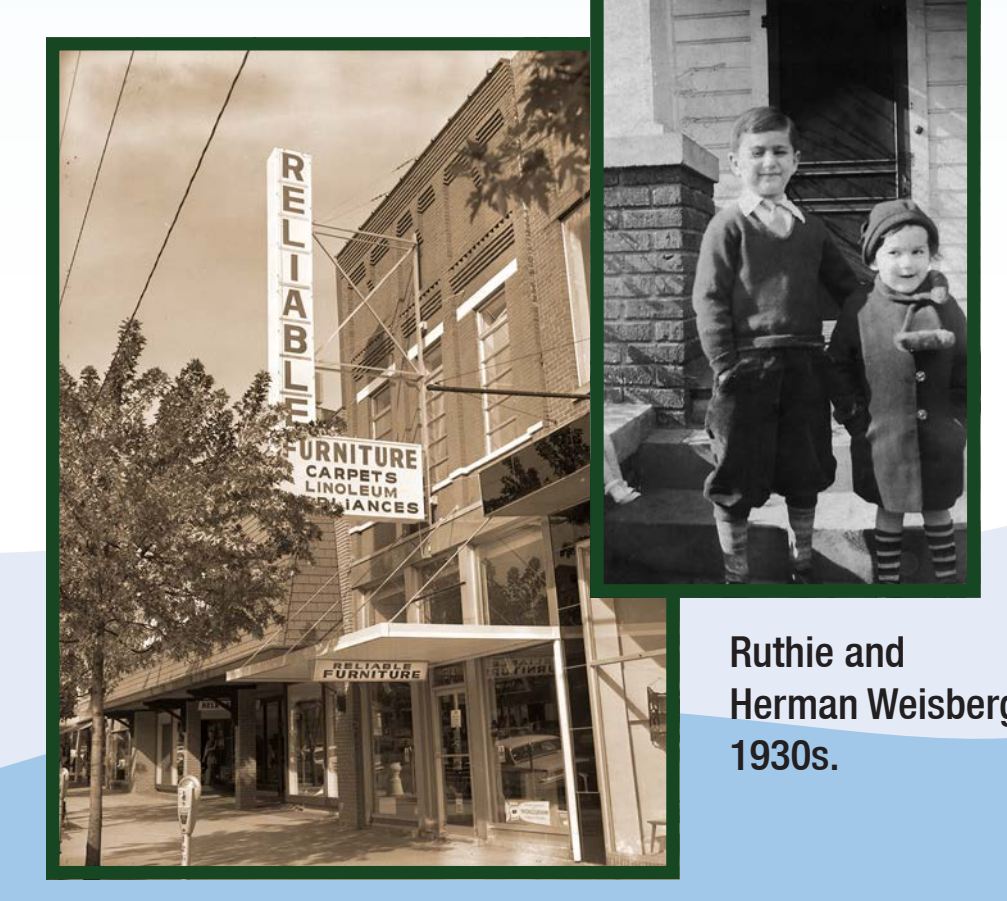
1900 Though Jews were present earlier, a permanent community did not begin to form until Edward and Ida Lewis settled in Hendersonville in 1900 and opened a clothing store. The Shermans, Pattersons, Kalins, Williams, Rosenbergs, Patlas, Mottsmans, Weisbergs, and Michaloves, among others, followed. Most were merchants, some were also competitors. Yet they were united in the support of their customs and forming a synagogue.



Sherman's Sporting Goods store established in 1922. Pictured (L-R) Jane (?) Lyda, ?, Kalman Sherman, Walter Gaeser, 1958.

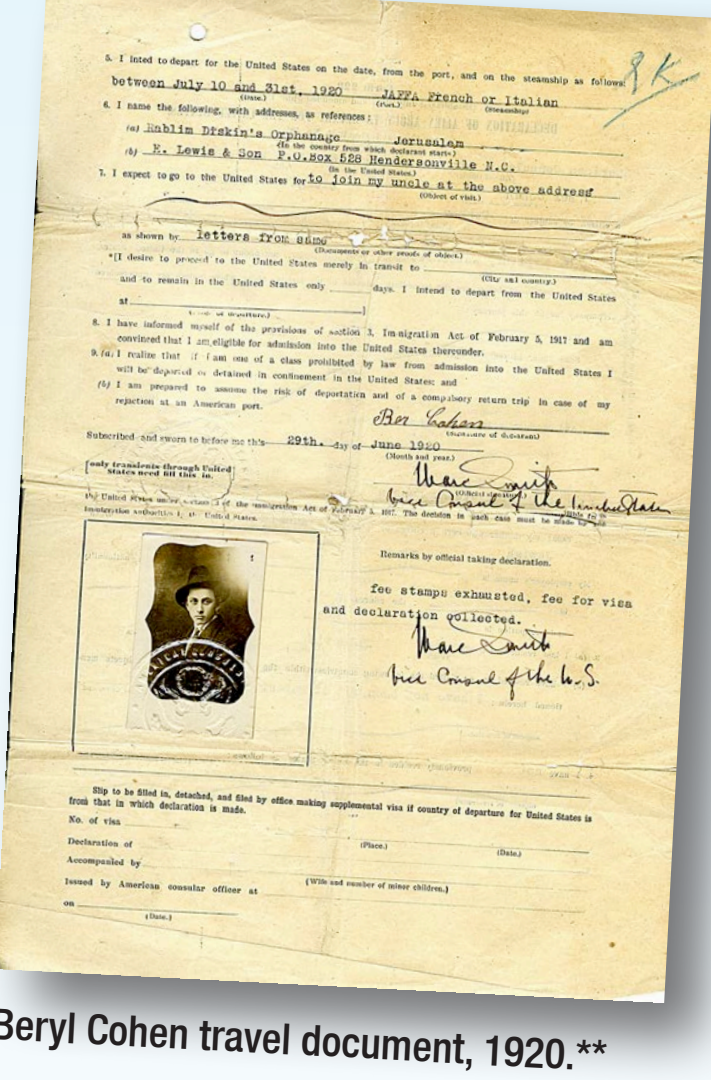


Daniel's Furniture was started by Daniel Michalove (1890-1960) as Railroad Salvage with merchandise his sister Hattie Pearlman sent from her family salvage business in Asheville. His son, Hendersonville Mayor Don Michalove, later took over the business, 1953.*



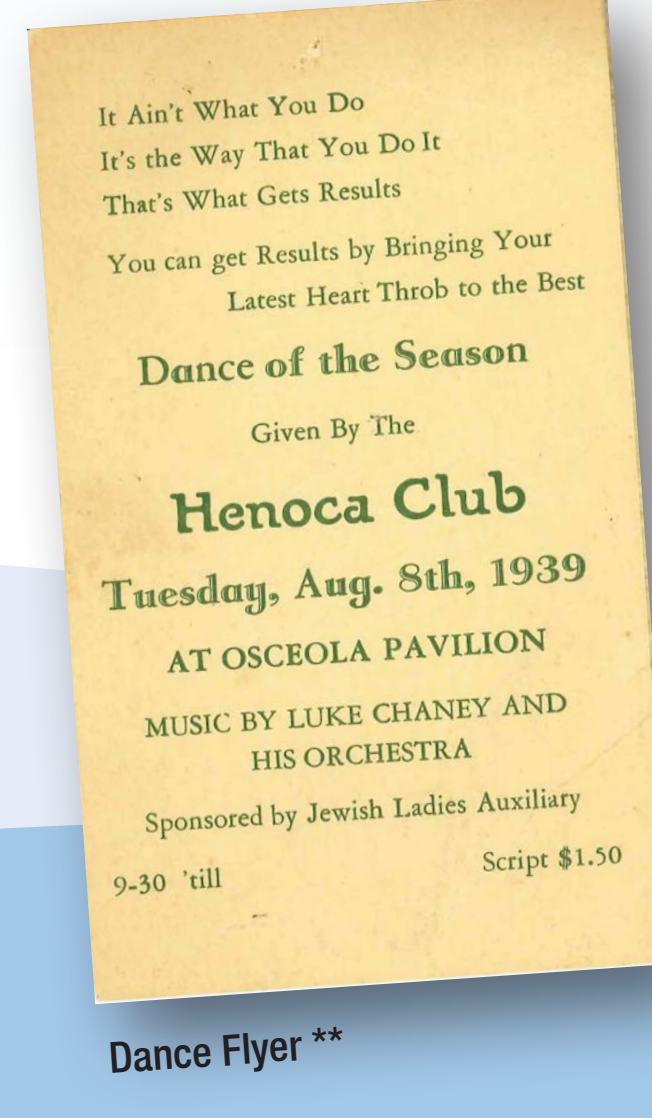
Reliable Furniture belonged to Morris and Mae Weisberg. *

1920 Beryl Cohen (1901-1964), (pictured above), was brought from Israel to serve as a shochet and Hebrew teacher. He became the lay leader of the congregation after Rabbi Williamowsky left.



Beryl Cohen travel document, 1920.**

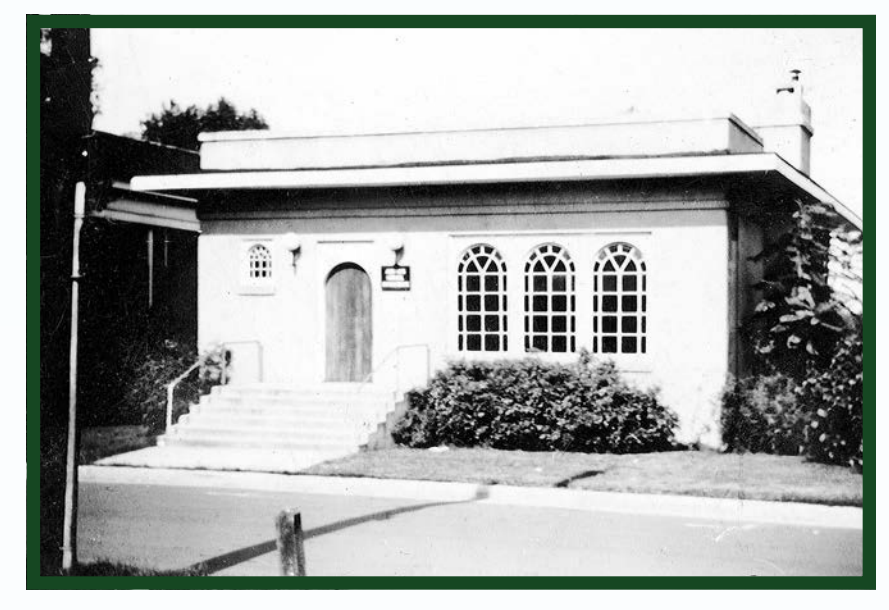
1922 Twenty-seven Jews met in the Kantrowitz home to organize Agudas Israel, which was Orthodox. Nathan Brenner was elected President and his wife was appointed as a trustee. Mrs. Kantrowitz, was the Recording Secretary.



Dance Flyer **

Soon the women formed a Jewish Ladies Auxiliary, and the young people organized a social club named HENOCA (Hendersonville North Carolina). Many programs, mostly dances, were run to raise funds to buy a building, but when these fell short of the financial goal, the congregation reached out to the greater Hendersonville community. Non-Jews, respecting the Jews' need to follow their religious traditions contributed to help pay for a new synagogue.

July 1925 The first synagogue building at 328 North King Street, formerly the Home Electric Company, was purchased. **



1927-29 The congregation hired its first Rabbi, Chiam Williamowsky (relative of the Williams family). He also served as schochet. With only 34 members, the congregation could not afford to pay the salary of a full time Rabbi. Through most of its history, the congregation has had visiting or student rabbis and lay leaders. This meant that everyone participated in synagogue life creating a tightknit community.



Morris Kaplan (left) and Morris Kalin (right) led services for over 50 years, late 1960s early 1970s. **

1938 Land in Oakdale Cemetery was purchased from the City of Hendersonville for Jewish burials. Hendersonville served as the hub of Jewish life for the surrounding area. During the High Holy Days, Jewish families from Sylva, Franklin, and Brevard, for example, stayed at one of the several Kosher boarding houses in town. Hendersonville was also the “Catskills of the South.” Summer residents often worshipped at Agudas Israel, and still do.

1940s and 1950s Hendersonville High School had its largest population of Jewish students. Many belonged to national Jewish organizations like Aleph Zadik Aleph (AZA), which connected them to a larger Jewish community.

The congregation became Conservative in the 1950s. In 1958 land was purchased for a new building at 6th and Oak Streets, but this land was later sold, and the money used to renovate the King Street building (1964). The Holy Ark was given to Camp Judea, one of several Jewish camps in Hendersonville, where it is still in use.



Children and teens in front of the King Street synagogue. (L-R): ?, Sanford (Sandy) Levinson, Claire Kalin Savitt, Ruthie Weisberg in back, Edward Hyman (twisting), Barry Kalin (tall boy in back), ?, Toni Schulman, 1945 or 46. **



Synagogue building on King Street after renovation.



The interior of the King Street synagogue during the Bar Mitzvah of Mickey Beckerman, 1958.

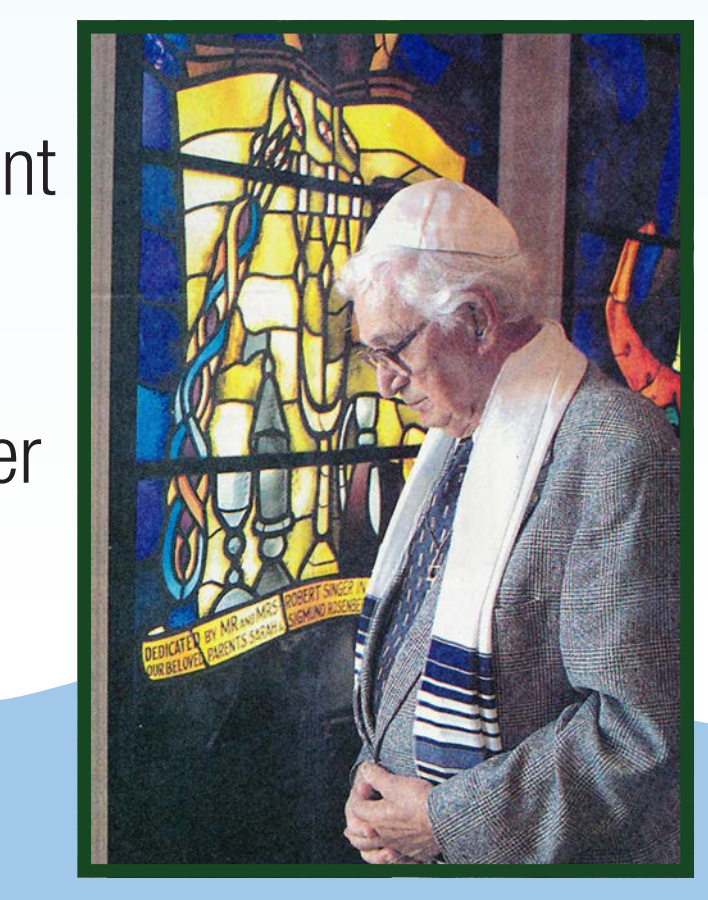
1960s Rabbi Charles Mantinband (1895-1974) was the summer Rabbi. He had served a congregation in Hattiesburg, Mississippi during much of the civil rights era and spoke out for racial equality.



Advertisement **

1970s and 1980s Don Michalove, President of Agudas Israel (2001-2002), became the first Jewish city councilman in 1977 and then mayor, 1981-1993.

1990s Morris Kaplan, President of Agudas Israel (1956-1992), was instrumental in bringing windows from the closed Fur Center Synagogue, in New York City, to Agudas Israel. They were installed in the King Street sanctuary in 1996. From the 1940s until his passing Morris (1911-2008), son-in-law of Louis Williams, was involved in synagogue life and represented the Congregation in the Hendersonville Community. (2005).



1996 Agudas Israel changed its affiliation from the (Conservative) United Synagogue of America to the Union for Reform Judaism. The congregation was always connected to the greater Jewish community, supporting a B'nai B'rith chapter, NC Association of Jewish Women and Men, and the Hendersonville Jewish Welfare Board, in addition to its own Sisterhood and Brotherhood.

2000 Five acres of land on Glasgow Lane were purchased to build a new synagogue. As before, the greater Hendersonville community contributed to help in this effort.



Groundbreaking for the new synagogue building at 505 Glasgow Lane.

2002 The Congregation moved into the new building. The Torahs were walked from the King Street Synagogue to the new building at 505 Glasgow Lane by several of the patriarchs of the congregation. (L-R) Kalman Sherman, Morris Kaplan, Sammy Williams and Don Michalove.



Agudas Israel Dedication

Present Most descendants of the founding families have passed on or moved away from Hendersonville, but the synagogue remains as a tribute to them. Its members continue to contribute to the civic and cultural development of Hendersonville, well beyond the proportion of their numbers.



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