

Once Upon A Time in North Park

North Park Synagogues: Beth Jacob & Tifereth Isreal

by Vickie Granowitz

In 1939, the Depression was beginning to show signs of ending, the citizens of the United States knew little of the man who would throw them into war. The Jewish community knew nothing of the desecration that would occur to their brethren in Europe. In San Diego, the small Jewish community believed its population would increase and that it was time to plan for the future. There were two synagogues in San Diego and both had downtown locations. Temple Beth Israel, the oldest San Diego synagogue, was established in 1861 as a Reform congregation. Tifereth Israel, established in 1905, was a Conservative congregation. San Diego was about to get its first Orthodox Synagogue.

Judaism is divided into three basic groups. The Orthodox adheres to the tenets of biblical law in a fundamental way. They practice their faith and lead their lives in ways similar to their ancestors 5000 years ago. They speak Hebrew at services, separate men and women during worship and always keep kosher. Reform Judaism has made many adaptations. Services are held mainly in English, men and women sit together and few keep kosher. Individuals who practice by Conservative rules are somewhere between Orthodox and Reform.

By May of 1939, a group of men and women who felt they needed an Orthodox approach to their Judaism had purchased a small house at 3206 Myrtle in North Park. They called their place of worship Beth Jacob Congregation. The small private home was hardly suitable, but the congregation grew steadily and the location was remodeled several times. The location included a Talmud Torah and a Religious School.

Following World War II, Beth Jacob Congregation was infused with a new enthusiasm and by March 20, 1950, land was purchased at 4473 30th Street near Meade Avenue. Three years later, ground was broken on the new location. In pictures from the groundbreaking ceremony, the North Park Water Tower is visible in the background. On December 6, 1953, the new Beth Jacob Synagogue and Center was dedicated. It had an auditorium with a 600 person capacity, school rooms and a fully equipped kosher kitchen.

Members of Tifereth Israel Synagogue also felt 1939 was the year to begin making changes. They had made changes many times and it had always led to positive results. From 1906 to 1917, they had occupied many rented locations. While World War I raged, they consecrated a location at Eighteenth and Market Streets and dedicated it to peace. In 1939 a group was formed to locate land and implement the construction of a larger, more appropriate facility. They held many fund raisers during the 1940s, and in 1948 they moved into a large corner lot at 30th and Howard in North Park. In August 1953, the congregation built a large two-story brick building as a Synagogue Center, next door to

the temple. It included classrooms, a social hall, offices, a gift shop, kosher kitchen and an auditorium that contained a stage and an additional small kitchen.

With the rise of new suburbia, the upward mobility of San Diego residents and the need for larger quarters, the 1970s ended with North Park losing both their synagogues. Beth Jacob broke ground in 1972 and moved in 1977 to what had been a barren canyon close to San Diego State University. Tifereth Israel congregation also no longer fit in their North Park home, and by 1974, plans were underway to move. Their third and current home was dedicated in 1979. It is on Cowles Mountain on five acres of land in the suburb of San Carlos.

Today the buildings which had been built by the North Park Jewish community are inhabited by worshipers of other faiths.