

Our History

In 1853 Newark, a small group of Jewish émigrés from Poland decided to form their own congregation. They met in the home of Abraham Newman until a hall could be rented. By 1855 they acquired land for a cemetery and were incorporated under New Jersey law as “Congregation of the Sons of Abraham—B’nai Abraham,” in honor of benefactor Abraham Newman and in recognition of Biblical tradition’s first Jew.

The congregation purchased its first building, a former Newark Baptist Church, in 1861. After a series of moves over the course of three decades, the cornerstone of a new 900-seat synagogue at High Street and 13th Avenue was laid in 1897. In 1924, the congregation raised the then-huge sum of \$1,250,000 to build their last Newark home, a magnificent edifice at Clinton and Shanley Avenues. Many of our current congregants grew up in the Clinton Avenue building. Recognizing the migration of Newark’s Jewish community to western Essex County in the 1960s, the congregation built a new home in Livingston, moving in 1973.

While the ritual practiced at Temple B’nai Abraham has evolved over the decades, the congregation has been led by only four senior rabbis since 1902, when Rabbi Julius Silberfeld became the rabbi of Temple B’nai Abraham. Retaining the Orthodox ritual that had been followed since 1853, he edited a new prayer book, adding English translations. In 1939, Rabbi Silberfeld retired and was succeeded by Dr. Joachim Prinz, who modernized the ritual and introduced his own prayer book. Dr. Prinz, who had escaped Nazi Germany in 1937, became a vocal civil rights leader in the United States, known globally for his moving rhetoric.

Dr. Prinz retired in 1976. Rabbi Barry Friedman, who came to the Temple in 1968 as Associate Rabbi, became Senior Rabbi in 1977. Rabbi Friedman introduced further innovations in the services. He wrote and edited the prayer book *Siddur Or Chadash*. He retired in 1999, having served the congregation for thirty-one years.

His successor, Rabbi Clifford M. Kulwin, served as Senior Rabbi for twenty years. Kulwin, a prolific presence in area media, spent the previous two decades working with Jewish communities around the world. He led annual trips to Israel and his tenure was marked by the Temple’s heightened engagement in the community at large.

Rabbi David Z. Vaisberg became Senior Rabbi of Temple B’nai Abraham on July 1, 2019. Before coming to TBA, he was the spiritual leader of Temple Emanu-El of Edison. We joyfully welcome Rabbi Vaisberg and his family to our congregational family!