

A TALE OF TWO SANCTUARIES

The First Presbyterian Church of Amenia has been a presence in the community since 1748. The current building and connected manse were dedicated in 1867 at a time when the population and economic prosperity for Amenia was at its peak. Sadly, in September of 2015 it was agreed the the congregation be dissolved.

Just down the street from this church is the Beth David Synagogue, which opened its doors to Orthodox Jewish farmers in 1929. The Synagogue has been open for over 89 years and was in need of renovation, both structural and aesthetic. One of the basic things on their wish list was to replace the movie theater type seats with pews that were more in keeping with the age and feeling of the interior.

The President of Beth David, Sherry Frankel approached the Deacon of the Presbyterian Diocese and asked if they would consider giving a small portion of their pews to Beth David. They graciously agreed to donate anything that we would need and the arduous process of reconfiguring them to fit in a much smaller space began. With the help of a local carpenter, John Meyers, the pews were removed and lovingly recut to size and the beautiful chestnut finish was restored. This took over four months of hard work. While this was happening the original cushions which were covered in red velvet, needed to be resized and replaced. They were brought to M Designs in Canaan, CT and it was discovered that

they were filled with horsehair and originally made for the Church by C.F. Hawley Dry Goods and Furniture in Millerton. This was a store that was known for making seats for horse and buggies at the time.

On Friday, August 4th the pews were brought to Beth David and finally arrived in their new home. At the same time this was happening, a wonderful show called “A Chance for Land and Fresh Air” was installed in the community room as a permanent exhibit. Curated by a congregant and well known author, Carol Ascher, and previously displayed at the Sharon Historical Society, it tells the story of the migration of European and Russian Jews to Amenia and the environs and the establishment of their presence in the community at the turn of the century.

This marks a turning point in the renewal of this beautiful and historic Synagogue. Congregation Beth David is a landmarked structure and is continuing to strengthen and grow its expanding membership.

This project serves as a beacon for community cooperation and generosity. Without the kindness of the First Presbyterian Church of Amenia, this could not have been possible. While we are all saddened by their closing, we look forward to continued worship on these historic benches in a new home right down the street.