

CONGREGATION BETH DAVID

PO Box 125
3344 East Main Street
Amenia, NY 12501
congbethdavid.org



Congregation Beth David was established in 1929 by a mix of Jewish dairy farmers who had moved from nearby Sharon, Connecticut and Jewish businessmen who had come directly from New York to Amenia to participate in what promised to become a thriving little Jewish resort centering around Lake Amenia. With the railroad enabling New Yorkers to escape the summer heat, half a dozen boarding houses and small hotels that kept Kosher were established in and around Amenia, which, in turn, created a lively business district, including a pharmacy, a hardware store, and a couple of department stores.

Some of the names on the plaque of those who helped pay the Temple mortgage, as well as on the windows and seats are those of families whose descendants remain in the area. Nathan Osofsky and his wife Rebecca moved from Sharon to open The Grand House Hotel in the center of Amenia. Two of Osofsky's grandsons, Ronnie and Rick now own Ronniebrook Farm Dairy in Pine Planes. The Rothsteins, who initially came to Sharon, soon moved to Amenia, where they owned Lake House; Phillip Rothstein, their son, was an accountant in Amenia and treasurer of Temple Beth David for thirty-five years. His wife, Muriel Rothstein now lives in Sharon. Louis Gorkofsky began as a cattle dealer in Sharon around 1920, and for many years his son, Sam Gorkofsky, worked an expansive dairy farm of 200 cows in Sharon.

Other familiar names date back to the early Jewish farmers. Charlie Paley, who owns Paley's Farm Market on the Sharon Road, is the grandson of Hyman Paley, who came to the area as a dairy farmer around 1920, and Jake Shoifet, who served three terms as Mayor of Millerton, was the son of a rabbi and ritual slaughterer who moved to Sharon in 1916 in response to an add asking for a ritual slaughterer.

Harry Weinstein and Jacob Shoifet were among those who in the late 1920s decided to build a synagogue on a small plot of land donated by Bessie and Harry Rosenson on East Main Street in Amenia. The cornerstone for the synagogue was laid on Sunday, May 14, 1929 at a ceremony that brought together members of the local Jewish community, visiting Rabbis and other Jewish leaders, together with religious and civic leaders from the Amenia area. In all, several hundred people attended. Speakers included Supervisor Joseph McEnroe of Amenia and Rabbi Schwartz of Vassar Temple in Poughkeepsie. Reverend Dr. S. W. Steele of the Amenia Presbyterian Church expressed his pride in his Jewish neighbors and assured the audience that intolerance did not exist in Amenia.

For the next two decades, the synagogue prospered, as did Amenia. However, changes in vacationing habits in the 1950s, including the development of the Jewish Catskills, led a decline in Amenia's summer resorts. Flooding after hurricane Diane in 1955, which destroyed the dam and drained Lake Amenia, ended Amenia's resort period.

With second-generation members of the Congregation's founding families leaving Amenia for other pursuits, the Temple's numbers fell significantly. Originally orthodox, it changed to conservative and eventually to the reform Temple that currently serves a mix of weekenders, local residents and Jewish students from nearby boarding schools.

In 2002, two years head of its seventy-fifth anniversary, Congregation Beth David, a proud symbol of earlier times, was added to the National Register of Historic Places. It is the only synagogue in New York east of the Hudson River and north of New York City to be listed.

A total renovation of the Temple has been underway, restoring it so that it will continue its heritage for the next millennium. Recent grants have been received from The New York Landmarks Conservancy, The David Berg Foundation, Kirsh Foundation Holdings and the Millbrook Tribute Garden, Inc.