

FROM THE ARCHIVES: BUILDING A TEMPLE SCHOOL

THE 1950s WERE a period of great growth for Temple Emanu-El. Membership had reached 2,700 congregants—triple the membership of the 1930s, when the new facility was built at Fifth Avenue and 65th Street. Along with increased membership, however, came an overcrowding problem, particularly in a lack of seating during High Holy Days and for the 650 students of Temple Emanu-El's Religious School—who exceeded existing classroom capacity by about 200 students.

When a segment of property contiguous to the Temple on 66th Street became available, Emanu-El's leadership of the day acted quickly to purchase the property and to establish a building fund to raise money for the project. The goal: \$3 million to cover the cost of purchasing the land, constructing the six-story school building—including an “air-conditioned 1,100-seat auditorium, providing a bright and beautiful setting for High Holy Day services”—and undergoing necessary renovations to the Community House.

At the congregation's annual dinner-dance, held Dec. 15, 1959, at the Waldorf=Astoria, a 10-foot photo mural of the proposed Religious School and auditorium were on display. According to an article published in *Building Fund News*—a periodic newsletter launched by the congregation that same month—“Some members announced their gifts [to the building fund] from the floor; while others, who had given prior to the



Building for the Future

Among those attending the 1960 Demolition Ceremony at 66th Street are (front row, adults) Dr. Nathan Perilman, Dr. Julius Mark, Building Fund Chair Benjamin Lazarus, Temple President Alfred R. Bachrach, and Life Trustee Herbert C. Bernard (second row, far left).



Set in Stone

Temple President Alfred R. Bachrach plasters with cement the top edge of the granite cornerstone dated 5723 and 1962.

meeting, gave permission to have their contributions publicly announced. With 2,700 congregation members to draw from, Mr. [Benjamin] Lazarus [chairman of the Building Fund Committee] said he was confident that the campaign would meet its goal.”

Nearly a year later, on Dec. 8, 1960, members and leadership of the Temple gathered for a “Demolition Ceremony” at the site, where two limestone residences and four brownstones were razed. Many of the newspapers of the day—including *The New York Times*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *New York Journal American* and the *New York World-Telegram*—ran brief articles about the project. In a prayer at the demolition, Senior Rabbi Julius Mark said:

We ask Thy blessing, O Father, upon those who have given and will continue to give of their means, their energy and their wisdom to the construction of our greatly needed school. Bless those who are about to pull down and these who will soon build! And above all, we pray that the children who will be using its classrooms may be imbued with “the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of reverence for Thee.”

Groundbreaking for the new facility was held May 11, 1961, with Dr. Mark turning the ceremonial first spade of earth. He was followed by longtime Temple member and textile giant Leon Lowenstein, who gave what at the time was the largest single gift to the Building Fund drive, which underwrote the new auditorium. A noted philanthropist of the day, Mr. Lowenstein entered the business world at age 21 as a partner in the firm M. Lowenstein and Sons, which under his leadership became the number-one producer and finisher of cotton goods in the United States. According to *Building Fund News*, “[Mr. Lowenstein] interrupted his industrial career only once—to serve as First Lieutenant in the U.S. Army in World War I.”

Approximately 150 congregants witnessed the laying of the building cornerstone (after attending the Temple's Thanksgiving service) on Nov. 22, 1962. The new facility—with 33 classrooms for up to 1,000 students (attending either Religious School or Nursery School)—opened in September 1963. Topping off what was considered to be “one of the largest expansion programs ever undertaken in American Temple history,” a formal dedication ceremony was held April 19, 1964.

In a letter to the congregation at the start of the Building Fund campaign, Dr. Mark wrote, “Emanu-El has never been supported by a few but has always been maintained on a congregation-wide basis. It is not so much a duty as a privilege for every member of the congregation



to contribute in accordance with the heart's willingness to give and the standard of material resources with which God has blessed us.”

Over the years, many Temple families have donated funds for subsequent improvements to the Religious School building. We are ever grateful for their generosity.

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABES

On April 30, 1961, Temple Emanu-El sponsored an Oratorical Contest for the Building Fund in which more than 50 boys and girls from the Religious School participated. Following are several excerpts from some of the winning speeches that were published in the May 1961 edition of *Building Fund News*:

“In this fine tradition of Moses and obedience of the Lord's wishes, Temple Emanu-El is erecting a House of Study, where our culture can be preserved, where the father can diligently teach the laws of Israel to the son, where new ideas can mold the future of Judaism so that it can survive in conformity with the times.”

— Harold Benenson (age 14, ninth grade)

“The past generations have erected the beautiful Temple which we are in today...Now we must expand and do as well as our forefathers.”

— Bruce Racusin (age 11, sixth grade)

“I don't think the parents should give all the money, for after all, we get most of the benefit. I am taking 20¢ off my weekly allowance of 35¢ for one brick a week.”

— Donald Daniels (age 7, second grade)

A Sanctuary to Dwell Among Them

Readying the scrolls for the Ark in the new Leon Lowenstein Sanctuary are (from left) Dr. Julius Mark, Dr. Nathan Perilman, Temple President Alfred R. Bachrach, Leon Lowenstein and Dedication Committee Chairman Morton Pepper.

