



## **Temple Emanu El History**

### **Early Days**

In the summer of 1947, a new congregation was formed to fulfill a long felt need to have a Reform presence in the Heights area. With the sponsorship of the Union of American Hebrew Congregation (now renamed the Union for Reform Judaism), and direct assistance from The Temple-Tifereth Israel and Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple, Temple Emanu El was created.

Dr. Alan S. Green, who was associated with a congregation in Texas, was named rabbi and was to grace our pulpit for thirty years. Irvin Bushman became the first cantor, serving in that capacity from 1947 to 1983. When Religious School Principal Sophie Herman was hired, she became the third pillar of the triad of incredible leadership.

The new congregation originally met for meetings at the corner of Lee and Van Aken Roads at Moreland School. The founders envisioned a vibrant temple filled with warmth, music, and tradition.

The earliest members were primarily young, enthusiastic, post-war families living in the epicenter of what was to become a new Jewish neighborhood – the Heights. These families came to embrace their Judaism in a very special way. As a result, the congregation grew rapidly, drawing members from the surrounding neighborhoods.

TEE offered a full array of vibrant programs and services as well as a Religious School. The school stressed the joy of Judaism and taught students that faith could make a major contribution to the community and to mankind.

One year after its founding, TEE had a membership of 350 families and a religious school filled with 250 students. By the end of the second year, 500 families had joined the temple and by the end of

the third, the school reached an enrollment of 500. During the early years, worship services and special programs were held at both Plymouth Church and the chapel on the Bellefaire campus.

### **Building a Home**

In June of 1950, land was acquired in University Heights to build Temple Emanu El's original home, and our beautiful new building was dedicated in 1954.

In October of 1977, Rabbi Green passed the torch to then assistant rabbi, Daniel Roberts. Rabbi Roberts served as the senior rabbi for 25 years. During Rabbi Roberts' tenure, the Temple established a preschool.

When Rabbi Roberts transitioned to emeritus status in 2002, Rabbi Andrew Paley was hired and was with the congregation for three years. Rabbi Steven Denker was brought on board in 2004 as interim rabbi and in 2006 as senior rabbi.

### **Heading East to a New Home**

The demographics of the Cleveland Jewish community had shifted significantly by this time. What was once the center of Jewish Cleveland was not any longer. Fifty plus years after Temple Emanu El dedicated its first building, the Board of Trustees started to look at our options and, with congregational input, determined that relocation was our best avenue. In 2005, an 11-acre partial was purchased in Orange Village.

During the summer of 2007, hundreds of families participated in the official groundbreaking. In August 2008, adults and children alike helped march our six sacred Torahs over six miles to their new home.

Since settling into our new facility, Religious School has an enviable 75% retention rate after B'nai Mitzvah, well above the national average. The Preschool – accommodating children 6 weeks through pre-kindergarten – has also gained momentum, making it necessary to add new classrooms. Temple Emanu El's senior youth group, TEMTY, routinely leads Cleveland's Reform congregations in sending the largest contingent to regional conventions. Active and growing adult groups, like the Brotherhood and Women of Temple Emanu El, keep members involved. Social and advocacy-oriented programs have become a cornerstone of who we are as a congregation.

In May 2022, Rabbi Denker retired, and Rabbi Matt Cohen started his tenure. Under Rabbi Matt's tutelage and with his charismatic nature, the congregation has already gained 50 new families and is continuing to grow.