

**United States Department of Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

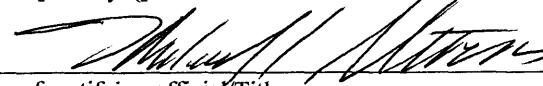
historic name Temple Beth Israel  
other names/site number N/A

**2. Location**

street & number 1475 Water Street N/A not for publication  
city or town Stevens Point N/A vicinity  
state Wisconsin code WI county Portage code 097 zip code 54481

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets \_ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant \_ nationally statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date 1/17/07

State Historic Preservation Officer - Wisconsin

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_ meets \_ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Temple Beth Israel

Portage County

Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain):

*Edson H. Beall*

3.1.07

*Edson H. Beall*

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- structure
- site
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

contributing	noncontributing
1	0 buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
1	0 total

**Name of related multiple property listing:**  
(Enter "N/A" if property not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources is previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion: religious facility

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture: Museum

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation Limestone

walls Metal

roof Metal

other Wood

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Temple Beth Israel  
Name of Property

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Social History

### Period of Significance

1905-1956

### Significant Dates

1905

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Bukolt, John - architect  
Allen, W.H. - builder

### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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### 9. Major Bibliographic References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic landmark
  
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

**Primary location of additional data:**

- X State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State Agency
  - Federal Agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - X Other
- Name of repository: Portage County  
\_ Historical Society Collection, University  
of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Area Research Center

### 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1    16    294712    4932709  
Zone    Easting    Northing

3    \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone    Easting    Northing

2    \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone    Easting    Northing

4    \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone    Easting    Northing

See Continuation Sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Mark R. Seiler	date	April 25, 2006
organization	Portage County Historical Society	telephone	715 344- 0168
street & number	4409 Janick C. N.	zip code	54481
city or town	Stevens Point	state	WI

Temple Beth Israel  
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### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

**Maps** A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs** Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional Items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

### Property Owner

Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

<b>name/title</b>	Timothy J Siebert, President	<b>date</b>	April 25, 2006
<b>organization</b>	Portage County Historical Society	<b>telephone</b>	715 344 7607
<b>street&amp;number</b>	2933 Kozy	<b>zip code</b>	54481
<b>city or town</b>	Stevens Point	<b>state</b>	WI

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Section 7 Page 1

Temple Beth Israel

Stevens Point, Portage County, Wisconsin

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Temple Beth Israel in Stevens Point is a one story, gable-roofed, wood-frame structure with a stone foundation, designed with Gothic Revival elements as a synagogue by John Bukolt and constructed by W.H Allen, both of Stevens Point, in 1905. It was used continuously by Congregation Beth Israel Congregation from 1905 until 1986 when it was deeded to the Portage County Historical Society. It is perhaps the fourth oldest building constructed as a synagogue in Wisconsin. Older structures are: Gates of Heaven (1863) in Madison; Temple Zion (1884) in Appleton; and Sharey Zedek (1895) in Hurley. Temple Beth Israel is perhaps the oldest synagogue with its sanctuary largely intact. Since 1986 the building has served as a museum of the Portage County Historical Society.

Temple Beth Israel stands on a 60 by 120 foot lot at 1445 Water Street, near the downtown business district. The building was constructed with the front of the sanctuary, where the sacred ark is located, facing northeast, in an attempt to comply with Jewish tradition of having the Torah ark on the east wall (*mizrah*), facing Jerusalem. The southwest façade faces Water Street. The synagogue was originally surrounded by a largely Jewish neighborhood consisting of private dwellings as well as commercial and industrial sites. Today it is surrounded by municipal parking lots on three sides.

The original building has a rectangular plan, approximately 30 by 50 feet with a standing-seam metal roof, which on the southwest end has a Jerkin-head or clipped-gable. The stone foundation is about 12-18 inches above grade and has matching windows on the northwest and southeast sides. The roof is penetrated on the southwest end by a brick chimney. In 1951 the synagogue was remodeled. A 20 by 26 foot concrete block addition to the basement was built on the northeast side of the building to house the heating plant, the horizontal wooden shiplap siding was covered by horizontal clapboard aluminum siding, the doors of the main entrance were replaced with hollow core doors, and concrete steps were constructed at the main entrance. Recently these doors were replaced with solid wood, paneled doors that match the original doors. The exterior trim is painted wood and there is no decorative ornamentation.

**Southwest façade.** In the center of the southwest facade is a large double pointed arch window, consisting of two double-hung sashes below twin arched tops which join to form a larger arch spanning across both windows. Monochromatic clear, gold and blue frosted glass is set in the lower sash and arched tops. Concrete steps, northeast of the window, lead to the main entrance to the building, a double-door topped by a Gothic-arch transom window, comprising twin arched tops which join to form the larger arch, with gold and blue frosted glass and a Star of David in the center pane.

**Northwest façade.** Three large double-hung windows with Gothic arched tops dominate the northwest façade. A wooden ramp on the northeast end of the building leads to an entry door to the sanctuary.

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**Southeast façade.** Three large double-hung windows with Gothic arched tops also dominate the southeast façade. On the southwest end of this façade is a gabled basement entry enclosure. To the southwest of this enclosure is a smaller Gothic-arched window.

**Northeast façade.** Under the northeast gable is a small, round window which is divided by curved muntins with rose-colored glass, under which is a small gabled bay which houses the Torah ark. Attached to the 1905 building is the 1951 concrete block addition to the basement, with a flat built-up roof, tile parapet, coping and brick chimney. The northeast wall of this addition is punctuated by two windows and an entrance door.

**Interior.** The interior layout on the southwest end of the synagogue consists of an entry vestibule and next to it an ante room that functioned as a religious education room. To the northeast of these spaces is the sanctuary. The vestibule has a small Gothic arched window in the southeast wall. Double doors lead into the sanctuary. The northwest wall of the sanctuary has an arched opening to the school room. The northwest wall of the school room has the large double hung Gothic arched window. The arches, visible from the exterior, are concealed by a lowered ceiling. Opposite the windows, a large arched opening leads to the sanctuary. Floor covering in the vestibule, school room and sanctuary is asphalt tile.

The sanctuary is a nearly square space with a barrel vaulted ceiling. The lower two thirds of the walls are paneled with a stained particle board, the upper third with "blond" oak plywood paneling. Acoustical panels have been attached to the vaulted plaster ceiling. The northwest and southeast walls are dominated by the six large Gothic arched windows. The white, painted molding around each window is accented by a rosette block at the peak of the arched transom. From the center of the ceiling hangs a large, bronze chandelier consisting of a large milk glass globe surrounded by six smaller globes, decorated with Stars of David. In the front (north east end) of the sanctuary is the *bima* or rostrum, behind which is the Torah ark. The ark is concealed by a velvet curtain and valance, embroidered with Stars of David. A *parokhet*, a decorative curtain embroidered with religious symbols, hangs on the back wall of the ark. The ark contains three Torah scrolls, a kaddish cup, menorah, *keter*, (elaborate silver crowns to adorn the Torah scrolls), and a silver *yad*, the pointer used when reading the Torah. Each Torah has a *meil*, an elaborately embroidered mantle, and a sterling silver *tas*, a sterling silver plaque. On the bima, in front of the ark, is an oblong table, or *teva*, from which prayers are recited and upon which the Torah scroll is unrolled for reading. On either side of the bima are an American and an Israeli flag. The bima is set off by a wooden rail with four large post-mounted lantern fixtures which match the ceiling chandelier. Above the ark is the *Ner Tamid*, the eternal light, behind a cutout in the form of a Star of David, and above it is a round window divided by curved muntins with

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Temple Beth Israel  
Stevens Point, Portage County, Wisconsin

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rose-colored glass. Mounted on the wall on either side of the bima are two bronzed, carved prayer boards. These prayer boards contain bronze plaques with the names and *Yahrzeit* (date of death) of deceased members of the congregation, their ancestors or other relatives, with an electric bulb next to each plaque. The original seating in the sanctuary consisted of wooden pews (two of these remain). In the 1951 remodeling, the pews were replaced with upholstered folding theatre seats. Nameplates were fixed to each seat signifying the names of the donors or individuals being memorialized. These theater seats were removed several years ago, to enable the sanctuary to be utilized as museum display space. In the future, the original pews and remaining theater seats will be reinstalled, to separate the front of the sanctuary from the museum space.

**Basement:** The 1951 remodeling modernized the basement meeting space. Entrance to the basement is only from the exterior of the building. The walls are paneled with tongue and groove knotty-pine boards. The ceiling consists of suspended acoustical panels with a dropped soffit down the center, concealing the center support beam and mechanical ductwork. Two doors on either side of the northeast end lead to a cloak and storage room with a rear exit and the mechanical room in the 1951 addition. On the southwest end of the basement, under the entry vestibule and Sunday school room above, are kitchen and bathroom areas. The side (southeast) exit leads directly outside and is the main access to this level. Currently the basement is used by the Historical Society for museum storage.

While both the interior and the exterior of the building were remodeled with the application of new surface materials, these changes took place during the period of significance and reflect the continued use of the building by the congregation.



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Temple Beth Israel  
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Temple Beth Israel is being nominated under *Criterion A: Social History* at the local level because it was the focal point for Stevens Point's small but vibrant Jewish community, now defunct, that played a significant role in the religious, social and commercial development of Stevens Point, as well as the central Wisconsin area. It was the first Jewish congregation in Central Wisconsin, established a decade before congregations in Arpin and Wausau. The period of significance begins in 1905, the year the synagogue opened, and ends in 1956, the end of the historic period.

The development of the Jewish community in Stevens Point was part of the third wave of Jewish immigration to Wisconsin after 1880, predominantly from Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> Nearly a decade before the arrival of the first Russian Jews, however, two Jewish families had settled in Stevens Point. Solomon Glover, a member of the German speaking Jewish community of Rausnitz, near Brno, Bohemia (now Czech Republic) had immigrated to the United States in 1846 and first lived in New York and Georgia before coming to Wisconsin. In 1873 he moved his family from his farm in the town of Lind in Waupaca County to Stevens Point.<sup>2</sup> Glover, a Freethinker, not a practicing Jew, operated a hardware store and by 1880<sup>3</sup> his daughter Ida had established a millinery business on Main Street that she would operate until about 1912.<sup>4</sup> Also in 1873, Isaac Brill, a native of Austria, opened a clothing store in Stevens Point<sup>5</sup>, which he and then his son would operate until 1904.<sup>6</sup> Beginning in the early 1880s Eastern European Jews began to settle in Stevens Point.<sup>7</sup>

By the turn of the century about 25 Jewish families, predominantly from Russia, had taken up residence. In the first years these Orthodox Jews met in homes to hold religious services, using a Torah that the Frank family had brought with them to the United States.<sup>8</sup> By 1902 when the Jewish community had grown to the point that there was need for a kosher meat market, Isaac Bunin, a founding member of the congregation and a local merchant organized a "Hebrew" meat market.<sup>9</sup> Also Alvin Garber, originally a member of the Arpin Jewish community, was a *shochet*, someone who could

<sup>1</sup> "Jewish (Immigration)", in Wyatt, Barbara L., editor. *Cultural resource Management in Wisconsin. Three volumes. Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986.*

<sup>2</sup> Obituary, "Solomon Glover", *Stevens Point Journal*, 22 June 1907, page 1.

<sup>3</sup> *United States 1880 Census, Wisconsin, Portage, Roll 1442 Book 1, page 188.*

<sup>4</sup> *Business Directory, City of Stevens Point, 1912.*

<sup>5</sup> Advertisement, *Stevens Point Journal*, November 1873.

<sup>6</sup> Advertisement, *Stevens Point Journal*, 17 March, 1904.

<sup>7</sup> Bowersock, R.G., "The Story of Jewry in Stevens Point", Portage County Historical Society Collection, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Area Research Center, ca. 1942.

<sup>8</sup> Bowersock, R.G.

<sup>9</sup> "New Hebrew Meat Market", *Stevens Point Journal*, 17 May 1902.

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Temple Beth Israel

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supervise the ritual preparation of meat.<sup>10</sup> In later years members who kept kosher would procure their meat from Milwaukee or Chicago.

By October 1904, under the leadership of Israel Shafton, the Jewish community raised \$480 from merchants, including Ida Glover, to purchase a lot in a Jewish neighborhood on Water Street where they would build their synagogue. In July 1905 the Beth Israel Congregation was incorporated, with Shafton as president.<sup>11</sup> Construction of the synagogue began in August 1905 and on Rosh Hashanah Rabbi Rubenstein of Milwaukee officiated at the dedication,<sup>12</sup> most likely reading from the Frank family's Torah, which they had promised to give to the congregation, once it was established.<sup>13</sup> In April 1906 the congregation secured a \$1000 mortgage,<sup>14</sup> which was satisfied in July 1940.<sup>15</sup>

In 1908 Shabbat services, normally held at sundown on Fridays, were held Saturdays from 8-9 PM, an accommodation that Jewish merchants had to make to their Christian clientele.<sup>16</sup> In later years services were on Friday at 9:15 PM.<sup>17</sup> The Beth Israel Congregation did not maintain a cemetery. Burials took place in Milwaukee, Kenosha, Sheboygan, Appleton, Chicago, or Wausau.

Beth Israel Congregation ultimately grew to as many as 40 families, primarily from Stevens Point, Marshfield, Wisconsin Rapids, but also from Fremont, Weyauwega, Pittsville, Adams, Waupaca, Friendship, and New London. From approximately 1930 to 1964 the congregation employed full time rabbis (List appended). Prior to 1930 rabbis from Wausau sometimes conducted funeral services in Stevens Point, but graveside ceremonies were conducted by rabbis in the cities where the burials took place. From 1913 until 1951 Alvin Garber functioned as cantor, especially on high holy days.

Beth Israel was organized as an orthodox congregation, reflecting the eastern European origins of many of its members, but in 1940, when Rabbi Curt Reach—a conservative Jew and refugee from Danzig, Germany—was hired,<sup>18</sup> Beth Israel became a conservative congregation, which it remained until its

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<sup>10</sup> Obituary, "Alvin Garber", *Stevens Point Journal*, 9 June 9, 1972.

<sup>11</sup> "Jewish Synagogue", *Stevens Point Journal*, 9 September 1905.

<sup>12</sup> "Jewish New Year Services", *Stevens Point Journal*, 28 Sept. 1905.

<sup>13</sup> Bowersock.

<sup>14</sup> *Abstract of Title compiled in the abstract office of R. K. McDonald & Co.*, Stevens Point, Wisconsin, Portage County Historical Society Collection, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Area Research Center.

<sup>15</sup> "Burn Mortgage at Beth Israel Temple Dinner", *Stevens Point Journal*, 5 November 1940.

<sup>16</sup> *Directory of Stevens Point and Portage County*, The Gazette, 318 Main, Stevens Point, 1908.

<sup>17</sup> "Church Services", *Stevens Point Journal*, April 1960.

<sup>18</sup> Obituary, "Rabbi Curt Reach", *Stevens Point Journal*, 7 May 1963.

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dissolution in 1986, when a minyan no longer could be assembled.<sup>19</sup>

The founders of Beth Israel were active in promoting and defending their faith. In 1905, a few weeks after the dedication of the synagogue, in the aftermath of pogroms in Russia, a news article in the Stevens Point Journal, reported that members of the community had donated \$45 for the "assistance of the Jews now suffering persecution at the hands of the fanatical Russians".<sup>20</sup> The founders also established a B'nai B'rith lodge in 1915. By 1921 there were 66 enrolled members, mainly from Stevens Point, Marshfield, Waupaca, and Wisconsin Rapids, but also from Thorpe, Weyauwega, Westfield, Wautoma, Coloma, Freemont, Iola, and Amherst.<sup>21</sup> By 1931 the lodge had gone defunct and was reestablished. Between 1931 and 1946, the new lodge had enrolled 86 members.<sup>22</sup> The B'nai B'rith lodge at its monthly meetings had invited speakers on a variety of topics.<sup>23</sup> It supported a B'nai B'rith Youth Organization in the area, and twice hosted the state conference of B'nai B'rith. The lodge contributed money to the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee to endow a "Hebrew chair" and asked the college in Stevens Point to sponsor an Israeli student. The lodge was vigilant concerning anti-Semitism, or any type of discrimination. It arranged for a representative of the Anti Defamation League to visit the local high school, and in 1960 it supported the attorney general of Wisconsin in contesting the "restricted clientele" policy of the Wittig Point Resort in Boulder Junction.<sup>24</sup>

Whereas the men of B'nai B'rith concerned themselves primarily with matters in the society outside the congregation, the women of Beth Israel organized Sisterhood, an organization not unlike the Ladies Aid Societies that were prevalent in Christian churches, was interested primarily with the maintenance of the Synagogue.<sup>25</sup> The Sisterhood at its monthly meetings had programs for the members and planned monthly card parties, public dinners, rummage sales and bake sales, all of which were fundraisers for the congregation. Indeed the Sisterhood contributed significantly to the satisfaction of the original mortgage, the financing the 1951 remodeling of the synagogue, the upkeep of the building, and to the salaries of the rabbi, a cleaning lady and a Sunday school teacher. The minutes of the Sisterhood reveal

<sup>19</sup> "A missing piece in our cultural mosaic", *Stevens Point Journal*, 4 October 1985; "Era ends at Stevens Point's synagogue", *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 21 1986.

<sup>20</sup> "Money for Russia Jews", *Stevens Point Journal*, Nov 22, 1905.

<sup>21</sup> *B'nai B'rith Membership Book*, Portage County Historical Society Collection, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Area Research Center.

<sup>22</sup> *B'nai B'rith Membership Book*.

<sup>23</sup> *B'nai B'rith Minutes*, 1951-1966, Portage County Historical Society Collection, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Area Research Center.

<sup>24</sup> *B'nai B'rith Minutes*, 17 November 1960.

<sup>25</sup> *Sisterhood Minutes*, 1928-1964, Portage County Historical Society Collection, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Area Research Center.

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Temple Beth Israel  
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that the women were vigilant defenders of their Orthodox faith. On one occasion they passed a formal motion to be conveyed to the B'nai B'rith, stating that the men should "prohibit serving meat and milk products together in the Temple building",<sup>26</sup> and on another occasion stated that "no traiffa [non-kosher] food be brought to the Shule".<sup>27</sup> In 1939, the Sisterhood passed a motion that "a general meeting of the congregation shall be held, regarding as to the ways and means of eliminating the services of the rabbi".<sup>28</sup> Soon thereafter the rabbi departed. In 1941 the new Rabbi Reach recognized the influence of the Sisterhood when he urged them to use their influence on their husbands to attend Friday services.<sup>29</sup> The Sisterhood was affiliated with the National and State Federations of Temple Sisterhoods, and its members were also enrolled in Hadassah, a Zionist charitable organization that focuses on health care. Between 1928 and 1964 the Sisterhood maintained a membership of 25 or more women.<sup>30</sup>

**Social Involvement:** The activities of the Beth Israel Congregation and its members was not limited to their own membership, but extended into the Stevens Point community. Arthur Levinson was active in ecumenical efforts and claims to have spoken to every Christian congregation in town.<sup>31</sup> The congregation was a member of the Stevens Point Council of Churches, and when Beth Israel hosted the Council of Churches, Rabbi Reach was the preacher.<sup>32</sup> Rabbi Reach invited the Stevens Point community to attend a Purim play performed by the children and also rotated with other, Christian clergy in delivering daily 15 minute devotions on WLBL radio,<sup>33</sup> served as a director of the Stevens Point Community chest, and was appointed to serve on the "Mayor's Committee on Interfaith Unity" during World War II.<sup>34</sup> The B'nai B'rith lodge sponsored a bowling team and little league baseball team for youth of all religions. They purchased literature from the Anti-defamation League and distributed it to teachers in local schools as well as to a sociology professor at the local college and developed a "citizenship essay contest" administered in the local school districts. The Sisterhood, as noted above, hosted card parties and gave dinners, open to the community. During World War II the Sisterhood was especially active, volunteering for the USO center and the Red Cross and organizing Red Cross bandage-knitting groups. Rabbi Reach's wife, Louise, also served as co-chair of the Red

<sup>26</sup> *Sisterhood Minutes*, 12 October 1937.

<sup>27</sup> *Sisterhood Minutes*, 2 February 1944.

<sup>28</sup> *Sisterhood Minutes*, 11 July 1939.

<sup>29</sup> *Sisterhood Minutes*, 1 July 1941.

<sup>30</sup> *Sisterhood Financial Records*, Portage County Historical Society Collection, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Area Research Center.

<sup>31</sup> "A missing piece in our cultural mosaic".

<sup>32</sup> *Sisterhood Minutes*, March 1942.

<sup>33</sup> "WLBL Programs", *Stevens Point Journal*, 8 February, 1942.

<sup>34</sup> "Need for Unity is emphasized at Dedication", *Stevens Point Journal* Nov 27 1944, page 1.

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Temple Beth Israel

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Cross.<sup>35</sup> Members of the Sisterhood volunteered for the war effort, training for first aid and home nursing, functioning as block captains and minute men, assisting with sugar rationing and draft registration.<sup>36</sup>

Individual members of the Stevens Point Jewish Community were recognized as leading members of the Stevens Point community, as evidenced by their obituaries being featured on the front page of the local newspapers. In January 1900, the front page obituary of Louis Wiesner stated that "a company of seventeen Odd Fellows marched up to the residence of the deceased.... On being admitted they gathered about the bier of their deceased brother and carried out the ritual for the burial of the dead.... The remains were then taken to the depot [for transport by train to Appleton] escorted by the Odd Fellows...."<sup>37</sup> When the earliest Jewish settler Solomon Glover died, the front page obituary stated: "He was widely known years ago through central Wisconsin and many old friends will learn of the death of Solomon Glover with real regret."<sup>38</sup> Forty years later an editorial about A.L. Shafton stated: "He was a liberal supporter of all worthy public causes. It is safe to say that Stevens Point has had few, if any, citizens whose private benefactions were as many and varied and bestowed with such a lack of ostentation as were those of Mr. Shafton. The sadness of the community over the death of Mr. Shafton is deep, genuine and understandable."<sup>39</sup> Three additional obituaries of members of Beth Israel provide examples of the extent of community involvement achieved by the second generation of the Jewish community in Stevens Point.

Ben Garber was a member of the American Legion, member and president of the Lions Club and of the Central Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce. He received the Distinguished Citizen Award from the Junior Chamber of Commerce in 1964. Garber was a member and past president of the Stevens Point Curling Club, a lay advisory board member of the River Pines Community Health Center and of St Michael's [Roman Catholic] Hospital, a board member of the Stevens Point Housing Authority and a member of the National Conference of Christians and Jews and also was an active participant in "Panacea", an annual fund raiser for the Catholic high school.<sup>40</sup>

Peter Slomann received the Jaycee's Distinguished Citizens Award in 1963, contributed to the development of Slomann Park in Stevens Point, was president of the Chamber of Commerce, a

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<sup>35</sup> *Sisterhood Minutes*, July 1943.

<sup>36</sup> *Sisterhood Minutes*, 1 December, 1942.

<sup>37</sup> "Louis Wiesner Killed", *Stevens Point Journal*, 10 January 1900, page 1.

<sup>38</sup> Obituary, "Solomon Glover".

<sup>39</sup> "A.L. Shafton", *Stevens Point Journal*, 5 May 5 1948, page 1.

<sup>40</sup> Obituary, "Ben Garber", *Stevens Point Journal*, 13 March 1984.

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member of the Masonic Lodge, the Shriners, the Elks, the Moose Lodge and the Kiwanis Club. He served on the Citizens Committee for the public schools and worked on the campaign to build Stevens Point's municipal swimming pool. He was also on the board of directors of Licensed Beverage Industries, Inc.<sup>41</sup>

Albert Schein was a member of the Elks, the Lions Club, the Stevens Point Chamber of Commerce, the American Legion, the Stevens Point Music Council, the Masonic Lodge, and the Central Wisconsin Shrine Club. He was a member and district chairman of the Samoset Council of the Boy Scouts. Schein was the founder of the Stevens Point Community Chest, an active campaign worker for the Red Cross, and president of the Central Wisconsin Underwriters association.<sup>42</sup>

**Commercial Involvement:** From the beginnings of the Jewish community in Stevens Point, members of Beth Israel Congregation played a significant role in the commercial development of the community. From 1873 to 2000 there were at least 100 Jewish enterprises in the city. These ranged from individuals who were horse and cattle traders, peddlers, junk dealers, or operators of small stores to multi-million-dollar enterprises with state-wide operations. Many of these remained in business for 20-30 years, while 10 or more were in business for 50-60 years. For a century, the Stevens Point downtown business district was home to many, prominent retail stores. Among the earliest were a millinery store on Main Street operated by Ida Glover from 1880<sup>43</sup> - ca.1912<sup>44</sup> and Brill's clothing store operated by Isaac Brill and his son Louis from ca. 1873<sup>45</sup> until 1904.<sup>46</sup> Louis Brill also became vice president and then president of Citizens National Bank<sup>47</sup>, now J P Morgan Chase Bank, aka Bank One. The first president of Beth Israel Congregation, Israel Shafton, with his sons, operated variety and clothing stores from 1898 until his death in 1947. He built one building in the business district (now part of the Portage County Public Library building) and owned a number of others. Shafton also was on the board of directors of the Citizens Building and Loan, which today is the Anchor Bank.<sup>48</sup> Albert and Adele Schein were New York Life Insurance agents from 1940 - 1987. Albert served as president and member of the Central Wisconsin Underwriters association. After her husband's death Adele continued the agency and became one of Stevens Point's most prominent businesswomen. She was president of the Underwriters Association, received the National Quality Award for 35 years and was a life member

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<sup>41</sup> "Peter Slomann dies; businessman, civic leader", *Stevens Point Journal*, 3 Feb 1977, page 1.

<sup>42</sup> "Insurance Agent Albert W. Schein Dies at Hospital", *Stevens Point Journal*, 12 December 1953, page 1.

<sup>43</sup> *United States 1880 Census*, Wisconsin, Portage, Roll 1442 Book 1, Page 188b.

<sup>44</sup> *Business Directory, City of Stevens Point*, 1912.

<sup>45</sup> Advertisement, *Stevens Point Journal*, November 1873.

<sup>46</sup> Advertisement, *Stevens Point Journal*, 17 March 1904.

<sup>47</sup> Wright's Directory of Stevens Point, A G Wright, Milwaukee, 1903.

<sup>48</sup> "Israel Shafton, Pioneer Local Merchant, Dies", *Stevens Point Journal*, 15 January 1947, page 1.

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of the women's Leaders Round Table and the New York Life's Top Club.<sup>49</sup> Albert Mirman, his son Harvey, and son-in-law Arthur Levinson, together with their wives, operated a furniture store on Main Street for 50 years. Leon and Ida Rudnick operated a grocery store on the public square for 50 years. A. L. Shafton operated the popular City Fruit Exchange from 1905-1919, when he and Peter Slomann formed A.L. Shafton & Co., a wholesale grocery firm. When Prohibition ended, Shafton and Slomann decided to expand into liquor. In 1939 Slomann transformed the liquor division into Northwest Liquor, which developed into a multi-million-dollar wholesale liquor business with operations in Stevens Point, Eau Claire, Superior, La Crosse, and Rhinelander. A.L. Shafton also was part owner in Shafton, Inc. of Superior and of the Wisconsin Distributing Co., Wausau. With these business ventures, Shafton distributed wholesale groceries to all of central and northwest Wisconsin.<sup>50</sup> William Zenoff who started in business as a small grocer in 1940, later purchased Krembs Hardware and transformed it into a large furniture store. In 1969 Zenoff built the Holiday Inn and Holi-dome, at the time, one of the largest in the State of Wisconsin, which transformed Stevens Point into a lucrative convention location. Zenoff also donated the land for a baseball park, which the city developed and named after him.

These are but several examples of the contributions of the Stevens Point Jewish community to the economic development of the city and region.

**Epilogue:** For 127 years members of the Beth Israel Congregation contributed greatly to the development of the Stevens Point Community. The synagogue was the focal point of the city's Jewish community. The community had begun when Solomon Glover opened his hardware store and saw at least 100 business enterprises established. From 1930-1950 twenty to thirty businesses were operating in Stevens Point, mainly in the downtown business district. During those peak years, as many as forty Jewish families resided in Stevens Point and the membership of Temple Beth Israel numbered more than 100. After 1950 the Jewish population declined, as the older generation died or retired to other cities, and their children left town. By 1960, eighteen Jewish businesses were still in operation. By 1970 this number had dwindled to ten, and by 1990 only two remained. With the sale of the Holiday Inn in 1996, only one small grocery store remained in operation, and with its closing in 2000 there no longer were any Jewish firms in Stevens Point.

When, in 1986, the Beth Israel Congregation no longer could assemble the minyan required to conduct religious services, the trustees disbanded the congregation and deeded it as a museum to the Portage County Historical Society, to memorialize Stevens Point's Jews. The founders of the Jewish community had died. Their children or grandchildren had moved away. The only signs of Stevens

<sup>49</sup> Obituary, "Adele Schein", *Stevens Point Journal*, 25 August 1994.

<sup>50</sup> "A.L. Shafton".

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Point's Jewish residents are the synagogue, David Kalisky's building on the public square, and the front facade of Israel Shafton's building, which was saved and incorporated into the Portage County Library building. Since Beth Israel Congregation did not bury its dead in Stevens Point, Temple Beth Israel is the congregation's only visible monument.

Throughout the period of significance Temple Beth Israel was the center of the Jewish community in Stevens Point. Not only did it serve as the place of worship, it was also the center of membership organizations and social groups. As the building most closely associated with the Jewish community in the city, the synagogue represents the history and the identity of this social group.

**Criteria Consideration A:**

Ordinarily, properties associated with religious groups are not eligible for listing. However, Temple Beth Israel meets the consideration because its significance is for its historical importance as the property most closely associated with the social history of the Jewish community in Stevens Point.

*The Department of Significance*



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*Abstract of Title compiled in the abstract office of R. K. McDonald & Co., Stevens Point, Wisconsin, Portage County Historical Society Collection, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Area Research Center.*

*B'nai B'rith Membership Book, Portage County Historical Society Collection, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Area Research Center.*

*B'nai B'rith Minutes, 1951-1966, Portage County Historical Society Collection, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Area Research Center.*

*Bowersock, R.G., "The Story of Jewry in Stevens Point", Portage County Historical Society Collection, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Area Research Center, ca. 1942.*

*Business Directory, City of Stevens Point, 1912.*

*Directory of Stevens Point and Portage County, The Gazette, 318 Main, Stevens Point, 1908.*

*Sisterhood Financial Records, Portage County Historical Society Collection, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Area Research Center.*

*Sisterhood Minutes, 1928-1964, Portage County Historical Society Collection, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Area Research Center.*

*Stevens Point Journal, 1873, 1900, 1902, 1904, 1905, 1907, 1940, 1942, 1944, 1947, 1948, 1953, 1960, 1963, 1972, 1977, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1994.*

*United States 1880 Census, Wisconsin, Portage, Roll 1442 Book 1.*

*Wright's Directory of Stevens Point, A G Wright, Milwaukee, 1903.*

*Wyatt, Barbara L., editor. Cultural resource Management in Wisconsin. Three volumes. Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986.*

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**Boundary Description:**

Commencing at the distance of one hundred fifty (150) feet North Westerly from the South Westerly corner of Out Lot number Twelve (12), being corner of Mill and Water Streets; thence North Easterly at right angles with Water Street one hundred twenty (120) feet; thence in a North Westerly direction parallel with Water Street sixty (60) feet; thence in a South Westerly direction at right angles with said Water Street one hundred and twenty (120) feet to Water Street; thence in a South Easterly direction along line of Water Street sixty (60) feet to the initial point or place of beginning, --being a part of Out Lot number Eleven (11) in Strong, Ellis and Others Plat to the Town, now city, of Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

**Boundary Justification:**

The nominated property consists of the entire lot that has been historically associated with the property.

\_\_\_\_ End of Boundary Descriptions

## **Congregation Beth Israel Rabbis**

**Alvin Garber**, cantor, ca. 1913-1951 (1913-1924 in Arpin, 1924 moved to Wisconsin Rapids)

**A. Hoffman**, ca. 1930/31

**Myron Rissman**, 1931-1932

**David Davis**, 1934

**Pastinsky**, Oct. 1937

**B. Gillman**, 1936-July 1939

**P.D. Cohen**, Dec. 1939

**Curt Reach**, April 1940-Jan. 1945

**Becker**, Nov. 1945

**S.K. Shapiro**, Feb. 1947-Sept. 1948

**Isaac N. Lerer**, August 1949-July 1951

**Dov Schwarcz**, Sept. 1951 (went to La Crosse)

**David J. Matzner**, August 1954-April 1955(went to Wausau)

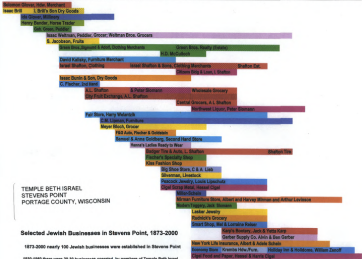
**Gruenfield**, Sept. 1955

**Bernard Schwab**, Oct. 1957-April 1962

**Harden**, Aug. 1963

**Kline**, April 30 1964

TEMPLE BETH ISRAEL  
STEVENS POINT  
PORTAGE COUNTY, WISCONSIN



TEMPLE BETH ISRAEL  
 STEVENS POINT  
 PORTAGE COUNTY, WISCONSIN

**Selected Jewish Businesses in Stevens Point, 1873-2000**

1873-2000 nearly 100 Jewish businesses were established in Stevens Point

1940-1960 there were 20-30 businesses operated by members of Temple Beth Israel