

A Typical Friday Evening at The Jewish Synagogue in Bristol

By Ellen M. Carach

There are churches of many Christian denominations in Bristol County, some over a hundred years old, like the "White Church" in Barrington, and others very definitely 20th century, such as the Christian Science Society Building on County Road in that same town.

For Jewish families moving to Bristol County, there is a small Synagogue in Bristol, tucked away amongst Colonial houses at 205 High Street. This synagogue is by no means a new venture. The congregation has celebrated its 60th anniversary and the building is about 50 years old.

Its exterior of white clapboards blend well into the New England surroundings and if it were not for the strange sight of Hebrew letters spelling out the name Chevra Agudas Achim — United Brothers Synagogue — a visitor might walk by it without taking notice.

Should he walk in around 8.15 p.m. on the first Friday of every month, he would find a great deal of hustle and bustle going on. Monthly services are held at this time, with a social hour following the religious part of the program.

On the ground floor of the building is a large activity room, recently redecorated in cheerful yellow with gray trim, with an adjacent kitchenette. The ladies of the Sisterhood are busy welcoming old friends and visitors alike, placing a white table cloth on the large banquet table and setting out dishes and spoons, cafeteria style. Another group is in the kitchen, starting up the coffee urn, arranging savory spreads and salads on suitable dishes and placing home-made cakes and cookies on large trays, ready for serving during the social hour.

By about 8:20 p.m., the guest speaker for the evening and the cantor or choral group have arrived and are introduced all around. Programs during the 1960-61 season have included talks on Jewish music and art; on how to read the Bible intelligently; education; archeology in Israel; religious influence on modern law and the interrelationship between Judaism and Islam. The last named was part of a series on religions other than Judaism which has included a program about the Congregational Church. The series will be continued this year.

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At 8:30 o'clock, the president of the congregation invites everyone to go upstairs to the synagogue proper, to take a prayer book from the shelf and be seated. The synagogue was erected by orthodox Jews who did not believe that men and women could pray without distraction when sitting side by side. The synagogue therefore has a gallery in the orthodox tradition which was used by the ladies for many years. But today, men and women sit together and the gallery is used for added seating space. The synagogue is not large and is simple in decoration but it has an atmosphere of warmth and serenity. Pews are freshly painted and the place has a well cared for look. The ark at the front end of the building contains two Torahs or scrolls with the five books of Moses. An embroidered curtain is drawn across the ark when the Torahs are not in use.

The Friday evening service begins with a psalm welcoming the Sabbath, sung by the cantor or choir. One of the men of the tor for the evening and reads congregational acts as coordinated portions of the prayers in English. After the Kiddush — blessing of the wine — the speaker is introduced and delivers his address. Everyone joins in sing-

ing the closing hymn. Then it is "Good Shabbos" all around.

Some people stay behind to talk informally with the speaker. Others go downstairs and partake of the refreshments. Soon the aroma of coffee is too much for those who stayed behind and they, too, come to taste the food. But the talking does not stop. The speakers always provide stimulating discussion and many questions covering the subject of the evenings are aired over the coffee. If there is time, song sheets are passed around and everyone joins in singing old favorites. Occasionally chairs are pushed aside and a group will dance the Hora which is an Israeli dance.

Who are the people who belong to the Synagogue? Some are New Englanders by birth, some have actually lived in Bristol all their lives, others came many years ago and chose Rhode Island as their home. Others have moved to Bristol County from all parts of the U. S. A., during the last five years. Ages range from young married couples in their early twenties to senior members who were married in this synagogue some forty years ago. For the youngsters, ages 7 to 13, a religious school is conducted on Wednesday afternoon.

All the members of United Brothers Synagogue share a hope that the congregation will grow and prosper and they extend a friendly welcome to visitors of all faiths.