



VilnaScribe

THE VILNA SHUL

Boston's Center
for Jewish Culture
18 Philips Street
Boston, MA
617.523.2324

Vote early and vote often for the Vilna!

Help us win \$100,000 as we uncover what is "Just Beneath the Surface"

Join us at special events to celebrate!

Starting today, you can help the Vilna Shul win \$100,000 to uncover and restore a full wall of murals in the historic sanctuary. Twenty-five sites in Greater Boston have been selected by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in cooperation with American Express to be included in the 2009 Partners in Preservation (PiP) program. The program will award a total of \$1 million to ten sites in the area that showcase Greater Boston's rich cultural heritage. **The Vilna Shul is the only Jewish site to ever be included in the Partners in Preservation program**, a program that has already awarded \$2.5 million to historic sites in Chicago, San Francisco, and New Orleans.

How can you make sure we are among the ten sites to receive a share of the \$1 million? Vote! Vote early and vote often! You, your family and friends can vote everyday from mid-April to May 17, 2009 by visiting www.partnersinpreservation.com or our website, www.vilnashul.org, and voting for the Vilna Shul. The historic site that receives the most votes is guaranteed \$100,000 towards a project that will help preserve that site. Nine other sites will be selected by American Express, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and an Advisory Committee comprised of Greater Boston civic and preservation leaders. They will base their decision on the historic value of each site's preservation project.



What project would the \$100,000 award fund at the Vilna? We plan to completely uncover the decorative murals painted in 1920 on the back wall of the women's seating section in the main sanctuary. Eastern European Jews had the tradition of brightly painting and decorating their prayer spaces. They brought this tradition with them when they immigrated to America. The Vilna Shul, congregation painted murals on the walls three times in the early years of the

building. Then, they mysteriously covered over the murals with layers of beige paint. Why would they do this? Did they run out of money? Did they feel that beige walls were more American than bright murals? Whatever the reason, the murals were covered up so early in the history of the building that even people who attended the Vilna Shul as children in the 1930s have no memory of the painted walls.

In 1998, small patches of the three unique schemes of wall art were revealed. But due to funding constraints, the rest of the walls have remained covered, keeping hidden the full story of the designs, scenes and patterns that originally adorned the sanctuary walls.

With the help of your votes in the Partners in Preservation program, we hope to secure the \$100,000 award and to once again share the Vilna Shul murals with the world. In exposing and reconstructing the original wall paintings, we will also offer a chance to reconstruct a piece of Eastern European Jewish culture in America and make it tangible to the thousands of people who enter the Vilna Shul each year. Revealing the artwork of the Vilna Shul walls is akin to revealing the souls and spirits of the everyday men and women who prayed in this building and who built communities in the West End of Boston and throughout America.

To celebrate being part of the Partners in Preservation Program and to thank you for your votes of support, we hope you will join us for several special events. We will be having an open house Saturday, May 2nd and Sunday, May 3rd. We invite you to bring your friends in to see the wonderful building you have so generously supported.

Vote Vilna everyday! Pass it on! www.partnersinpreservation.com

CONTENTS:

- 1 Partners in Preservation
- 2 Letter from the President
- 3 Things are Happening at the Shul
- 4 Who is This Lady and Former Neighbor?
- 5 An Open Question to the Vilna Shul Community
From our Window
- 6 Havurah on the Hill

One of the most beloved residents of the late 19th century-early 20th century Jewish population in the West End of Boston was Judge Jennie Loitman Barron. For years, she devoted her life to her family, her profession, her judgeship and her Judaism. Professionally, Judge Barron worked fervently to overturn the law that prohibited women from serving on juries. Her private life was filled with ceaseless attention to her husband, her daughters and their families, and to her extended family of friends and relatives. She embraced both the personal and the professional with equal ardor and passion.

Jennie Loitman was one of four daughters born to immigrant parents, Fannie and Morris, who arrived from Europe to Boston in 1877. They ran a liquor business and lived at 77 Barton St. and/or 71 Allen St. After school, Jennie worked as a “hand” in a shoe factory and sold books door to door. At the age of sixteen and to finance her education, she taught night classes in citizenship to newcomers. She graduated from Boston Girls High School, the youngest in her class and the highest ranking. She went on to graduate from Boston University in three years and from Boston University Law School in two years.

Jennie married Attorney Samuel Barron. He became Executive Vice President of Homeowners Federal Savings and Loan Association of Boston. They met during high school, married after graduation from college, and raised three daughters. Jennie and Sam worked from the same office under the name

Barron and Barron. Their love affair endured until their deaths—his in 1968 and hers nine months later on March 23, 1969.

After being admitted to the Massachusetts Bar in 1914, Jennie was elected to the Boston School Committee in 1924. She became the first woman in Massachusetts to be appointed to the Municipal Court for life. Jennie Loitman Barron fought for women’s rights recognizing that, “The right of trial by jury was intended to give every citizen a trial by an impartial jury and judgment by one’s peers. To say that a woman before the Bar is entitled by her peers and then to exclude women from the jury room is to misinterpret the spirit which underlies our institutions. Jury service for women is another step toward the attainment of that universal justice for which the American nation stands”.

Jennie worked tirelessly in the Jewish community as well, speaking throughout New England about Zionism and the Jewish American experience. In 1925, she spoke at the Newburyport Women’s Club on the topic of “Our New Americans—Immigration and their Future; How it Affects Them and Us.” In 1926, she spoke to the Quincy members of Zionist Organizations and Hadassah on, “Why Every American Jew Should be a Zionist”.

In 1951, Jennie was cited for “qualities of heart and mind—a righteous judge, a constructive citizen, alerted to every good cause—a zealous champion of democracy—a Jewish woman of valor, who is bringing honor to the Jewish name and in the larger American community”.

Appointed to the Massachusetts Superior Court as an associate Justice in 1959, Jennie was the first woman to serve full time in that capacity. She was nominated by Governor Foster Furculo and confirmed by unanimous vote. Jenny earned a national reputation as a “judge with a heart”. Friends and colleagues described her as short, petite, and soft-spoken, but exceedingly alert, cordial, dynamic and brilliant. Judge Barron presided over cases of delinquency, traffic accidents, drunk driving, illegitimacy, neglect, murder, discrimination, juvenile problems, foster care, abortion and of course, the right of women to serve on juries.

She met with influential and ordinary people throughout the world traveling to Europe, the Middle East, Africa and South America. On July 4, 1960, Judge Barron had the privilege of giving the Independence Day oration at Faneuil Hall in Boston. She was the third woman of 177 speakers over 184 years to do so.

Judge Barron’s life and career were exceptional, particularly for a woman of her time in the United States. She was a pioneer who worked to enrich the community in which she lived, believing, “We cannot enjoy freedom without sharing responsibility. There is no liberty if there is no law.”

Material for this paper came from “The Jewish Friendship Trail” by Michael A. Ross, and papers, letters, and photos from the Schlesinger Library of Radcliffe College.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jack Swartz, President
David Gerzof, Vice President
Deborah Feinstein, Vice President
Stanley M. Smith, Vice President
Lawrence A. Schwartz,
Clerk/Treasurer

Arthur Bayer
Brenda P. Caplan
David Cohen
Deborah B. Cohen, Emeritus
Joshua Elkin
Paul S. Gass
Jack Glassman, AIA
David Glater
Maxine S. Goldberg
Murray Herscott
Louis E. Laskey
Ewajean Mintz, Emeritus
Richard G. Mintz, Emeritus
Jesse Sage
Eileen Samuels
Lee B. Silverman, Emeritus
Myles D. Striar, Emeritus
Sandy Swartz
Judy Usen
Richard S. Usen, Emeritus
Jeff Werner

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

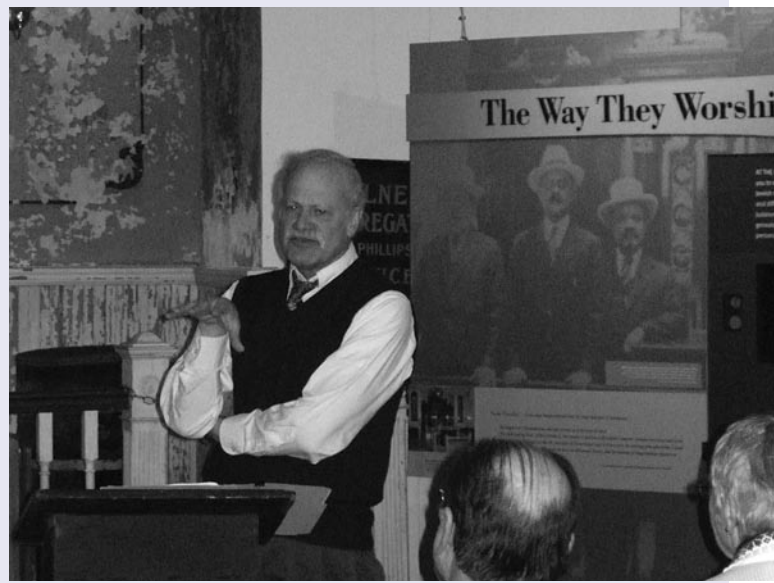
Rabbi Albert S. Axelrad
Daniel Bell
Pearl K. Bell
Anne Bernays
Peggy Charren
Kitty Dukakis
Arnold Hiatt
Justin Kaplan
Leonard Nimoy
Jane M. Rabb
Jehuda Reinharz
Shulamit Reinharz
Roger A. Saunders
S. Parkman Shaw, Jr.
Cynthia B. Shulman
Laurence H. Tribe
Sallyann Wekstein
Elie Wiesel

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Steven M. Greenberg



Norm H. Finkelstein speaking
to the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Boston



Professor Stephen Whitfield
at the Making a Mark Speaker Series

Things are happening at the Vilna

Things are happening at the Vilna!. We have expanded our programming, refocused our tours, and need your votes in the Partners in Preservation program—from April 14th until May 17th—to ensure our opportunity to move forward with the next phase of restoration. Attendance and programming have increased by nearly 80% from 2007 to 2008, and we are being contacted to host more programs and tours. Tourists from around the globe are finding us on the Internet as well as in tourist guide books. This winter we actually had visitors who searched us out despite the cold. We look forward to a busy year and welcoming new volunteers who would like to become docents. These photographs will give you an idea of the programs and events being hosted at the Vilna Shul.



Purim Celebration



Nicholas Negroponete and Doug Levin at the Vilna Speakers Series



Students from Solomon Schecter of Westchester, NY preparing for prayer

VILNA SHUL IS FINDING A PLACE IN BOSTON HISTORY

I am pleased to announce that word of the Vilna Shul, Boston's Center for Jewish Culture, is spreading. As members, supporters and friends of the Vilna Shul, you have known for a long time how important the Vilna Shul is not only to Jewish history, but also to Boston history. It is truly a special place. I was first drawn to the Vilna Shul many years ago out of interest in the physical restoration of the building. Now it has become clear to the Board of Directors, the staff and many of you that we must also recreate a Jewish presence in Boston. I thank you for your support. Whenever you give a gift to the Vilna Shul, attend one of the programs on our ever-expanding calendar of events, or tell a friend about the Vilna, you bring us closer to realizing our goals.

This past year more people took notice of this hidden gem tucked away on Beacon Hill. More and more school groups are taking cultural tours. Tour books and tour companies, such as Boston by Foot and Boston CityWalks, are including the Vilna Shul as a must-see site in Boston. We are collaborating with other museums around Beacon Hill to create a North Slope tour that highlights the notable landmarks and contributions of this diverse and ever-changing slice of Boston. As a result, tourists and locals alike are no longer merely stumbling upon the Vilna Shul. They are actively seeking us out.

I was especially excited to learn that the Vilna Shul was named one of twenty-five sites in Greater Boston to be included in the "Partners in Preservation" program. In this program the National Trust for Historic Preservation and American Express will give away a total of \$1 million for preservation projects in Greater Boston. People in Boston and around the world can vote everyday for the Vilna and show how important a Jewish presence in Boston is to them. Winning the competition and receiving \$100,000 will allow for the restoration of a full wall of murals in the historic sanctuary. I'll be voting online every day at www.partnerinpreservation.com between April 14 and May 17, and I hope you will join me! With any luck, next time I address you, it will be to tell you about the progress of the wall restoration project. Spread the word to your family and friends and encourage them to vote as well. Every vote counts.

Looking ahead towards the fall, I hope to see you at our annual Gala on September 13, 2009. The Vilna Shul will honor Rabbi David B. Starr, PhD, with the *Zvi R. Cohen Leadership and Legacy Award* in recognition of his contribution and commitment to Jewish tradition and history. I thank you all for your contributions and support and ask that you use the enclosed envelope to help us continue to restore a Jewish presence to Boston.

Very truly yours,



Jack Swartz, President

We are pleased to announce that the 2009 Zvi R. Cohen Leadership and Legacy Award for individual commitment to Jewish values, tradition and history will be awarded to Dr. David B. Starr, Vice President of Community Education at Hebrew College in Newton, MA. Dr. Starr is an expert on the subjects of modern Jewish history, Jewish education and adult Jewish learning in America. As the founding dean of the Me'ah adult learning program, Dr. Starr established a model of Jewish education for lay and professional leadership nationwide. He is also a leading scholar on the life and work of Solomon Schechter, founder of the Conservative Movement. His forthcoming book is called *The Origins of 20th Century Judaism: The Age of Solomon Schechter*, (University Press of New England).

As a much sought after scholar-in-residence, Dr. Starr has created experiential learning encounters for many Greater Boston synagogue members during weekend Shabbatons and for hundreds of participants on various community leadership missions to Israel for Combined Jewish Philanthropies. Dr. Starr has also touched the lives of many students beyond Hebrew College as a popular lecturer in the Hornstein Program for Jewish Communal Service at Brandeis University and as a rabbinic advisor to the Student Conservative Minyan at Harvard Radcliffe Hillel.

Dr. Starr received a B.A. from the University of Minnesota; an M.A. and Ph.D. from Columbia University; and an M.A. and rabbinical ordination from the Jewish Theological Seminary.

We will honor Dr. Starr at a cocktail reception at the Vilna Shul on **Sunday, September 13, 2009**. Please contact sandy@sandywartz.com or phone 617-686-6996 if you are interested in finding out more about this event.

DR. DAVID STARR TO RECEIVE THE ZVI R. COHEN AWARD

SAVE THE DATE!

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2009
THE VILNA SHUL, BOSTON'S
CENTER FOR JEWISH CULTURE,
CELEBRATES

Legacy of Learning

HONORING
RABBI DAVID B. STARR, PhD
WITH THE ZVI R. COHEN AWARD



AN OPEN QUESTION TO THE VILNA SHUL COMMUNITY

As the Vilna Shul strengthens its role as an historic site, cultural venue and spiritual place in Boston, we look to our next goal—being a place of learning for Jews and people of all faiths. This seems quite fitting as “shul” means “school” in Yiddish. My question to the Vilna Shul community is this—what type and form of learning should the Vilna Shul provide?

Some efforts are already underway. For example, we are in the early stages of establishing a Me’ah program (An intensive adult Jewish learning program of Hebrew College and Combined Jewish Philanthropies’ Commission on Jewish Continuity & Education). This will become the center of our formalized adult Jewish education program, but there is so much more we might consider doing:

- We could establish a forum, where leaders of various religions would engage in open discussion around common topics such as the pursuit of peace or helping the poor.
- We could host a local Jewish scholar, who holds regular hours at the Vilna and invites all who are interested to come and ask questions.
- We might even host a Daf Yomi, a one page of Talmud study per day or another form of Talmud study geared towards those who are new to it.
- To recognize the significance of Yiddish in the Jewish history of Boston, we might offer Yiddish classes.

The options are many. I am asking for your ideas about what would make the Vilna a place where you would come to learn.

Many have told us that we are already a place of learning. For many, the simple discovery of the Vilna begins the process of learning about an enriching and historical Jewish community. You have told us that the Vilna has allowed you to learn about your own Jewish heritage regardless of your style of participation in the Jewish community. Others have shared how the Vilna has helped to define or redefine their own sense of Judaism.

Our sages teach us that learning is key to a purposeful life. It is my belief that a strong element of education and learning is key to the continued growth and success of the Vilna Shul.

I appreciate your support and look forward to hearing your ideas on how we can move forward. Please call me at 617-523-2324 or email me at steven@vlnashul.org with suggestions. (Speaking of email, please sign up on our website so that we can communicate more easily going forward.)

Steven M. Greenberg



Executive Director

FROM OUR WINDOW by Gesa Kirsch and Tony Schreiner

When we first came to an open house viewing of our future home on Phillips Street, we looked out the living room window across the street and immediately saw the beautiful façade of the Vilna Shul. That was one important reason why we made the decision to buy and move in.

Not too long after we moved in that spring, Steven Greenberg introduced himself and made us feel welcome. In no time, we became friends and felt free to give favors and ask favors. For instance, we have become the alternate Saturday mail delivery point for the Shul.

But just as important, we appreciate living across the street from a historic place which hosts so many wonderful spiritual and cultural events. We enjoy watching the crowds arrive by taxi fleet or on foot for the monthly Havurah on the Hill. We take note of the many tourists and tour groups that stop in front of the Shul or go in. We see the construction of the Sukkahs and enjoy the singing drifting up to our windows on those last warm fall nights. A more quirky occasion was when one afternoon, we were relaxing on our top floor, and all of sudden heard a band playing and saw a festive group marching across the street and into the Shul; it turned out to be a traditional wedding.

When the “Reconnect to the Tapestry” historical exhibition was ready, Steven had planned a grand opening reception. He asked for our stove and pots to cook a big mound of fingerling potatoes. Regrettably, there was a heavy snow storm on opening day, and not very many people were able to come, but we were able to enjoy quite a lot of herring and potatoes ourselves. Fortunately, the exhibit has gone on to become a great success and continues to this day. Another time, Steven knocked on our door and said: “Come on over, Nicholas Negroponte from the One-laptop-per-child program is speaking tonight;” that was a pretty special event, and we appreciated the personal invitation.

We enjoy watching and participating in the many activities at the Shul, but beyond that, we also appreciate the community spirit shown by Steven. He attends community meetings, such as the long series of public hearings to plan the renovation of Phillips Park. He watches over the street and park and has introduced many neighbors to each other. Our view on the Vilna Shul has shown it to be an enriching presence on the north slope of Beacon Hill.

Havurah on the Hill

Friday night learning services remain an important part of spiritual programming at the Vilna Shul. Havurah on the Hill services provide a Jewish space for young adults and the young at heart one Friday night a month. Each event includes a volunteer-led learning service, a guest speaker, and a kosher buffet dinner in the historic sanctuary.

Recently-featured guest speakers were as follows:

In November, Israeli Consul General Nadav Tamir discussed aspects of Israel not often thought about. He also discussed the dimensions of a special connection between Israel and Boston.

January's event featured Tamar Morad, a local journalist who recently edited the book *Iraq's Last Jews*, a compilation of oral histories recounting the once vibrant 2,500 year old Jewish community of Iraq.

In February, Professor Frances Malino, the Sophia Moses Robison Professor of Jewish Studies and History at Wellesley College and chair of the Jewish Studies Program, talked about her research of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, a network of Jewish schools run by French Jews in Northern Africa and the Ottoman Empire. These 19th century schools were organized with the intention of westernizing Sephardi Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa.

In March, Rachel Fish explained her work uncovering a scandal at Harvard Divinity School in which the school had accepted funds from the Emir of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Zayed. Fish exposed Sheikh Zayed's abuse of human rights and proliferation of anti-Semitic propaganda. She also discussed her current work as a graduate student at Brandeis University and with the David Project.

In April, Nancy Falchuk, National President of Hadassah discussed the legacy and future of Zionism both as a term and as a movement. She engaged the audience in a wide ranging discussion of what Zionism means to them and to Jews throughout the world.

Join us in the coming months as we welcome guest speakers: writer and comedian Bill Novak on May 15th; young adult kosher restaurant manager Haim Cohen of Rami's in Brookline on June 19th; and Art Rotman, President of the Russian Jewish Community Foundation, on July 17th.

Havurah on the Hill also celebrated Purim with a pre-Purim Megillah reading and costume party. The celebration brought together over 100 young adults from throughout Greater Boston.

We look forward to seeing you at future events!

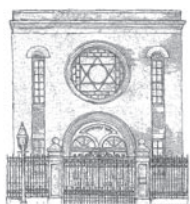
THE VILNA SHUL

Boston Center
for Jewish Culture
18 Phillips Street
Boston, MA 02114-6356

Affiliate
of the Combined
Jewish Philanthropies
and
Official Project
of Save America's
Treasures

*Visit us Online at: www.vilnashul.org
for the latest news and event listings*

Non-profit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
Boston, MA
Permit No. 732



VilnaScribe