

## Tradition

From the Shavei Tzion Archives

April 2014 Judith Temime

From its inauguration in 1938, the synagogue in **Shavei Tzion** has been a central institution in the life of the community here and, of course, in **Rexingen**, Germany, the village of origin of the first settlers of the moshav, the synagogue was a meeting place that brought the community together. In the exhibition catalogue *Place of Refuge and Safe Harbor* written by **Heinz Hoegerle**, **Barbara Staudacher** and **Carsten Kohlmann** and published in 2008 to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the moshav, we read that the first synagogue in **Rexingen** was built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But by 1835, the Jewish community there numbered 355 persons and "the synagogue had long since become too small". A new synagogue, in the neo-classical style, was built in **Rexingen** between 1836-7 and it "was a source of pride to the community". The large new synagogue was dedicated in 1837 in a ceremony "that gave the community the chance to reflect on a collective history of at least 200 years."



Interior of the **Rexingen** synagogue, 1937.

From the collection of the **Shavei Tzion Archives**.

The **Shavei Tzion** newsletter *B'yachad (Together)*, in September 1992, published the farewell speech spoken by **Zev Berlinger** at the synagogue in **Rexingen** on the eve of the departure from Germany of the first settlers of the moshav. Thus, said **Zev**: "We've gathered here today...we who are leaving for Eretz Yisrael, to bid you farewell. It is our desire to remove to Eretz Yisrael (*the Land of Israel*), the Jewish community of **Rexingen**, with all of institutions and social relations. But if we do establish a new village, based in collectivism, will we be able to sustain it? I cannot deny my fears, but I look to God, the strength that has protected the unity and amity of the Jewish people throughout the generations, and I look to our religion and to the Bible. We settlers will be able to lean on the community traditions of **Rexingen**, and whoever has had the privilege of celebrating the Sabbath (in **Rexingen**), has felt the religious atmosphere that joins and unites the Jews of the community. There are those for whom religion has little significance because they have not yet experienced the force that binds a religious community. Such persons have not learned the history of the Jews. Had they done so, they would know that without the Bible, the Jewish people would not have survived and will not survive. Neither by fire nor water, neither by inquisition and persecution nor assimilation have (*the gentiles*) succeeding in cutting the ties of Israel to its faith. The Jews of **Rexingen** are the descendants of that 'stiff-necked people' who stubbornly clung to the tradition of their fathers, and only a fatal blow might shock and change them."

The courageous group aliyah (immigration) of the **Rexingen** villagers was accomplished in the shadow of the Nazi regime which had made life impossible for Jews there, but readers must understand that in **Rexingen** until that point in time and throughout the history of the local community, there had been "close relations...between the Jewish and Christian inhabitants of the place". So wrote **Yael Ezri** in the March 1992 issue of *B'yachad*. She added, "more telling than 1,000 testimonies, is the story of the wonderful rescue of the Torah scroll from the events of Kristallnacht." **Uri Gefen**, the archivist in **Shavei Tzion** for more than 20 years, told **Yael**: "On the night between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1938, the Nazis burned

everything that symbolized, in their eyes, the Jewish culture they loathed: books, prayer books, synagogues." The newsletter continues with first-person evidence of that terrible night in **Rexingen**, as recorded by **Victor Neckarsulmer**, one of the community leaders: "I was woken by shouts 'The synagogue is burning!' I hurried to the synagogue and what I saw there was horrifying. The synagogue was ablaze in several places. S.A. men shattered lamps and wrenched memorial plaques from the walls. With rods and axes, they broke apart the cantor's podium, the Torah scrolls and the benches. The (*village*) firemen were there but they did nothing to abate the flames. When I asked why they weren't fighting the fire, they told me 'We've been forbidden to protect the synagogue. We must only ensure that the fire doesn't spread to the neighboring houses.' In my frustration, I went to the head of the local council. Making all sorts of excuses, he tried to whitewash the real reasons (*for the desecration*). Then I ran to the nearest telephone and called the head of the Jewish Council in Stuttgart. Only then did I learn (*that*) that same night, windows were broken in houses belonging to Jews. When I returned to the synagogue, the building was still standing but it was completely burnt. Torah scrolls, prayer books and prayer shawls that had not burned were gathered into a heap in a corner of the courtyard...and set afire again. On my way home, I was arrested. I was put into the jail in **Rexingen** (*together with other arrestees*). When a tenth arrestee arrived, someone said, 'Now nothing can happen to us—we have a minyan' (*quorum of worshippers*). Many others were arrested." The arrestees from **Rexingen** were later interned in Dachau, with many other persons from the district.

**Victor** continued his story: " About two weeks after we were released from Dachau (*and had returned to Rexingen*), **Ludwig Maurer**, a village policeman, asked me to visit him at his house and (*there*) he told me 'I pulled a Torah scroll from the heap of ashes at the synagogue (*and it's*) in pretty good shape. I know you'll soon be leaving with the second group heading for **Shavei Tzion**. If you want to take the Torah scroll, it's yours whenever you say'". **Victor** recalled, "I knew that it was dangerous to remove a Torah scroll (*from Germany*) without permission, but I decided to take the risk. Today, that scroll has found an honorable (*resting*) place in the **Rexingen** Memorial Room in

**Shavei Tzion**, a room consecrated to the memory of those **Rexingen** Jews who perished in the Holocaust, and dedicated to a community which was and is no more".



Torah scroll rescued from the **Rexingen** synagogue, November 10, 1938.

Rexingen Memorial Room, Beit Loewngart, **Shavei Tzion**.

From the collection of the **Shavei Tzion Archives**.

The aliyah of the **Neckarsulmer Family**—**Victor**, his wife **Hedwig** and their young son **Fritz (Uri)**—which had been planned for the end of 1938, was postponed because of **Victor's** incarceration in Dachau, and the desecrated Torah scroll arrived with them only at the beginning of 1939. Meanwhile, one Torah scroll served the little community in the settlers' camp in **Shavei Zion**, where the synagogue shared space with the communal dining room. Then, in his journal entry of September 23, 1938, **Dr. Manfred Scheuer**, the mukhtar (British Mandate –appointed headman) of the new settlement, wrote, "**Zev (Berlinger)** has brought a Torah scroll from Freudenthal. Now we have two scrolls for Rosh Hashanah." Did the second scroll bring with it a blessing for the moshav? On September 25, **Dr. Scheuer** wrote, "Rosh Hashanah Eve. War is in the air. Mobilization. Among us, too, there's an anxious suspense...but in the New Year, everything will change for the better!" And the following day, he wrote, "Rain!"

From the founding of the moshav, the settlers were obliged to find or invent a new framework that would respect their religious traditions. The institutions and customs that were so basic to the unity of Jewish life in **Rexingen** were put to difficult tests in **Shavei Zion**, in a reality that was altogether difficult. Activities undertaken for the benefit of the whole community sometimes conflicted with the exacting fulfillment of the mitzvot (religious commandments) that individuals had known well how to fulfill within their own families. In July 1938, **Dr. Scheuer** wrote, "Shabbat. At 7:30 (*in the evening*), I made up the work roster. There were three stars in the sky. **Zev Berlinger** complained, saying that until we've made havdalah (*the ceremony marking the end of the holy day*), it's still the Sabbath." And of the first day of Rosh Hashanah, he wrote, "I was on duty in the observation station on the watch tower until 5:00 in the morning. Afterwards, I was late to the Torah reading. One of the workers (*employed in mining sand on the seashore*), is also a Levite so that a second reader was not lacking." **Dr. Scheuer**, of course, in Germany, had neither composed work rosters nor performed nightly guard duty and, so, was not likely to have been late there in pursuing his religious obligations.

The discipline that bound members of the settlement and allowed them to build a successful moshav, didn't necessarily inform their performance of religious duties. About a particular Sabbath in May 1938, **Dr. Scheuer** wrote, "Not all of the members were present at prayers at 8:30 this morning. Some of them stayed away on principle." But those persons who did choose to attend prayers, enjoyed an experience that was familiar and comforting. **Dr. Scheuer** continued, "At the Holy Ark, **Pressburger (Alfred, who fell ill and died several months later)** read in turn with **(Hermann) Gideon**, with his pleasing voice. **Zev Berlinger** gave a lesson on the weekly Torah portion". And yet, how different the Sabbath was in Eretz Yisrael! Of one Sabbath in May 1938, **Dr. Scheuer** noted, "Before noon, we all went to swim (*in the sea*), under the protection of **Sally Lemberger's** hunting rifle". Such security measures quickly became part of the fabric of life in **Shavei Zion**. On Sabbath afternoons, one went down to the shore: "Swimming, with a pistol".

Not long after the founding of the moshav, a permanent home was constructed for the synagogue, the building we know today. And as we know, the building served for many years as the venue for members' assemblies, for festivities and even for the screening of movies each week. A heavy curtain was drawn across the podium in order to conceal the ark and separate the sacred from the secular. When it became clear that the village population had outgrown the space, our present community hall, Beit Loewengart, was built and all of the secular functions that had taken place in the synagogue were then removed to Beit Loewengart and Beit Yehoshua, the members' club. The new hall, opened in 1963, was constructed with funds made available to the village as a loan from former Rexinger **Arthur Loewengart** and his wife **Gerda** who had established themselves in the United States. That loan was repaid not to the **Loewengarts** but rather, as they had stipulated, was channeled into a scholarship fund. The fund, overseen by moshav member **Alexander Noymeir**, was a great tribute to the **Loewengarts'** vision and to **Alexander's** careful and compassionate management. The Loewengart Fund operated for 25 years, helping to underwrite the college education of 3,000 students from the Western Galilee.



Meeting in the synagogue. **Shavei Zion**, early-middle 1940s. Photo by **M. Schwartz**.

From the collection of the **Shavei Zion Archives**.

Construction of the synagogue, called "Beit Marx" in memory of **Sophie** and **Meir Marx**, was completed in the spring of 1940. In the minutes of the moshav's Management Committee for April of that year, we read that the dedication of the synagogue was to take place on Lag B'Omer, May 26, and would be graced "mit Doppelhochzeit", that is, with a double wedding. And who were the joyful couples? **Hans Schwartz** married **Rezi Pressburger**, and **Hans'** sister, **Margarethe (Gretl)** married **Josef (Seppel) Lemberger**. **Rezi** was the widow of **Alfred Pressburger**, whose death had left **Rezi** with three small children: **Aliza (Klapfer)**, **Jakob**, and **Shoshana**. A son, **Jonathan**, would be born to **Rezi** and **Hans**. **Gretl** and **Seppel** had entered into a fictitious marriage in Germany in order to make use of the very last "certificate" (permission to immigrate) that remained in the hands of the **Rexingen** group; in 1939, they made their way to Eretz Yisrael on one of the last ships allowed to enter the

country. In the eulogy read at **Seppel's** funeral in 1997, it was recalled that "the ties of love that grew between him and **Gretl**" (*in the wake of the fictitious marriage*), brought them together as an earnest couple to the dedication festivities at Beit Marx and there they were married according to the laws of Moses and Israel.



Simchat Torah celebration in the synagogue. **Shavei Zion**, 1947.

From the collection of the **Shavei Zion Archives**.

The dedication of the synagogue was sufficiently newsworthy to have been reported in *The Palestine Post*. The short feature reported that on May 29, "A synagogue, school and people's hall named "Beth Marx" for the donors of the building (the **Marx-Taenzer Family**) was formally inaugurated at **Shavei Zion**, situated between Acre and

Nahariya, at a ceremony held on Sunday afternoon....Representatives of the District Administration, Jewish national institutions, Association of Jewish Settlers from Germany and neighbouring centres were present". The article does not mention the double wedding but does name no fewer than four speechmakers who shared the podium.

In his German-language book, *Schawei Zion*, **Rolf Seelmann-Eggebert** discussed the political and religious character of the moshav, and noted the dilemmas of conduct and education that had been addressed over the years. If, at the founding of the moshav, settlers were categorized according to their place of origin (**Rexingen** and not-**Rexingen**) or according to the personal capital they had brought to the young settlement (1,000 pounds sterling and not-1,000 pounds), "In the end," wrote **Seelmann-Eggebert** in 1970, "inhabitants are categorized as orthodox and not-orthodox." He continued, "Today, the orthodox element in **Shavei Tzion**...is retreating more and more into the background. Both the new inhabitants and the second generation are responsible for that. But **Shavei Tzion** still holds fast to its traditionally religious foundation." As an example of a then-current dilemma that demanded a tactful solution, **Seelmann-Eggebert** asked, "Would an inhabitant smoke on the street on the Sabbath? Most of them," he had observed, "would not".

In 1938, the settlers built not only the foundation of the moshav in all its technical aspects (the supply of water and electricity, the generation of an adequate communal livelihood, the construction of family housing, etc.), but also a regimented routine in which the week revolved around the Sabbath and the months around the holidays. We have already read that in the dining-room-cum-synagogue, the settlers took pride in their Torah scrolls. Describing Yom Kippur in 1938, **Dr. Scheuer** wrote, "The prayers were beautiful. There was a break after the Torah reading. The meal that broke the fast (*included*) pickled herring, eggs, challah and butter." The members and the workers then living in the settlement shared the meal. On the Sabbath during Sukkot, **Dr. Scheuer** wrote, "*(We all)* ate a pleasant dinner in the sukkah. Afterwards, *(there were)* stories and jokes."

Fulfilling mitzvot at the level of the community meant that the settlers must receive authoritative opinions and make use of certain stop-gap resources until a rabbi could be named to serve the moshav. The minutes of the Management Committee for May 1942 report that the Religion Committee "requires a Sabbath clock for the communal dining hall and kitchen" and the request was approved. Those same minutes, quoted and translated in 1982 in *Beineinu*, the moshav newsletter *Between Us*, continue: "**Rabbi (Moshe) Findling** of Haifa will lecture here and will attend to the issue of the eruv (*the prescribed symbolic boundary of a community*). Additional religious lessons will be taught once a week by **Mr. Hartmann** of Haifa. The Education Committee and the Religion Committee will decide together how the lessons will be given and whether participation will be obligatory or voluntary. For these lessons, the Management Committee allocates three and a half Palestine pounds per month".

Earlier in 1942, the minutes of the Management Committee reported, "The Religion Committee has suggested consulting with Kibbutz Tirat Tzvi on the religious questions involved in keeping a flock of sheep in the moshav." That same month, the Religion Committee asked that the members' assembly (in a meeting to be held a day later), discuss "the problem of employing a rabbi", but the Management Committee denied the request, explaining that the only item on the agenda of the assembly would be "members' participation in the cost of dental care". The matter of employing a rabbi to serve the community was discussed during a visit to **Shavei Zion** by **Rabbi Meir Berlin**, a member of the Jewish National Council. As we know, the rabbi later Hebraicized his name to "**Bar-Ilan**" and that name is honored at the eponymous university. During his visit here in early 1942, **Rabbi Berlin** heard "a comprehensive review of the development of the moshav, and also (*a report*) on the pressing problems of water and land" but the rabbi felt that he was unable to respond adequately to those issues because "they had come within his purview only a short time before". When the representatives of the moshav talked with him about "the need for industrial enterprise"--and here, **Rivka Olami**, the editor of *Beineinu* which published these minutes in 1982, interjected 'There's nothing new under the sun'--

**Rabbi Berlin** objected to "establishing a hotel or guesthouses (*here, and added that*) the new hotel (*already opened on the beachfront, Beit Dolphin*)...must be made to operate according to the laws of kashrut". After his visit to the moshav, **Rabbi Berlin** wrote to inquire about "the spiritual progress" being made in **Shavei Tzion** and he argued that it was "the right time to employ '**Rabbi A**' here". Because Management Committee member "**S**" (who represented the extreme orthodox sector in **Shavei Tzion**, explained **Pinchas Erlanger** when he translated the minutes for 'Beineinu' in 1982), had been absent from the relevant committee meeting, it was decided that the decision about "**Rabbi A**" would be postponed until "**S**" cast his deciding vote.

Debates and decisions on religious observance in **Shavei Tzion** in the formative years were sometimes postponed because of tensions in the moshav, during the general clashes with the Arab population, and during World War 2 and the War of Independence. In the minutes of the Management Committee in June 1940, we read that "**Rabbi Bamberger** of Haifa has objected to the fact that there had been dancing in the synagogue". **Rabbi Bamberger's** letter was addressed personally to **Dr. Scheuer**, who replied explaining that a curtain was used to convert the space from synagogue to community hall, as had been agreed with the donors who underwrote the construction of the building. Furthermore, **Dr. Scheuer** noted, "the present difficult moment is not the appropriate (*time*) for the clarification of the religious issues that impact the moshav, such as irrigation on the Sabbath". Thus, certain debates were postponed but at least one member left the moshav because of "his religious world view", so wrote **Pinchas Erlanger**, author of the newsletter's popular column "40 Years Ago". The Management Committee wondered, "...if now, at the height of the (world) war, there is room for religious disputes? We shall find a suitable member to lead a discussion in the assembly".

Finding a permanent rabbi was postponed for a number of reasons, but principally because the community was so busy with simply sustaining itself in the face of daily hardships. **Aron Berlinger**, the son of **Fanny** and **Asher Berlinger**, has brought to the archives new information which had not been recorded and which has completed the story of the search for the moshav's first rabbi. **Aron** tells us that his grandfather, **Rabbi Naphtali Berlinger** had been poised to emigrate from Buttenhausen, Germany

and then to join the **Shavei Tzion** community in Palestine. The role of community rabbi had been promised to him and at the beginning of 1939 a contract to that effect was signed between the moshav and the rabbi. According to the contract, **Rabbi Berlinger** would be employed from March 1939 and, in addition to all of the conventional "rabbinischer Funktionen", including the role of mohel (ritual circumciser) and shochet (ritual slaughterer), he was to teach lessons in religion to the moshav's children as well as to the adolescents who were taken out of school at the age of 14 in order to work for the co-operative.



**Rabbi Naphtali Berlinger** in his study in Buttenhausen, Germany. 1930s.

Courtesy of **Aron Berlinger**.

In February 1939, the High Council of the Jewish Community in Wuerttemberg (seated in Stuttgart) supplied to the moshav a document which testified to the broad knowledge, the substantive pedagogical competence and the qualities and character of **Rabbi Berlinger**. To his misfortune and to the great disappointment of his family in Palestine who awaited his arrival here, the rabbi's permission to immigrate was not

forthcoming. In February 1940, **Asher Berlinger** wrote to the Chief Rabbinate in Jerusalem: "...Your Eminences, further to your request, I am enclosing herewith two postal checks...in the amount of one Palestine pound, which will cover costs pertaining to the immigration license for my father, **Naphtali Berlinger**. Please accept my thanks for Your Eminences' help in this matter, and I hope that, God willing, I'll soon have good news..."

**Rabbi Berlinger**, who was the scion of one of the oldest rabbinical dynasties in Germany, and about whom the High Council in Stuttgart wrote, "Any community would be proud to have the good fortune of counting such a man among its members", never arrived in **Shavei Tzion**. In 1942, never having received his permission to immigrate, **Rabbi Berlinger** was deported to Theresienstadt, and there he perished.

The matter of employing a community rabbi was eventually resolved, although in the years when the designated rabbi lived at a significant distance from the moshav and also divided his time here with duties in other communities, that rabbi would customarily come to the moshav only every several weeks. **Rabbi Findling** was the first to serve **Shavei Tzion** but, in 1943, with the appointment of **Rabbi Dr. Aharon Keller** as chief rabbi of Nahariya and its environs, the moshav entered into a warm and enduring relationship. **Rabbi Keller** came to the moshav for prayer services and also held lessons for members and taught the history of the Jewish people in our small school. From an article in *Place of Refuge...* by **Zahava (Keller) Neuberger** (**Rabbi Keller's** daughter), we learn that after consulting with the Chief Rabbinate, **Rabbi Keller** gave permission for the display "of the Torah scroll that had survived Kristallnacht in **Rexingen**, instead of placement in the genizah (*storage place for items unfit for further ritual use*) and ritual burial..." Display of the scroll, he said, "would ensure that the world remember...the eternal struggle between 'the voice of Jacob' and Amalek who attacks us". When **Rabbi Keller** ended his tenure in **Shavei Tzion**, he left a legacy of unity, tolerance and "the humane, moral (*conduct that has been...the gift of the Jewish people*) to the world". **Rabbi Yeshayahu Mitlis**, **Rabbi Keller's** son-in-law, then performed the duties of community rabbi here for a number of years.

In his article in *Place of Refuge...*, **Eliyahu Klein** wrote about the demographic changes that had taken place in the moshav, largely in the 1970s and 1980s: "The passing years took their toll as members died and the ranks of the worshippers thinned. Among the second generation, there were fewer worshippers and not enough to make up for those lost. New members who joined the moshav were secular and thus, over time, most of the members no longer attended the synagogue. The sons and daughters of religious members saw no point in building their homes here, both because of the changes in the moshav and because they saw no future here for their own children's education and social relations. In fact, all of the religious young people left the moshav. The situation was such that the minyan was endangered." And **Eliyahu** continued: "In 1990, to our good fortune, **Rabbi Yehoshua Hellman** began his tenure here. *(He was)* a young and energetic rabbi, pleasant to everyone, admired by the residents no matter what their worldview. He has enriched the public *(here)* with Torah lessons and other sacred lessons, and has succeeded in reaching out to residents and in including persons from outside *(of Shavei Tzion)* so that, for the time being, the minyan is assured".

In June 1938, the first bar mitzvah was celebrated in **Shavei Tzion** when **Eliezer**, the son of **Sophie** and **Dr. Manfred Scheuer** (later, **Elu Goren**) was called to the Torah. In his journal, **Dr. Scheuer** wrote, "Sixty-six persons were present *(including Scheuer Family relatives from Tel Aviv and Haifa, and family friend Oskar Mayer, the mukhtar of Nahariya and his wife)*. For the first time, we used the beautiful (albeit unfinished) Holy Ark made by our two carpenters. **Eliezer** read two sections of "Shelach Lecha", not in a loud voice but with pleasant inflection. **Oskar Mayer** donated half a Palestine pound to the synagogue. *(There was)* a loud buzz among the worshippers because of the size of the donation, apparently in comparison with the two pennies which are *(our)* daily allowance of pocket money. I donated a like sum *(but)* the buzz was quieter! The novelty had worn off. **Zev Berlinger** gave an excellent homily from the portion of the week that tells about the journey of the spies in the Land of Canaan and Caleb Ben-Yehoshua, with many parallels to **Shavei Tzion**."

"**Eliezer**" continued **Dr. Scheuer**, "received various gifts. From me, a small savings account book at a big bank. (*He was also given*) a Bible with commentaries, many books, a leather satchel, a small valise, a soccer ball and so on (*and also*) a wristwatch from his grandfather which we had brought with us from abroad". That grandfather was **Wolf Landsberg**, **Sophie Scheuer's** father, who had remained in Germany and was ultimately deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, where he perished. "From my brother," wrote **Dr. Scheuer**, "*(Eliezer received)* a Kiddush cup. From friends, a suitcase and shaving gear. From the moshav members, the donation to the Jewish National Fund of a tree which will be planted here. Also, in accordance with his greatest desire, **Eliezer** will be allowed to come (*to the encampment*) during the summer and to work." Readers must know that in those days and until construction of the first family houses was completed at the end of 1938, the children did not live in **Shavei Tzion** but rather lived and studied at "Ahava" in Kiryat Bialik. Thus, the bar mitzvah boy's wish to live in the camp here and join the working members was a real declaration of maturity. **Eliezer** came to **Shavei Tzion** at the beginning of July. In his journal, his father wrote then, "*(Eliezer)* is working diligently, digging drainage ditches. He does calculations to see whether he's earning his meals. He's quiet and has more perseverance than I had expected from him at the age of 13".

Continuing his description of the bar mitzvah celebration, **Dr. Scheuer** wrote, "We ate lunch and after a rest we strolled (*along the beach*) to the hill. We collected antiquities." And that same day, "My daughter **Hilda** found the first egg (*in the moshav's young poultry enterprise*) and in the evening I said the "shehecheyanu" blessing (*recited when doing something for the first time in a particular year*). At 6:30 in the evening...the festive meal began. The women had decorated the dining room (*which had, of course, been used as the synagogue that morning*). It looked like a banquet table at a wedding. And the food, too, was excellent. (*There was*) tongue for the first course, smoked meat, various salads, potatoes, compotes, cakes and a lot of wine and cigarettes. Blessings (*were given by*) **Oskar Mayer** as an old friend, **Eliezer** on laying tefillin (*that is, phylacteries...and there were good wishes from*) the workers, spoken in Hebrew, and from the Management Committee (*which*) expressed the wish

that **Eliezer** become a good member. *(There were songs)* after the Havdalah and grace after meals *(and)* all kinds of funny performances."

The archives preserve evidence of the traditional customs which framed the daily life of the moshav. The members asked for blessings on the work of their hands and for the success of the moshav and the proof of this is moving. In a book containing the minutes of the Management Committee for several years, we read on the page which opens the record at the New Year, after Rosh Hashanah, "A new year and its blessings will commence". In 1953, **Shave Tzion** celebrated the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding, with festivities attended by 1,000 persons, among them representatives of government departments and other organizations important to the birth of the state. The rich program included a tour of the moshav, performances by moshav children on the sports field (today the "Bor" neighborhood, that is, Vered Street), speeches and blessings, refreshments, an exhibition entitled "The Moshav and Its Development", a performance by the local choir, a theatrical performance and, in the late evening, dancing on a raft on the sea. The moshav's tenth anniversary hadn't been celebrated because of the War of Independence and the event held in 1953 apparently more than made up for that, but it's well to remember that the exuberant 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration opened at the synagogue, with a prayer of thanksgiving.

In 1967, shortly after the end of the Six Day War, negligence at the nearby "San Jean" military base caused a fire to break out there in a building storing captured Syrian munitions. Rockets shot off in every direction over the entire area--a veritable "rain of rocket fire", remembers **Aharon Klapfer**--and one of these landed squarely on the synagogue, breaking through the roof and destroying the northeastern-most window. It was no small miracle that no one was hurt.



Damage to the **Shavei Zion** synagogue, June 1967.

From the collection of the **Shavei Zion Archives**.

Only a few years earlier, the synagogue had been renovated, when the opening of Beit Loewengart made it possible to move all secular functions from the synagogue to the proper new community hall. In the *Alon HaMeshek* moshav newsletter in October 1963, in an issue published for Rosh Hashanah, **Menachem (Menko) Berlinger** who served as adjudicator of Jewish law here, Torah reader and ritual slaughterer, had written excitedly about those renovations to the synagogue: "This Rosh Hashanah, we've been privileged with a handsome synagogue, at long last, newly-furnished in good taste and suited to its functions. We suffered a great deal from the old conditions though they may have been appropriate to the first years after the founding of the village. The Synagogue Committee invested great effort, much thought and also perseverance (*in the renovation project*). I hope that worshippers, each in his dedicated seat, will feel comfortable and that the space will serve broad sectors (*of the population*), young and old, for study, prayer, self-examination and elevation of the soul. And the synagogue will become an important instrument of

social cohesion and education and will plant in the hearts of worshippers, the eternal values of our people, the authority of our Torah, our prophets and our sages..."

We've read of the first two Torah scrolls in **Shavei Tzion**, those brought here by the first settlers in 1938, and of the scroll that survived Kristallnacht and was bravely smuggled into Palestine by **Victor Neckarsulmer**. Some 21 years ago, **Leah Neugebauer** gave a third Torah scroll to the synagogue, dedicating it to the memory of her husband **Yehuda** (who had been a regular reader at the synagogue in the authentic German-Jewish style), and to the memory of their son **Naphtali** and **Leah's** uncle **Moshe Sahm** and **Moshe's** son **David**. Just a week ago at this writing, on April 20, 2014, a new scroll was donated to the synagogue by **Oren Maman**, the son of **Yaffa** and **Meir Maman** and the brother of **Calanit Cohen** who, with her husband **Ness**, joined the moshav several years ago. The new scroll, housed in a brilliant, heavy silver case according to Sephardic custom, and the older scrolls, were honored with a gay and noisy procession that made its way through the streets of the moshav, from the **Cohen** home to the synagogue. The new scroll is a reminder of the warm welcome our **Rabbi Hellman** has given Sephardic worshippers here and, on the day of the dedication, numerous residents and guests expressed their respect and joy in both song and dance.

In his article in *Place of Refuge...*, **Rabbi Yehoshua Hellman** noted "...the conservation and persistence of old traditions which are in the safekeeping of the community and which center largely around the synagogue. Local custom maintains (*the synagogue*) not only to serve as place of worship and Torah but also to serve the community in every aspect of its spiritual and secular life, under the rubric of the mitzvah of love for one's fellow man, expressed through courtesy, (*proper*) behavior and (*respectful*) attention to each person. My view is that each and every person can find his place in the community, (*bringing his*) ideas, initiative and energy throughout the year: on weekdays, holidays and on the Sabbath and at various events". The rabbi recalled the significant contribution of **Hermann Gideon** who "was the steward of religion from

day the land was settled...and who laid the foundations of tradition (*here*)..." **Rabbi Hellman** continued, "What's required of me as community rabbi...is to continue to strengthen, unite and sustain and, in the event of change in the community, to mediate and to discover the strong connection of (*those changes*) to (*the community's*) heritage..."



**Alfred Hopper** in the **Shavei Zion** synagogue. 1940s.  
Photo by **Lazar Dünner** for the Jewish National Fund.  
From the collection of the **Shavei Zion Archives**.

*Readers interested in learning more about the fate of the synagogue in **Rexingen** and its present status are invited to visit the site of the non-profit that works tirelessly to conserve the building itself and to preserve the memory of the historic Jewish community. The first address noted below is for the German-language pages and the second for the English pages.*

<http://www.ehemalige-synagoge-rexingen.de/>

<http://www.ehemalige-synagoge-rexingen.de/en/former-synagogue>