

## Our History

The first Jews began to settle in the Clinton, MA area in the late 1800's. The earliest services were held in the home of Morris Gould, who emigrated from Lithuania in 1903. Because he had studied to become a Rabbi, Morris Gould became the Clinton Jewish community's first spiritual leader. By the 1920's, the Jewish community of Clinton was comprised of 25 families. Services were moved to the Town Hall, and then to one of the merchant's buildings. Services began early to accommodate the merchants, many of whom were recruited regularly to "make a minyan", the ten people required for the service.

This arrangement continued until a fire destroyed the building. In 1926 Morris Gould made an appeal to build a synagogue. Community support was widespread and Congregation Shaarei Zedeck was dedicated on February 10, 1929.

The congregation flourished in the next decades. A Brotherhood, Sisterhood, Hadassah and Young Men and Women's Hebrew Association were formed.

In the 1940's and 1950's, a new generation of Jewish professional and businessmen assumed leadership of the Clinton Shul. The original families remained active and many new families arrived. From then until the mid-1960's, the temple was able to employ a series of full-time Rabbis.

During the late 1960's, and through the 1970's, the declining economies of small New England communities such as Clinton, coupled with the greater mobility of the population, led to a sharp decline in the membership of Shaarei Zedeck. Although services were still held punctually at 7:30 a.m. every Saturday morning, attendance was at an all-time low. Traditional beliefs gave way to practical considerations, and women were counted in the minyan.

Beginning in the 1980's, a mini renaissance occurred at Congregation Shaarei Zedeck as new families moved into the area. Loni Feinberg, who moved to Clinton in 1988, has assumed an educational leadership role in the synagogue. Loni has a strong knowledge of Hebrew, Torah and Judaic studies, and has taught many in the congregation to read from the Torah or to recite parts of the service. Thanks to her, students as young as thirteen are capable of leading the entire service.

You will find descendants of the early Clinton Jewish families among the members of the congregation. You will also find Jews who are newcomers to the area. We all feel truly fortunate to be part of such a rich tradition and welcome you to a very special place.