

# The School at the Shul

## Abe Piwosky and His Contribution to Education at AJ

By Ruth W. Schultz (reprinted from 2008)

Abe Piwosky was raised in an Orthodox home in Northern Liberties. Every day after public school he attended the Northeast Talmud Torah. And on Sunday his Polish-immigrant parents sent him to the Hebrew Sunday School Society which had been founded by Rebecca Gratz in the latter part of the 18th century.

In the following years, he would earn a wall full of degrees: Central High School, the School of Pedagogy, Temple University, Gratz College, Temple Law School.

He was the head of the Math Department at Northeast High School, the first time a Jew was appointed a high school department head and he was the superintendent of the 26th Street School of the Hebrew Sunday School Society.

In 1921, ten years after Rabbi Klein became the spiritual leader of Adath Jeshurun, he decided to reorganize the religious school. There were 371 children enrolled, a weak curriculum and not enough classrooms at the new Broad Street Synagogue. Abram P. Piwosky became the principal of the school that year, while Rabbi Klein remained superintendent. (Piwosky taught math in the morning, practiced law in the early afternoon, and directed AJ's Hebrew School from 4:00 to 6:00).

Since AJ's founding in 1858, it had maintained a religious school. It was usually taught by the rabbi and/or cantor and was supplemented by volunteers from the congregation. Originally, German and Hebrew were taught. But German was dropped in 1896, and sometimes Jewish history and Bible studies were taught at a Sunday school, or in other years, at a Sabbath school. *Sometimes* was the operative word; the school, often off-site, was a work in progress.

With Piwosky in charge, however, it became a very different institution. He hired 15 experienced teachers, all of whom held degrees in pertinent subjects, many of them from Gratz College. The only novice was his sister-in-law Matilda Tubis, a recent Normal School graduate who created a Sunday school kindergarten class that she taught for the next 25 years.

In 1926, AJ's new three-story classroom building, under and at the rear of the sanctuary, was completed and the new curriculum was up and running. It covered four subjects: Hebrew, history, literature and religion. Piwosky was also instrumental in forming an oversight education institution for Conservative synagogues including Mikveh Israel. It was called the Council of Jewish Education (now the Board of Jewish Education), for which he served as president. At AJ,



ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: I. Jerome Stern, Leonard Goldfine, Rabbi Yaakov G. Rosenberg, Elizabeth T. Pilowsky, Abram P. Piwosky

school hours were increased from one day to three times a week (Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday). He retired after 30 years as principal in 1951 after seeing his own children, **Joan Wohl** and **Nona Abrams**, complete that curriculum.

Today, wouldn't Abe be amazed to see how the school has expanded to include daycare starting at three months; a preschool for two-, three- and four-year-olds, and a kindergarten for five-year-olds; a high school department, and a special education program? Adults are similarly engaged in learning through the Old York Road Kehillah. At AJ Jewish education is a lifetime experience. **aj**