

JEWISH HISTORY REMEMBERED IN COLUMBIA

A joint event sponsored by Beth Shalom Synagogue, Tree of Life Congregation, and the Jewish Historical Society of SC was held on Assembly Street at the site of the original 1846 Columbia synagogue, on Sunday, November 9, 2008. It was a beautiful day to reflect on the origins of the Jewish presence in the capital city. About 40 attended the commemoration and unveiling of a historical plaque across the street from the Richland County Public Library, between Hampton and Washington Streets.



The program started with a welcome and introduction by Beth Shalom Synagogue president, Dr. Lilly Filler. Mayor Bob Coble greeted the guests and then turned the program to Councilwoman Belinda Gergel to give a brief history of the site. The unveiling and reading of the marker was made by Amy Scully, President of Tree of Life Congregation.



Side 1: Israelite Sunday School.

The Israelite Sunday School, the first Jewish religious school in Columbia and the seventh in the United States, met in a building on this site until 1865. Founded in 1843 to give city's Jewish children "an intimate.... and full exposition of our faith." Supported by the Columbia Hebrew Benevolent Society, the school had 20-30 students when it was organized in a nearby building, in space donated by a member of the society. (Erected by Beth Shalom Synagogue, Tree of Life Temple, and the Jewish Historical Society of SC, 2008)



Side 2: Columbia's first Synagogue.

In 1846 the Columbia Hebrew Benevolent Society built a frame building on this site for the Israelite Sunday School, which met on the first floor. The society also organized the first formal congregation in Columbia, which they named Shearith Israel (Remnant of Israel) with its synagogue on the second floor. The building burned when General William T. Sherman's Federals captured the city in February, 1865.

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Both Rabbi Case from Beth Shalom and Rabbi Sherman from Tree of Life participated with thoughts and reflections as well as a blessing for all those attending.

The program was concluded with Ed Poliakoff, President of JHSSC explaining the "marker program" of the society, for which we are the first recipients of some funding from them. We should all be proud to have this historical marker in our city. Please take a trip down Assembly Street, between Hampton and Washington Streets, across from the Library and enjoy this bit of history.