An Address by Sam Harris

for the

100th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

of

CONGREGATION SONS OF ABRAHAM

Lafayette, Indiana
September 24, 1989
Thank you all for coming tonight, some of you from significant distances. Most of
the faces I see are those of present or former congregants. Some notable exceptions who
can be placed in the category of friends of the congregation are the mayors of Lafayette
and West Lafayette, Jim Riehle and Sonia Margerum. We are honored to have you share
this special evening with us as our guests.

When I was first asked early in the summer to handle this segment of the program,
I readily agreed realizing that September was a long way off. Suddenly it’s here. 100
years plus a couple of months have passed in our shul history. September 1989 is finally
here, and our celebration has begun.

Before going any further, I would like to apologize in advance for any omissions
or inaccuracies in what I will be saying. I’m afraid that I will skip over some very nice and
dedicated people who should be mentioned and I hope that you will believe me when I
say that such omissions are not by design but rather due to faulty memory and poor
scholarship. It may come as a shock but despite what I have told my children, I really
don’t know everything. For my knowledge of the early years of our congregation, I must
depend on what I have read and heard from others, sometimes second-hand, or third-
hand, or even worse. For the more recent years, my knowledge depends on the accuracy
of my perceptions and the quality of my memory. I hope that I will prove to be up to the
task at hand. I have not had the time to double check all of my sources. If you will be so
kind as to point out my errors of fact after this program, I promise to come back for the
125th anniversary celebration and do it right. But please remember one thing. Any
failings that you notice cannot be blamed on the preceding cocktail hour. I feel I’ve
already demonstrated the ultimate sense of responsibility by showing superhuman
restraint in that area.

This 100th anniversary is obviously a milestone that we only get to relish once.
The fact that we are here tonight, would probably have been a great surprise to those
men who originally banded together for the first minyon of Sons of Abraham. If I were a
social scientist who truly understood how people interact with each other and with their
surroundings, I am sure that I would conclude that the odds of survival for our
congregation for 100 years would be rather small. Lafayette was never blessed with a
large Jewish community. Newcomers always seemed few and far between; more often
than not, the children moved away. But somehow, we always had enough Jewish
people, Yiddisher Menschen, in town to observe the ritual cycle, to share the simchas,
and to mourn our losses.

Who would have believed that after 100 years, we would still be meeting for
services on Friday nights and Saturday mornings, despite the lure of the dazzling
Lafayette night life and the golf course? Who would believe that we could still muster a
minyon when a Kaddish must be said? Or that people would still be sufficiently interested
in Judaism to get together for Jewish study? Or that this small community in the midst of
a cornfield could maintain a sense of Jewish commitment which would be handed down
from generation to generation for one hundred years, and still fill us with a sense of
pride as we look at our own children. Our children have learned from us and from those

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who have come before us. At a time when most American children seem unable to learn English, we are delighted to hear many of our children on the bimah leading services in Hebrew. In this generation alone, the generation of my children, we have produced Jews who live or study in Israel, who become Rabbis, who seek careers working with Jewish youth so that future generations may have the same opportunity as the present one to learn about their heritage.

Our list of community activities may seem more appropriate for a community many times our size. Being a Jew in Lafayette Indiana requires more effort than in New York or Chicago. We find that we must be a little more Jewish for the sake of our children, and for the sake of our community. If we don't provide the Jewish example for our children, who will? If we don't join in to build and support our congregation, from where will its strength come?

These truths were known to the founders of our congregation. In the summer of 1889, 22 men from Lafayette got together to organize an orthodox congregation because they realized that Jewish survival in the cornfields required that Jews band together for religious and social purposes. By now, these names are familiar to us all:

Moses Atlass  
Israel Elkin  
Abraham Goldberg  
Gottlieb Katz  
Bara Pearlman  
David Pearlman  
Eleck Pearlman  
Jacob Pearlman  
Louis Pearlman  
Mayer Rose  
Sam Rostov  
Oscar Saduk  
George Salzman  
Jake Salzman  
Louis Salzman  
Jacob Spector  
Solomon Spector  
Jacob Tech  
Isaac Wasserstein  
Nisen Winski  
Oscar Winski  
and Sam Wolf.

We hear many of these names read at our Yahrzeit memorial services. Moses Atlass always begins the list, because he was one of the first -- not just alphabetically. His name also appears on the shul’s first memorial plaque to the left of the bimah, "In
Memoriam, Moses Atlass, December 16, 1919." Other names stand out as we look around us. Our eyes wander during the day's Yom Kippur service. When the sun shines through the stained glass windows, we notice the names in them, carefully pieced together, Spector, Pearlman, Salzman, Fishelson. And of course, the initials on the eternal light -- OW--Oscar Winski. I don't remember how many times a visitor has asked me about the mystical significance of those symbols on that light above the ark.

These are the men who began our congregation, although it apparently had no name or constitution at that time. Nowadays, we would know how to do things right. We would start by establishing an ad hoc committee to do a preliminary feasibility study on the need for a synagogue in the greater Lafayette community. We would make projections about utilization of the facility, and investigate the cost, and potential sources of support. Finally, after much study, and time, we would begin to get serious. Our founders did things differently. They sensed the need and acted. They didn't have to investigate sources of financial support. They were those sources! They didn't have to worry about people attending their services. They and their families would be the congregation.

There are still connections between those founding fathers and our present congregation. Sadie Bercovitz and Jack Elkin still remember their uncle Israel Elkin who was present on that day in 1889. The Winski family still has a presence in the community. David Pearlman's grandson remains in Lafayette, a prominent attorney. Florence Hartman was able to instantly find for me the citizenship papers of her great uncle, Solomon Spector. Incidentally, he arrived in the U.S. in 1886 at the age of 36, a bit older than most of the immigrants. Spector seems to have been the driving force behind the congregation. He was responsible for bringing over many immigrants and starting them on the road to success. Florence's father, Solomon Hartman, came to Lafayette because Spector was here, and he became the first treasurer of the new shul when it was built in its present location. But most of us are newcomers. I have been here for 25 years, but I still count myself as one of the newcomers, despite the fact that there are many newer-comers than me. After the founders, the membership of what was to become Sons of Abraham changed with each successive wave of immigration. The most recent wave includes those who find themselves here because of the presence of Purdue University. We have left family and friends behind, but have developed new friendships and a new sense of family within our congregation. Our children share in this sense of family as they enter the synagogue. The place is full of adoptive uncles, aunts, and grandparents. There have been many changes in the congregation over the years. We no longer have spitoons between the rows of seats as we once did. There is no longer a special officer of the shul--a collector-- whose duty was to go around and knock on doors to physically collect the monies due to the congregation from its members. Perhaps the present board would like to consider reinstituting such a position as collector, or enforcer. The language spoken is now English-- Yiddish is rarely heard, and no longer used for recording minutes of the board. But the reasons for the existence of Congregation Sons of Abraham are exactly the same today as they were a century ago.
A few souls came from Europe after the horrors of the Holocaust. We have often heard of these horrors from the lips of Jack Levinthal and Sam Chosnek among others. Jack in particular felt a burning need to share his experiences with others. He often told me that his fate was to survive in order that he be a witness of those horrible events. His testimony was a painful personal experience for him. He was not comfortable speaking in English before large groups, but he had to do it. Sam and Edith Chosnek arrived in this community in 1950. I asked him how he chose Lafayette as his destination. He laughed and said that he had never even heard of Lafayette before -- he was assigned to come here by the Jewish agency responsible for refugee settlement. The essence of their arrival in Lafayette was the courage and hard work demanded from an immigrant family, unable to speak with their neighbors, unfamiliar with their surroundings, and with no family or friends to fall back on. But Sam probably wouldn't agree with me. His story relates the many kindnesses shown him and the help which was extended by members of this shul. Even though he knew no one, he had people here! This same element comes up time and time again in the stories of others. Our shul family has always been warm and open to the newcomer. In the past, it was the immigrant who was integrated into the community. Today, it is more often an itinerant professor than a peddler.

Earlier immigrants followed circuitous routes to get to Lafayette. Simon Krushen arrived here in 1922 after a stay in what was then Palestine. He wasn't sent to Lafayette. He had family here, the Cohens. Ike Bercovitz came in 1926 after a brief stay in Cuba. He joined his older brother Nate who preceded him. Why come to Lafayette? There was family -- in their case it was uncle David Bercovitz. And there was a warm and supportive Jewish Community, and a shul.

We have little direct information from the earliest immigrants who started our congregation. One spectacular exception is the autobiography of Israel Elkin, one of the founders who I've already mentioned. Although the dates given don't always seem consistent, it seems he told his story to his daughter who wrote the manuscript when he was 78, which would make the year of the telling 1940 give or take a little. Israel died in 1950 at the age of 87.

Israel Elkin came to the United States in 1891 from Russia. He travelled directly to Lafayette because he knew Solomon Spector who had preceded him here from the old country five years earlier. He was supposed to travel here with Spector's family and with another friend Oscar Saduk, but Saduk fell ill and it didn't happen that way. When he arrived he was immediately welcomed to the community. People were quick to take him in and show him the ropes until he could get on his feet. Apparently Saduk also made it eventually because his name appears on the list of founders. Life was difficult but he showed that same courage I marveled at earlier -- with no knowledge of English he chose to start life in the U.S. as a rural peddler, traveling through the countryside selling what he could carry to the farmer's wives. There is much of interest in this brief autobiography. The detailed family relationships make War and Peace easy reading. But in particular, I was looking for information relevant to our congregation.
Israel had helped organize the Jewish cemetery, even before our present synagogue was built. At that time, Congregation Sons of Abraham was a hall on the third floor of the Levy and Rice Skirt Factory on Ninth Street. (Israel calls it a Shirt Factory.) In the 75th Anniversary Booklet, there is a reference to services and the first sefer torah at the building on the southeast corner of Ninth and Main Streets, the Reifers Furniture Building. Surprise!! Reifers stood on the southwest corner. Is it too late to correct the historical record? According to Florence Hartman, the Reifers Building didn't exist at that time. She well remembers the Levy and Rice Skirt Factory. She often went there with her mother to purchase fabric remnants for her clothes. The factory stood above a buggy shop to which her father Solomon brought his buggy for repairs. When the time came to build a synagogue, Israel was on the building committee. Let me quote his own words filtered through his daughter:

"I was always a supporter of the shul, the Jewish Lodges, and the other Jewish enterprises but never had the leisure to take an active part. Now I could. We needed a Jewish cemetery. I was one of the committee to negotiate and organize this. Congregation affairs also played an important part in the community activities, and I took an active part in this. We had a small Jewish community, none of them wealthy, and we could not afford to build a shul, but we had a hall on the third floor of the Levy and Rice Skirt Factory rented by the year for shul purposes. We had this for many years, and later a lovely little shul was built on North Seventh Street. I was on the building committee."

Now for a break in the narrative. Again, according to Florence Hartman, she remembers services being held on the second floor of the building on Fourth and Ferry Streets. That would be upstairs of what is now Berry's Camera Store. The congregation began in 1889, and began regular services and brought a torah to the Ninth and Main location, probably in 1891. Since our current shul wasn't built until 1916, there was certainly plenty of time for another site in the interim. One other location crops up much later. The congregation maintained the Progress Club, a social hall on the Courthouse Square, because there were no adequate facilities for those activities at the new shul. Sadie Bercovitz described to me how the crowd would walk downtown for an Oneg Shabbat after Friday night services at the synagogue. Later, Sid Berger remembers Hebrew classes at that location. Now back to quoting Israel Elkin:

"While my business affairs and the great distance which we lived from the shul were not conducive to my attending shul on Saturdays, I did observe all the holidays and the ushering in of the Sabbath in our own home. The holidays were observed by the community as a whole. Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur were observed in prayer in shul; Succoth was observed in the home. Again, we lived so far away (West Lafayette) that we could not participate in the use of the community " lulov and esrog", therefore, we always bought one for the use of my family. Chanuka and Purim were always celebrated with balls or parties of some kind in the shul. The shul was also our community center. Sometimes we had fancy dress balls, sometimes programs were given by the children, or we had basket balls. (This is after all Indiana!!) At the basket balls, all the women and
children (girls) would have a whole picnic supper in a very attractive basket and these would be auctioned off to the highest bidder. In this way money was made for the support of the shul. The outstanding families who took an active part in these affairs were the Spectors, the Wassersteins, the Goldbergs, the Winkis, the Pearlmans, the Wolfes, the Goodmans, the Salzmanns, and many others.

Florence Hartman remembers these basket balls at the hall on Fourth and Ferry. More often than not a family wound up buying back its own basket.

Israel continues a little later with the observation, "These were the great days when all were friends of one another, all about the same amount of worldly goods, everyone felt kindly toward one another. Most of our social contacts were through the shul and families visiting back and forth."

At this point, life didn't sound quite as difficult as it may have been earlier. One last segment worth reading: "In 1908 Rabbi Gershuny of Cleveland was selected to be our Schochet. He moved to Lafayette with his family." Shortly after they arrived, they were joined by more family from New York. Two of the young ladies who joined them, the Fishelson sisters, were recent immigrants from Russia who fled after the Kishineff Pogrom. They were apparently real charmers and the local boys began to succumb.

Now Israel again: "After living here for three months, the younger sister, Rose Fishelson was married to Louis Winski. That summer there seemed to be an epidemic of Jewish marriages, for four Sundays straight there were large weddings to which the whole Jewish community was invited... The first was Anna Wolf and Eli Goodman, the next Rose Spector and David Fishman, the third Rose Fishelson and Louis Winski, the fourth Beckie Goodman and Jacob Singer. My son David, not to be outdone by his friends fell in love with Mrs. Ness's other sister Frances Fishelson, and they were married three months later on September 3, 1905." The years are a bit confused but its safe to say that those were busy and happy times.

But I'm sure that relationships within our shul community weren't always quite as idyllic as they may sound here. People are people, and people were people, and frictions did develop, problems had to be solved. Also there was the ongoing task of maintaining the young congregation, spiritually, physically, and financially.

There has always been a need for those who are willing to accept the responsibility of guiding Sons of Abraham through the years. The first president of our congregation was Isaac Wasserstein. Many have followed.

Solomon Spector
Moses Atllass
Mayer Rose
Oscar Winski
Israel Elkin
David Bercovitz  
Harry Roger  
and Jacob Singer.

Jake Singer was the quintessential president, serving more than 25 years in that office.

The modern era began after Jacob Singer stepped down. Sid Berger was elected president in 1960??, It seems entirely appropriate that Sid served as a link, the transition between those with strong family ties in the community and those who came later to seek their academic fame and fortune. Sid was born in Lafayette and his father Mose and grandfather Israel Berger were stalwarts of the shul before him. I was asked to honor those past presidents who are present tonight. Sid, would you please stand for a moment so that people while be able to admire your new slim figure?

After Sid’s presidency, came that of Dave Berk. That was still before my time in Lafayette. I remember a few years later when I first met Dave. Actually, I got the full treatment—Dave, Ike and Nate Bercovitz and Charlie Elkin all at the same time. Within a week of arriving in Lafayette, I found that the way to kosher meat was to place an order with the butcher in Indianapolis. I was told that meat was shipped to Lafayette weekly via Greyhound bus, and that it could be picked up after a certain hour on Thursday or whatever the magic day was. Where do I pick up my meat? I was given an address on Third Street. Before going any further, I should remark that by this time Mickey and I were feeling that we had left the last vestiges of the Jewish world behind in New York. Blond hair and blue eyes were already getting to me. I parked on Third Street and started looking for my meat. The address I sought seemed not to be there. I walked back and forth and finally realized that one funny looking place which I had previously overlooked was the only possibility. I found a door, one of those strange low doors with a big step that often exist in garages and usually lead to banged heads, and walked in. I saw no one. The place seemed to be occupied by crate upon crate of noisy and rather fragrant chickens. By this time, I concluded that I had made a mistake. As I was about to make my exit, Ike emerged from behind a stack of crates—-I was caught. He stood there with a plaid jacket and a plaid cap and a stubbly face, but as soon as I heard his voice, I realized that I had come to the right place. Soon I had met the family, and Charlie and I walked over to the Greyhound station to get the treasure which had not yet been picked up. That afternoon is one of my first and most lasting images of Lafayette.

Back to business! Marvin Schreiber followed Dave Berk as president. Marvin was the first of the Purdue presidents; many were to follow. Then came Ed Simon. Barry Elkin served as president in 1968 and ’69. He was president at the time of our 75th Anniversary celebration. Barry was a local boy, one of the Elkins who grew up in Sons of Abraham. His grandfather was Samuel, the younger brother of Israel Elkin. I remember Barry best, not as president, but as the treasurer who took over after his father Charlie died. Barry was a third generation treasurer of our congregation. But he was much more. He was whatever he had to be in a particular situation. He was never too busy to serve his shul and provide the guidance and steady hand which we so often needed. His sudden and surprising death in the summer of 1981 at the age of 45 shocked our congregation as never before. Earlier that year, I stood next to Barry each day as he said
kaddish for his mother and I for my father. Never did I expect that before I finished my year of reciting kaddish, his sons would be standing next to me.

In 1970, Joe Wolinsky ascended to the presidency. Then came Earl Prohofsly, and then Sam Harris. I was really very clever in being president in '74-'75. The job was an easy one as long as Joseph Radinsky was rabbi. Arnold Tubis who followed me had a more difficult time of it when Rabbi Radinsky left in the summer of '76. The following years saw many presidents and many rabbis come and go. After Arnold was George Berman, Steve Weingram, Leslie Field, then me again (I guess that makes me the Grover Cleveland of Sons of Abraham, the only president to serve two non-consecutive terms). Then came Mike Miller, Solomon (Shlomo ben Uri) Gartenhaus, David Berman, and that brings us up to the present, Neil Zimmerman. The congregation owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to all of these men, but especially to those who have served in recent years during those periods when we have had no rabbi—with all of those added responsibilities which come at such times. It seems strange that up to the time of the 75th Anniversary celebration, there had been only 14 presidents. During the past 25 years, 11 names have been added to that list. Either we're wearing out our presidents at a faster rate, or else everyone wants to be an administrator.

Sons of Abraham didn't just keep the men of the community busy. The women frequently went their own way, and busied themselves with support activities without which the congregation could not survive. The Sisterhood of Sons of Abraham provided the backbone of the social side of Jewish life in Lafayette. Besides maintaining the synagogue and the rabbi's house, they have always sponsored major fund-raising efforts. In modern times we know of the annual garage sale and Harriet Diamond's freezer-pleaser "Gourmet Jewish Food" spectacular. The latter, of course, is an off-spring of the phenomenally successful "Businessmen's Luncheon" which was discontinued in 1980, not because of a lack in attendance.

The women of our sisterhood also have their administrators. Currently that office is occupied by Sheila Wolinsky. Despite her recent ascent to that position, she has been active in sisterhood affairs for what must seem like 100 years to her. In fact, she and Harriet Berger were responsible for the start of those gastronomic treats called the "Businessmen's Luncheon." For the two days each year when that fundraiser took place, you could hardly do business with anyone in Lafayette without having your eyebrows scorched by a flaming gust of garlic. Sheila -- would you please stand?

Before Sheila other equally capable women were in charge. Harriet Diamond of freezer-pleaser fame was sisterhood president from 1987 until earlier this year. If I ever need anything done, I call on Harriet. The problem is, so does everybody else, but we're never disappointed. Helen Miller was president before Harriet, who followed Cyrelle Simon, who followed Heather Moskowitz, who followed Louise Klatch, Sue Prohofsly, Becky Chosnek, Marilyn Elkin (one of those surnames that keeps cropping up), Sandy Diskin, Iris Treager, Cyrelle Simon again (I guess that makes her the Groveress Cleveland of the sisterhood), Charlotte Tubis (sisterhood president at the time of the 75th Anniversary Bash), Jessica Krushen, Harriet Berger, Sandra Brown, Pauline Zaban and
Edna Cohen. Before this time (1961) the sisterhood did not exist by that name. It was preceded by a "Ladies Aid Society". One of the presidents of that group was our beloved Sadie Bercovitz.

Different people serve in different ways. There are so many jobs to do. Not everyone wants to be president. Many make their mark on the community nonetheless. There are so many of you here tonight who have demonstrated a longstanding commitment to our congregation, that it would be redundant to try to list the names and the accomplishments. Besides, I would be sure to offend some because of my flawed memory. But there are a few very special people who by virtue of their deeds demand special recognition.

First and foremost, I take pleasure in acknowledging the debt we all owe to Ike and Sadie Bercovitz. Their leadership in Sons of Abraham predates my stay in Lafayette. When I arrived here, they were already legends. They have sat on the board of trustees as long as I can remember. They were always doers in the shul and in the sisterhood. And they were always givers. They gave time, advice and financial aid. To the present day, Ike can still be counted on to help make our Shabbos morning minyon. We would like to honor them by having them light the first of the ten candles which surround our anniversary cake.

When we think of other families that have been involved in every facet of the life of our Jewish community, the names of Ed and Cyrelle Simon must head the list. Ed is always ready to undertake new projects, such as this anniversary celebration. Although they don't quite go back in time to our founders, they certainly qualify as builders of our congregation. Sons of Abraham has been enriched by their presence in Lafayette. Would Ed and Cyrelle please come forward to light the second candle?

I have read a list of 24 names, all but one were former presidents of our congregation. The current president, number 24, Neil Zimmerman, is a good example of how a young family is able to move into our community and have an almost instant impact on it. They have become part of us, and we hope that we have become a part of them as well. Neil, as a representative of all presidents of our congregation, will you and Marilyn please light candle number three?

Immediately after the list of shul presidents, came a similar list for the sisterhood. Sheila Wolinsky currently sits in the oval sisterhood office, wherever that is. Many years ago Joe performed the same service for the shul. For many years, they and their children have been present at all of our functions. It's a pleasure to be able to honor them here tonight. Sheila, as a representative of sisterhood presidents, would you and Joe please light candle number four?

For the fifth candle, I would like to call on someone who I feel is able to represent the founding fathers. Although he has only been in the shul family for a measly 67 years, he has been a fixture at all services for as long as I can remember. It is only recently, that his poor health has kept him from coming to shul on a regular basis. He is the senior
member of our congregation and I am delighted to ask Simon Krushen to light candle number five.

We’re half way there, not in time, but in number of lit candles. Those who accept the responsibility of running the shul meet regularly and decide what has to be done. Deciding what has to be done—and getting a general sense of agreement—is often the easiest part. When the question arises of who does the work, many pairs of eyes suddenly look downward. Things must be done, frequently on short notice or with no notice at all. During each time period, there always seems to be one person who distinguishes herself or himself by consistently stepping forward and doing what has to be done with much disregard to personal inconvenience. During the last several years, that person has been Harriet Diamond. Unlike many of us, she does not consider herself a specialist. Some of us will willingly do this, but not that. Others will do that, but not this. Harriet does it all. We all respect her judgement and seek out her counsel. We are amazed at the time she invests in the shul kitchen, and in other labors for the benefit of the Sons of Abraham community. We appreciate it and would like to recognize her many contributions by asking her, and Sid, to please step forward and light candle number six.

At this time of year with the High Holy Days approaching, we sit down and begin to make lists. One list contains the names of family and friends to whom we will send holiday greetings. Another list which we usually formulate in our mind, is the personal assessment of the past year. There is also the list of resolutions for the new year. But one member of our congregation makes long lists, not for his benefit, but for ours. His list is a laborious and often painful one to compile. It may take a hundred or more phone calls before it is complete. His list will eventually contain the name of every man in the congregation who has pledged a contribution in acknowledgement of being called to the torah during those High Holy Days. Bill Zaban has been doing this job for as long as I can remember. Each year he tells me that this year is the last. It’s time for someone else to take over. But deep down, I think that he knows that nobody else can do this job as well as he does, and that it’s an important job. Bill has been involved with the Board of Trustees of the congregation forever. His knowledge of the building trades has made him a natural for dealing with the maintenance of the shul and the rabbi’s residence. His involvement with the selling of Aliyahs is seasonal. His involvement with the shul knows no season. Bill, will you please come up here and light candle number seven?

As I said before, there are many different ways in which members serve and support the congregation. When we compile our lists of what we consider important, there is always one item that tops the list. Above all we desire that our children be well trained in our heritage. We expect that they will be able to read and understand the prayers which have been chanted for generations. We want them to have the flavor and the substance of our religion, to know about the holidays, and to be able to participate fully in our services. Through the years, many have contributed superhuman efforts in order to achieve this goal. During Rabbi Joseph Radinsky’s tenure here, he did it all. He provided our boys and girls with daily Hebrew classes, contributed to the Sunday School, taught bar and bat mitzva students, and did whatever else he could to try to achieve our educational goals. When he left, there was an instant vacuum created. But many of our
members stepped forward. Our children continued to study and continued to learn. But one woman gave of herself as did no one else. Sonia Barash was responsible for elevating our Hebrew classes to a new level of excellence. Because of her efforts during a critical time in our history, our children were not only able to survive—they were able to flourish. I ask that Sonia and Moshe Barash step forward and light candle number eight as representatives of all who have contributed so meaningfully to the Jewish education of our children.

The heat of eight candles is beginning to take its toll on the frosting. For the ninth candle, I’d like to have someone unique, a mixture of young and old, of the very newest and still the most established. We are fortunate to have someone in our midst who fits this description, Gedalya and Marilyn Engel. They have been active members of the Lafayette Jewish Community, and have taken a leadership role for years from Rabbi Engel’s pulpit here at the Hillel Foundation. They have also been active participants in the functions of Sons of Abraham, but not as members. The Rabbi and his three sons have especially been appreciated on many Shabbos mornings when they have constituted 40% of our minyon. During periods when we have had no rabbi, Rabbi Engel has been quick to contribute his skills and knowledge as needed. Our survival to the present time is partly a result of his being here. This is certainly the description of an established Lafayette family, if you will pardon the expression, community elders. But now with retirement from Hillel a new phase of their life begins. They have become the newest members of our congregation and we all hope they continue to participate fully (und mit gezundt) for years to come. Marilyn and Gedalyah, would you please light candle number nine?

The last candle I’ve reserved for another newcomer. Rabbi Manuel Armon and his wife Sofia have been with us for only one year. As representatives of the rabbis and rebbitzin who have served this congregation over the years, I ask them to please light the last candle.

We look at this cake surrounded by ten candles. We have tried to honor a few individuals in our shul family, but we could easily have had many times this number of candles blazing away. But most of all, we should remember that tonight we are honoring those who originally met in order to give birth to this Congregation Sons of Abraham which we all love so much and which plays such an important part in our lives. We are here because of them and their foresight. The souls of the Atlases, the Spectors, the Elkins, the Pearlmans, and all those others are sitting with us tonight.

If you ever have doubts about your support to the shul, whether it involves time, money, or physical effort, pause for a moment and try to imagine what your days in Lafayette would have been like without Congregation Sons of Abraham. Try to imagine how that difference would have affected the lives of our children. Think about the emptiness that would be created if our congregation ceased to exist.

Somehow, I’m not happy with the image of these anniversary candles burning around a cake, because to most of us, a cake is dessert—- it comes after the main course. I would rather have seen candles around a big bowl of chopped liver--- an appetizer,
because I would prefer to picture the first 100 years of Sons of Abraham as the appetizer, the prelude to the main course. From our perspective, it may seem hard to imagine the completion of a second century for our congregation. Please try to imagine what the view must have been like for that very small, hardy group in 1889, without a congregation, without a building, with little money, and with long working days. If they could do it, we can do it. With the help of G-d, and with our continued support, let us pray that there will be a 200th Anniversary Celebration some day. Amen!