



The twelve founders

the different centers of the American Jewish community. The continuous growth of the Order made it necessary to build a manageable organization; so as early as 1851 the lodges were concentrated into *District 1* and *District 2*. And exactly thirty years after B'nai B'rith had been founded, the organization in the United States consisted of the seven Districts we know today.

Thereafter B'nai B'rith expanded to Europe. The official chronicle says that the first European lodge was the *Deutsche-Reichs-Loge No 332*, in Berlin, founded in 1882, and the

first overseas district, *District 8 Germany*, was founded in 1885. Recently discovered papers, however, tell us, that still earlier several lodges had been founded in Romania: *Noua Fraternitate* 1873 in Bucharest, and thereafter within two years a.o. *Peizotto* in Braila, *Bien* in Galatz, *Egalitatea* in Ploiesti, *Progesul* in Roman. But the official charters were delayed and not before 1889 had thirteen of the Romanian lodges received their charter, though the second lodge in Bucharest, the lodge *Lumina*, founded in 1875, still had to wait. *District 9 Roumania* was installed in 1888.

The reasons for this delay, and also the reasons why the history of the early Romanian lodges is not mentioned in the monographs on the history of B'nai B'rith which were written in German before World War II—and the writer of this paper has not been able to find any other monographs in any European language—are unknown. But the reason why Romania was the earliest European foothold of B'nai B'rith is obvious.

There were severe persecutions of Jews in Romania in 1870. B'nai B'rith asked the President of the United States, Ulysses Grant, to send the ex-president of the Order, Benjamin F Peixotto, as U S consul to Bucharest. Peixotto succeeded in his task of improving the situation for the Jews of Romania. This was, in fact, not the first political operation overseas. Already in 1851 B'nai B'rith successfully pressured some of the strictly religious Swiss cantons to abolish their restrictions against non-Christian tourists.

To make the Jewish voice heard has been one of the objectives of B'nai B'rith from the start.

B'nai B'rith—a membership-organization

B'nai B'rith means *Children of the Covenant* and it should be noted, that the organization called itself in the beginning using the German expression "Bundesbrüder" and had Hebrew titles for the members of the Board.

B'nai B'rith is the oldest international Jewish organization. Only *Alliance Israélite Universelle* is older (by three years), but it restricts its work to a few countries.

In contrast to most other Jewish organizations, B'nai B'rith has no hierarchy, nor is it a umbrella organization. It is totally democratic, it is still the only major Jewish organization, in which every individual member has a vote.

The Biennial International Convention, to which every lodge around the world may send delegates and has its number of votes in proportion to the number of its members, elects

the *Board of Governors of B'nai B'rith*, the *International President* and the *International Vice Presidents*.

Democratic principles have been sustained ever since B'nai B'rith was founded one and a half centuries ago, and so have the ideals of B'nai B'rith.

Expansion around the world

District 8 grew quickly and attracted the attention of most Central European and quite a few Mediterranean Jewish Communities. The *Maimonides Lodge* in Cairo was inaugurated in 1887 and the *Yerushalayim Lodge* in Jerusalem the following year. This lodge received the number 376, the numerical value of which in Hebrew *shin-lamed-vav-mem* is equal to "shalom—peace". The first secretary of this lodge was Eliezer ben-Yehuda, the man who shaped modern Hebrew. Within little more than two decades, there were lodges in Philippopolis, Sofia, Belgrade, Constantinople, Salonica, Smyrna, Alexandria, Beirut and other places around the eastern Mediterranean. In 1911 these lodges formed *District 11 Orient* the Board of which was domiciled in Constantinople.

By 1924 the number of Lodges in the Holy Land had grown sufficiently to inaugurate *District 14 Palestine*. In 1933 *District 16 Egypt* and *District 17 Bulgaria* split up from District 11. At that time, there were 34 lodges in those four "Oriental" districts—only District No 14 survived in new-born Israel.

In Central Europe *District 10 Österreich-Ungarn* was founded in 1895. In 1919, when new borders were established in old Europe, this number was transferred to a new *District 10 Czecho-Slovakia*. In 1923 the new *District 12 Austria* was formed, followed by *District 13 Poland* in 1924 and *District 18 Yugoslavia* in 1935. In the mid-thirties, District No 8 Germany alone counted 103 lodges and 75 chapters and its membership, a total of 14000 *brothers* and *sisters*, exceeded by far that of any other district of the Order. None of these Districts survived the Shoa. The numbers 8, 9, 10, 11,

12, 13, 16, 17 and 18 will never be used again.

In the *Netherlands*, lodges were founded in 1924 in The Hague and Amsterdam. The first *French* lodge was inaugurated in *Alger* in 1895, followed by *Loge France* in Paris in 1932 and *Loge Côte d'Azur* in Nice.

The only place in Western Europe that could glory in a functioning B'nai B'rith, however, was the United Kingdom, where the *First Lodge of England* was founded in 1910 in London and a second lodge in 1914 in Manchester. Chaim Weizmann was a brother of the Manchester lodge, and when the chairman of the Board of Deputies of British Jews in 1917 desisted in public from Zionism, the British lodges were already strong enough to aid Weizmann in overturning the board. *District No 15 Great Britain and Ireland* was inaugurated in 1926.

B'nai B'rith came to Switzerland in 1905, when the *Basel Loge* was inaugurated, followed 1909 by the *Augustin Keller-Loge*, of Zürich. The first Scandinavian Lodge was the *Danmark Loge*, of Copenhagen, which was inaugurated in 1912. Those three lodges did not belong to any district, but were directly under the jurisdiction of the *Supreme Lodge* in the United States.

Revival in Continental Europe

The Shoa shattered Jewish life in Continental Europe. Of all lodges only the Swiss Lodges had survived and, in a sense, the Danish lodge, because practically all members had succeeded in escaping to neutral Sweden.

Some few members of District 8 had fled to Sweden in the 1930's, and when peace again had been established in Europe, they succeeded in implanting in Swedish Jewish circles the ideals of B'nai B'rith. The first Continental-European lodge to receive its charter after World War II was thus the lodge of Stockholm, which named itself *Fredslogen*, i.e. The Lodge of the Peace.

Table of the lodges that have survived or been

reborn:

- No. 595 Basel-Loge, Basel (1905)
- No. 648 Augustin Keller-Loge, Zürich (1909)
- No. 712 Danmark Logen, Copenhagen (1912, in exile 1943-1945)
- No. 945 Loge Hollandia, The Hague (1924)
- No. 986 Loge Hilleel, Amsterdam (1924)
- No. 993 Loge Philon, Athens (1924, re-installed 1955)
- No. 1151 Loge France, Paris (1932, re-installed 1946)
- No. 1160 Loge Alsace, Mulhouse (1935)

Table of the first new lodges and chapters after the war:

- No. 1603 Fredslogen, Stockholm (chartered 1946, installed 1949)
- No. 1625 Loge Côte d'Azur, Nice (1946)
- No. 1808 Loge Alsace, Strasbourg (1948)
- No. 1848 Loge Emile Zola, Marseille
- No. 1849 Fraternelle 'Henry Jones', Brussels (1950)
- No. 1868 Loge Henry Dunant, Geneva (1950)
- No. 1871 Genootschap B'nai B'rith, Antwerp (1951)
- No. 1872 Loge Scheurer-Kestner, Colmar (1951)
- No. 1883 Association B'nai B'rith, Luxembourg (1951)
- No. 1884 Loge Robert Lehmann, Lyon (1951)
- No. 1909 Malmö-Logen, Malmö (1952)
- No. 1923 Loge Elie Bloch, Metz (1952)
- No. 1928 Norgeslosjen, Oslo (1952)
- No. 1929 Logen Gothia, Gothenburg (1953)
- No. 1992 Loge Cassuto, Milano (1955)
- No. 2032 Loggia Elia Benamozegh, Rome (1954)
- No. 764 Amicale des Soeurs 'Henry Jones', Brussels (1952)
- No. 770 Chapitre B'nai B'rith, Anvers (1951)

In November 1948, representatives from some of the lodges which had survived the war, and from some re-born lodges met in Paris: the Basel Loge, the Augustin Keller-Loge, the Danmark Loge, the Loge Hollandia, the Loge Hilleel and the Loge France and a member of the Loge France who represented Greece, a past

President of District 9 Romania, representatives for the just inaugurated new lodge Côte d'Azur and for the lodges that were going to be founded in Belgium and Sweden. District 15 Great Britain and Ireland had sent its President Gordon Liverman. The meeting decided to form, in co-operation with District 15, an association called *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der europäischen B'nai B'rith Logen/Union des Loges B'nai B'rith Européennes* and to elect rabbi Leo Baeck, who had been the President of District 8 from 1924 until it could function no more, and had survived Theresienstadt, as the associations' President.

In the year 1955, when B'nai B'rith had reached out to ten Continental-European countries, *District 19 Continental-Europe* was inaugurated. Today, the District comprises fourteen countries, i.e. all Western European democracies, except for Finland and Portugal. The new District held its first Convention the following year in Stockholm.

During the following thirty years, new Districts were founded in *South America, Australia and New Zealand, Canada, Central America, South Africa*, and finally the Districts *Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay* split up from District South America. In *Tokyo*, almost the entire Jewish Community has entered B'nai B'rith. The first Lodge in *Russia* has recently been inaugurated in Moscow. There are quite a few lodges in similar, far away places and not all of those lodges belong to a district, but are under the direct jurisdiction of the Board of Governors of B'nai B'rith International.

The Triennial Convention of B'nai B'rith in 1974, which was the second International Convention that took place in Israel, decided to abandon the conception of an *Order* and to transform the organization into *B'nai B'rith International*.

Auxiliaries, Chapters, Co-ed and Mixed Lodges

From the beginning, B'nai B'rith was an Or-

der for Jewish Men. In 1888 a *sister-circle* was formed in Berlin, followed by other sister-circles in the district. A similar circle, formed in 1897, worked for a short time in San Francisco. In the United States, twelve years later, a new and more successful attempt was made, and this was the beginning of the *Women's Auxiliaries*, later more appropriately renamed *B'nai B'rith Women*.

In England, a female group formed the *First Women's Lodge of England* in 1923, and this chapter was immediately ranked equal to the men's lodges.

Before the Shoa, there were *sister-circles* in many places in Continental Europe, and from the 1950s on, also female lodges, so-called *chapters*, were founded. England tried in 1968 to found *co-ed lodges* of both sexes, but it was not until a few days before the beginning of 1973, that the leadership of B'nai B'rith Women was ready to drop its resistance and advised the Board of Governors of B'nai B'rith to accept these modern ideas.

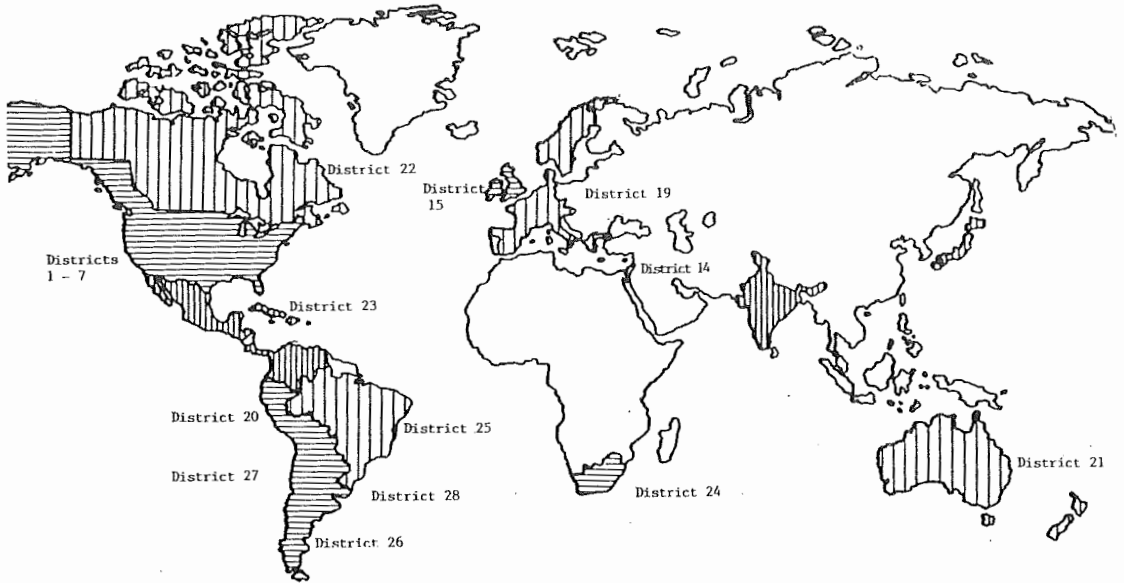
District 15 Great Britain and Ireland inaugurated immediately three *unity-lodges* and District 19 Continental-Europe soon followed this example. In the United States the leadership of B'nai B'rith Women tried to check the foundation of mixed lodges, establishing certain conditions for these so called *units*, but in 1988 the International Convention of B'nai B'rith decided to overrule all restrictions. Outside the United States, however, and so also in District 19 Continental-Europe, most lodges today are *mixed lodges*. One of the last places, where no mixed lodges existed, has been the Scandinavian region. But at the time of the publication of this paper, the Logen Gothia, of Gothenburg, will have just opened its ranks for women.

It was not until 1940 that a *B'nai B'rith Women's Supreme Council* was formed in the United States, which co-ordinated the work of the sister-circles and transformed them into chapters, i.e. women's lodges. The Independent Order of B'nai B'rith—later The B'nai B'rith International—and the B'nai B'rith Women in the United States form independent organizations within the B'nai B'rith family, but

the leadership of the BBW is seated on the Board of Governors of B'nai B'rith.

Ever since the Triennial Convention of 1974, female B'nai B'rith leaders from outside

the US—the so called *Overseas Districts*—have been elected as members of the Board of Governors of B'nai B'rith in their capacity as leaders of mixed Districts.



There exists the following districts: 1-7: The United States of America and British Columbia; 14: Israel; 15: Great Britain and Ireland; 19: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxemburg, Monaco, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland; 20: Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru; 21: Australia and New Zealand; 22: Canada, except British Columbia; 23: Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Netherland Antilles, Panama, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Virgin Islands; 24: South Africa; 25: Brazil; 26: Argentina; 27: Chile; 28: Uruguay. Also: Hongkong, India, Japan, Singapore, Soviet Union.

The agencies of B'nai B'rith and the International Council

From the very beginning, the main purpose of B'nai B'rith has been to serve the Jewish people. In order to fulfil this great mission, different "agencies" have been established in the course of time. One of the most well known is the *ADL—The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith*, famous worldwide for its unbiased and unprejudiced approach to the different problems of defamation on ethnic and

religious grounds.

Other agencies are working for Israel, for Adult Jewish Education, for Russian Jewry; there is a Hillel Commission taking care of Jewish youth at universities, there is a Youth Commission supervising the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization and other commissions specializing in different tasks.

The Triennial Convention in Jerusalem 1959—at that time the International Conventions still took place every third year—was the first one to be held outside the United States.

It decided to create an *International Council* in order to establish a close co-operation between all districts around the world on items, which were not specific US problems. At the present time the Chairman of the International Council is one of the past-presidents of District 19 Continental-Europe.

Forty five countries with about 500 000 members—men, women and youth—are thus co-operating to fulfil the mission of B'nai B'rith in serving the Jewish people worldwide.

The Scandinavian Region, the first region in the District that organized itself, when *The Scandinavian Lodge Council* was formed in 1955—the same year as District 19 was inaugurated—has experienced many occasions when the B'nai B'rith via its International Council has been of great help in solving difficult problems of bias and prejudice.

One of the main international tasks of our time, however, has been help to Jews in distress in the Soviet Union and other countries of oppression. It was through the mouth of B'nai B'rith, that the *Jews of Silence* in the Soviet Union in 1961 cried out and this was followed by a deal by the USA with the USSR that enabled a quarter of a million Soviet Jews

to leave the country. In our time, after more than a decade of renewed oppression, the Soviet Union has set out on a new development and B'nai B'rith is instrumental in implementing the visions of *glasnost* in daily Jewish life in Moscow.

The other great task of our time is the support of the Jewish state. B'nai B'rith has been involved in the building of a modern society in the Holy Land ever since the time the Jerusalem lodge was anticipated. In 1887 District 8 founded a technical school in Jerusalem. Five years later the National Library in Jerusalem, which is the origin of the library of the Hebrew University, was established. In our century B'nai B'rith founded the villages Moledet B'nai B'rith and Ramat Zvi. In different places throughout the country, B'nai B'rith has helped to build kindergardens and homes for immigrants, for girls, for resconvalescents, for senior citizens and for the blind. Those social activities are at present superseded by the political endeavours of striving for the total unity of the Jewish people.

* The author is the President of the Scandinavian Lodge Council, a Past Vice President of District 19 and a Past International Vice President of B'nai B'rith.