



The Synagogues of Central and Western Pennsylvania: A Visual Journey (America Through Time)

Julian H. Preisler

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Pennsylvania has one of the largest and oldest organized Jewish Communities communities in the United States. Jews of Sephardic origin settled in what was to become the “Keystone State” in the early eighteenth century, though there were some Jewish traders in the area during the latter part of the seventeenth century. Jews began trading and residing in the areas of Central and Western Pennsylvania in the early years of the nineteenth century, and as their numbers increased, they began establishing burial societies and synagogues. The early Jewish settlers were mostly of German origin and were joined later by Jews of Central and Eastern European background. Chambersburg, Danville, Hanover, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh and Uniontown were among the early areas of Jewish settlement. In 1840, a Jewish burial society was established in Chambersburg in Central Pennsylvania, making it the first official Jewish organization established outside of Philadelphia. Congregation Rodef Shalom in Pittsburgh traces its initial beginnings to a Jewish burial society established there in 1847. There is a wealth of history and an extensive physical record of Jewish settlement throughout Central and Western Pennsylvania. Growing Jewish Communities established congregations, cemeteries, and social organizations, building their synagogues as a testament to their faith and community. Take a visual journey and discover a unique portion of Pennsylvania's ethnic and religious history.

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