

## Lester Taven's Memories of Cleveland's Tetiever Shul in the 1930s & 1940s

(dictated by Lester Tavens in 2014)

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Cleveland's Tetiever shul started as Tetiever landsman group in 1893.

It became Tetiever Anshai Sfard (because of Spanish Jews, who had mustaches) in 1912.

It was first located on E40<sup>th</sup> St and Woodland Ave, and later on Lindh Rd off E105<sup>th</sup> St.

In 1931, the shul hired its first full time rabbi, Rabbi Landa, who was born in Tetiev, and served until 1950.

I (Lester Tavens) was born in 1931, and had my bar mitzvah in the shul at age 13.

My father was president of shul 1936-1956.

Everyone in the Tetiever shul spoke Yiddish in shul, and Rabbi Landa discouraged congregants from speaking any other language in shul.

For my bar mitzvah, at age 13 in 1944, I asked the rabbi for permission to deliver my bar mitzvah speech in English. Rabbi Landa told me that I could do so only if I delivered it also in Yiddish and Hebrew. So, every paragraph I said in my speech, I said in 3 languages: Yiddish, Hebrew and English. Even today, 70 years later, I still remember every word of that speech.

In the 1940s, salaries paid by synagogues to Orthodox rabbis was not enough to live off of. Rabbis lived under financial hardship to serve the community. To augment their income, rabbis depended on small cash gifts that individual congregants gave to them when the rabbi would perform a service for the congregant, such when acting as an agent to sell chametz before Passover. The Tetiever shul's annual dues in the 1940s (and even up to the time it merged with other synagogues to form Warrensville Center Synagogue) was only \$7 per year. And the rabbi's annual salary was only \$700/year.

I once witnessed Rabbi's Landa's personal selflessness in the following incident. In the 1940s, I accompanied my father on a visit to Rabbi Landa's house on Friday. During our visit, a woman entered, carrying a slaughtered chicken that she had just bought. She worried it might not be kosher, because it was bruised, and she asked the rabbi for his opinion. The rabbi asked her "How much did you pay for the chicken?". She said "15 cents". He told her, "The Sabbath is coming soon, and I did not buy a chicken for my own family yet. Do me a favor. Sell me your chicken for 15 cents. And you use the 15 cents to buy another chicken for your family." After she took the 15 cents and left, he discarded the chicken. He said that the chicken was not kosher due its bruises, but the woman was so poor that he did not have the heart to tell her she wasted precious funds on a chicken she could not eat, so he shouldered the financial loss himself, despite his own poverty.