Lester S. Hecht

(21, 23)

1950-1955

1957-1959

Lester S. Hecht served two nonconsecutive terms as president of Keneseth Israel. During his first term from 1950 to 1955, Hecht hired two new assistant rabbis: Rabbi Theodore S. Levy in 1951, and Rabbi H. Hirsch Cohen in 1952. Rabbi Korn, meanwhile, instituted the training of lay assistants to help with the religious work of the growing synagogue. These lay assistants were synagogue leaders who were trained to assist with religious functions, such as leading services, running graveside funerals, and delivering invocations at civic functions. At the same time, as more and more of the congregation’s membership moved to the suburbs, it became too expensive to maintain the Broad Street building and to attract membership at that location. In response, in 1951, the Board approved the sale of the Broad Street building to Temple University. Keneseth Israel purchased a plot of land on Old York Road in Elkins Park, and Israel Demchick was hired as head architect to design the new building. The symbolic groundbreaking occurred on November 28, 1955. During Hecht’s second term, from 1957 to 1959, Keneseth Israel officially moved into the new building. The dedication of the new building was in December of 1959, although the congregation had already been utilizing the space.

Lester S. Hecht was born on August 19, 1894 in Philadelphia. He graduated from Dickinson College in 1915, and subsequently received a law degree from the University of Michigan, where he was editor of the Michigan Law Review. Hecht moved back to Philadelphia in 1920, where he worked for Fox & Rothschild. In 1925 he became chief counsel to the legal aid bureau of the Department of Public Welfare, and in 1932 he became assistant Pennsylvania attorney general. In 1935 he returned to private practice, focusing primarily on tax law. He also authored *Municipal Claims and Tax Liens of Pennsylvania*, the primary text on municipal taxation in the state. Outside of work, Hecht was an executive board member of the Big Brothers organization, President of the University of Michigan Alumni Club and the Dickinson College Alumni Club, and a board member of the American Jewish Committee.

Hecht was married to Edit Weill Hecht, a sculptor, who died in 1963. They had three sons: Robert C., Richard W., and Lester. He subsequently married Violet Pritzker Hecht, and gained a stepson, Norman P. Ruby. Lester Hecht had nine grandchildren. At the end of his life, he lived at 8333 Elliston Drive in Wyndmoor. He died on December 9, 1978, and was cremated at the Chelton Hills Crematory.