

# THE EINSTEIN TORAH

By Rabbi Saul J. Rubin

(Written for Mickve Israel's 283rd anniversary)

For many years, the 1733 and 1737 Torahs were read at our anniversary service. We have been cautioned by the conservator who repaired our deerskin scrolls that, due to their fragility, it is not wise to remove the older scrolls from their cases except for extraordinary events.

Instead another venerated Torah will be substituted--the 162 years old--1855-- Einstein Torah. Abraham Einstein donated it in an effort to bring harmony to the congregation. Unlike in our time, there were major tensions dividing the members. The cause--some wanted reforms, others wanted to keep things like they were. Mr. Einstein believed that a splendid congregational banquet with lots of liquor and delicacies would distract the combatants. Obviously, he knew Savannahians well!

To arouse a sense of devotion and commonality, he added the gift of a Torah to the mix. This gave Mickve Israel Rabbi Jacob Rosenfeld an opportunity to inspire unity--which he did with a toast. Here are his exact words: "Union in Israel--the chosen people of God--associated by the most indissoluble ties of...religion. May we never forget that is our common cause."

President Jacob de la Motta, Esquire concluded the great banquet with these stirring words: "The Sacred Scroll of the Law, now before us, the emblem of our faith: may it never be polluted by the misconstruction of innovations..."

About this Torah, this much we know for certain. It came from Bittenweisen, Germany--and was purchased by Einstein's uncle, Rabbi Loeb Sanger.

For those who do not remember--Abraham Einstein was one of the most important leaders in Savannah Jewish history. He was *parnas* (president) of the Temple for an extended period. He served as the first Building Chairman for our present structure--from 1874-1876. His eldest daughter, Adelaide, married our second rabbi--Raphael de Castro Lewin. Einstein procured the architectural plans which provided the essential design for this magnificent sanctuary.

Abraham Einstein was so devoted to this congregation that he refused to leave Savannah during the 1870-76 Yellow Fever Epidemics that wiped out almost half of our population. He was determined to monitor the sanctuary building process -- and knew that his life was at risk, but this was his passion. As a consequence he perished--but he made sure that this Neo-Gothic gem would stand generation after generation. To read from his Torah on this historic occasion is a tribute to what he valued and the Temple he treasured more than life itself.