

# THE BEACON HILL TIMES

T H E R E   A R E   N O   T I M E S   L I K E   T H E S E   T I M E S

## A shared experience

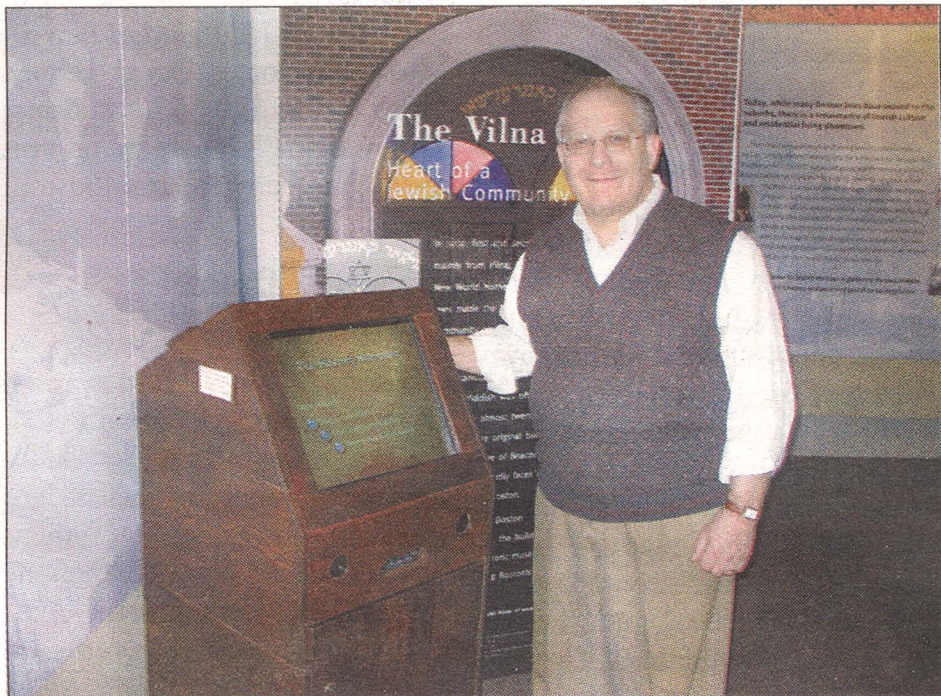
### *Interactive exhibit opens at the Boston Center for Jewish Heritage*

By Cary Shuman

STEVEN M. GREENBERG, executive director of the Boston Center for Jewish Heritage at the Vilna Shul on Phillips Street, couldn't be happier with the response to the center's "Boston Jewish Experience: Reconnect to the Tapestry" exhibit that opened in December.

While last month's wintry weather kept attendance down, those who have walked through the exhibit, located in the museum part of the shul, have been captivated by its extensive look at the Jewish community's history in Boston and the interactive, multi-media, exhibits that allow people to trace their origin and view historical photographs of area synagogues.

Greenberg said the unique exhibit was designed to inform people about "the Jewish presence in Boston." Greenberg, along with center board member and museum professional Deborah Feinstein, Brandeis professor Ellen Smith, the Bostonian Society, the Boston Public Library,



*Steven Greenberg, executive director of the Boston Center for Jewish Heritage at the Vilna Shul on Beacon Hill.*

the West End Museum and other people and organizations helped develop the exhibit.

The exhibit is divided into eight sections: The Way Jews Settled in Boston neighborhoods; the Way They Lived; the Way They Worshiped; the Way They Learned; the Way They Built Community; the Way We Remember; the Way They Moved; and the Way We Are Today.

"There were 115,000 Jews and 50 synagogues in Boston at the height in the 1930s," said Greenberg. "What this exhibit does is walk someone through

that whole Boston Jewish experience in what we call 'the threads of the tapestry. The tapestry is the experience and the issue is, how do you understand that experience? You pull it apart and look at the threads.'

According to Greenberg, Boston's Jews primarily settled in seven neighborhoods, South End, North End, West End, East Boston, Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan.

"The exhibit takes a look at the period from 1850 to 1950,

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which was a real growth period of Jewish population," said Greenberg.

In the Way They Lived section, visitors will see that Jews built houses of worships, schools, club, kosher meat markets, bakeries, and stores where they lived. Greenberg said the Way We Are Today section illustrates that "we're open and proud about being Jews and being proud about Israel."

Greenberg said one of the most exhibit's most popular attractions is an information booth where visitors can learn about all aspects of Judaism or do genealogical research. "People can look up their surname and learn about their family history," said Greenberg. "We wanted to make the exhibit as interactive as possible and as

in-depth. We're working with the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Boston and once a month, we'll have a genealogist here."

Greenberg said about 300 people have walked through the exhibit since it opened in mid-December. "On the day we opened, there was a snowstorm and 12 brave souls came in and viewed the exhibit," said Greenberg with a smile. "We do give tours but many people like to walk through the exhibit themselves because there's a lot of information here. People stand in each section and try to get a sense of what it must have been like to have this Jewish community from East Boston all the way to Mattapan.

Most visitors have been

unaware how extensive the Jewish community in Boston was."

Greenberg, who grew up in Natick and has a Master's Degree in Regional Planning from Cornell University, wants residents to come and enjoy the exhibit. He said the Vilna Shul is historic in its own right as "the only building left in Boston that was a synagogue in the immigrant era and still is a synagogue."

"We want people to come from everywhere to see our exhibit," said Greenberg, "We feel it's a good exhibit that covers a lot of ground. We're very proud of this exhibit. I've been told by people who lived through this era that this exhibit represents it, and their community was made up of all the things you'll see in the exhibit."