

**Herman Van Beil**  
**President: 1831-1837**

Dutch Jews made up a relatively small but important role in colonial and early 19th century Philadelphia and Herman Van Beil, president from 1831-37, was one of the most prominent. He was the epitome of the Dutch merchant whose talents made him a prosperous and influential person.

Born in Amsterdam in 1799, Van Beil arrived in Philadelphia in 1820. He was, over a successful business career, a bookbinder, clothing merchant, pawn broker and at the end of his life, a real estate investor. When he died in 1865, he had amassed an estate of over \$50,000, a large sum for those days. He served as an "Interpreter of the Courts," a position in Pennsylvania that exists today.

A religious man, he first served as cantor at Mikveh Israel but after two years, joined Rodeph Shalom. Like the other presidents of his era, he focused on looking for a permanent home for the growing congregation, overseeing at least one of the congregation's several short-term moves. His term ended in 1837, just as the new wave of German Jewish immigration began to set in.

One of the founders of the Hebrew Education Society, he was also involved in secular activities. A Mason, he was the longest serving member of his lodge when he died. Like Wolf Benjamin and other presidents who preceded him, he was remembered fondly for his character: "In his life he was an upright man...of varied and deep learning."

*Written by Fred Strober*