

LOCAL

Temple House of Israel celebrates 150 years of Jewish life in Staunton



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Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

Staunton's Temple House of Israel is celebrating 150 years of Jewish life in the city.

A series of free events will feature Rabbi Gary P. Zola, a distinguished professor of American Jewish history.

Events include lectures on the temple's architecture and Thomas Jefferson's views on Judaism.

The Temple House of Israel in downtown Staunton is hosting a series of events highlighting 150 years of Jewish life in the city, all part of the temple's anniversary celebration.

“Celebrating Temple House of Israel’s 150th anniversary, and 100 years in our beautiful building, is a magnificent achievement that speaks volumes about the staying power of faith and community,” said Rabbi Randi Nagel in an email to The News Leader. “I am honored to be part of Temple House of Israel’s long history in Staunton and am grateful for the wisdom of the many dedicated rabbis who paved the way before me.”

According to the Augusta Historical Bulletin, Jewish people began arriving in Staunton in the mid-1800s. By 1886, they had formed a small congregation, Temple House of Israel, and a building on Kalorama Street was purchased to use as a synagogue. The minutes to the first meeting list 24 men, almost all of them merchants from either Germany or Prussia. Decades later in 1925, the current temple at 15 N. Market Street was built.

To celebrate the anniversary, there will be events held on Dec. 5 and 6 featuring Rabbi Gary P. Zola. According to Cincinnati's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Zola served as the executive director of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives from 1998 through June 2023 at the school, where Nagel said Zola is also the Edward M. Ackerman Family Distinguished Professor Emeritus of the American Jewish Experience.

“The inclusion of Dr. Rabbi Gary Zola makes this weekend truly special,” Nagel said. “Attending is not just a celebration, but an unparalleled chance to connect with a leading scholar who can place our Temple's journey within the larger tapestry of American Jewish life. It's a compelling way to deepen our understanding of our own unique heritage.”

The events include:

Dr. Ruth Chodrow's “Architecture and History of the Temple” introduction at 7 p.m. on Dec. 3 at Mary Baldwin University's Francis Auditorium.

The Fannie B. Strauss and Weinberg Family Memorial Lecture with Rabbi Zola at 7 p.m. on Dec. 5 at the Temple House of Israel as part of the Shabbat service.

Bible study with Rabbi Zola at 10 a.m. on Dec. 6 at the Temple House of Israel.

A special lecture and discussion with Rabbi Zola on Thomas Jefferson's conflicting views on Jews and Judaism at 7 p.m. on Dec. 6 at the Frontier Culture Museum's Octagonal Barn.

Nagel said she's particularly looking forward to Zola's talk on Jefferson. "The opportunity to hear Dr. Gary P. Zola present primary source documents on 'Virtue and Vice: Thomas Jefferson's Conflicting Ideas on Jews and Judaism' promises to be an enlightening and candid discussion of a pivotal figure in American history, offering an unparalleled understanding of his complex legacy," she said.

The Frontier Culture Museum is located at 1290 Richmond Avenue in Staunton. All of the temple's anniversary events are open to the public. There will also be a dessert reception after the Dec. 5 evening service and the Dec. 6 evening lecture, Nagel said.

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Brad Zinn is the cops, courts and breaking news reporter at The News Leader. Have a news tip? Or something that needs investigating? You can email reporter Brad Zinn (he/him) at bzinn@newsleader.com.