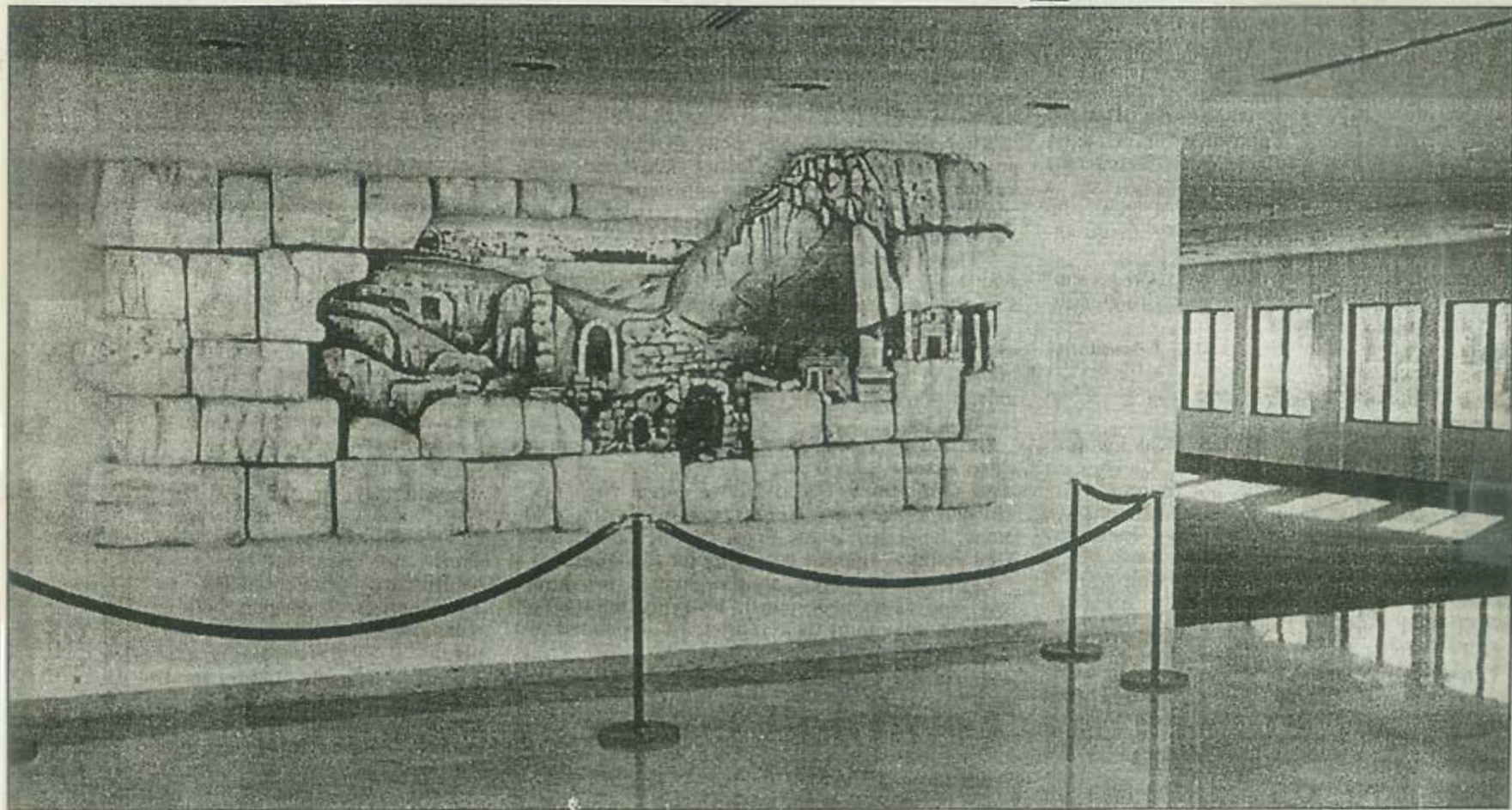


Bank calls in temple loan



Staff photos by John Zich

One of the decorations in Congregation B'Nai Torah is a mural made partially with imported marble.

Financial woes may force congregation to disband

The board is asking each family to donate at least \$2,500 apiece to save the synagogue.

By Wayne Tompkins
Staff Writer

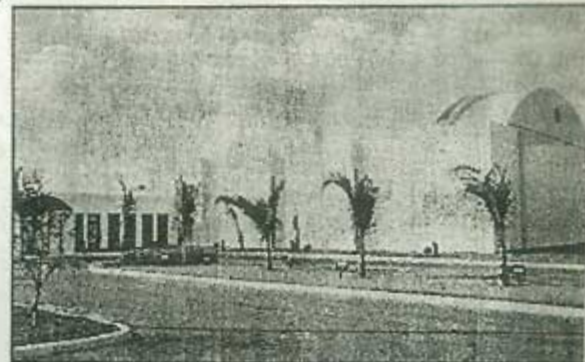
The B'Nai Torah congregation gambled that its posh new temple in suburban Boca Raton would attract new members and donations, which in turn would pay for the building and its 10-acre plot.

The gamble has failed — and the congregation must now raise \$1 million in two weeks or lose the building at 6261 SW 18th St. If the Conservative Jewish congregation can't raise that money, it

could even disband.

"I've never heard of a bank calling on a house of worship. It's unheard of," Sam Lender, a B'Nai Torah board member, said of NCNB Bank and the \$4.5 million mortgage the 500-member congregation is scrambling to pay. It still owes \$4 million.

NCNB has informed the congregation that it is in default, and an emergency meeting of congregation members has been called for 7:30 p.m. Turn to Temple page 2B



The outside of the temple on Southwest 18th Street in Boca Raton

Temple

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Thursday to address the crisis.

"We're hoping people will bring their check-books," said Ken Lipman, attorney for the congregation. The board is asking each family to donate at least \$2,500 apiece to save the synagogue.

Lipman said board members feel the well-to-do membership is more than capable of raising the money but complacency set in toward supporting the temple.

"We were banking on larger contributions from our members," Lipman said. "That's been the unpleasant surprise."

Competition among several Jewish charities, including the South County Jewish Federation and many others benefitting Israel, has diluted the pool of potential donations, Lipman said.

A paragraph from a strongly worded letter mailed to members Friday read:

"While during our High Holy Days we have a parking lot full of expensive automobiles, and a congregation living in some of the wealthiest communities in the United States ... donations from our congregation are embarrassingly and substantially less than other Jewish and, indeed, Christian congregations receive from far less wealthy members."

Other Jewish congregations have expressed sympathy to B'Nai Torah.

Temple Beth El's Rabbi Merle Singer said his temple would do "anything and everything" to help B'Nai Torah resolve its problems. Rabbi Sam Silver of Temple Sinai in Delray Beach urged unaffiliated Jews to consider joining and bolstering B'Nai Torah.

"I'm planning to make a small donation myself," Silver said.

While Lipman said the board may consider a lack of response from its own members as an indication they don't want to continue, Lender is optimistic that won't be the case.

"We've worked too hard for this," Lender said. "But yes, we overbuilt, with the future in mind." The new building has a capacity of 1,600, more than three times its current membership.

The congregation, based for years at a temple on Northwest Fourth Avenue in Boca Raton, moved to its new home in December.

"It was either expand at our old location, where there was no room, or take the plunge elsewhere," Lender explained.

The new facility has a Hebrew School and banquet facilities and includes a sanctuary made in part from marble imported from Jerusalem.

"The bank should have known it would take us time to get squared away," Lender said.

NCNB officials would not comment.

The congregation will be able to operate until the end of the month, since 50 families who guaranteed \$25,000 against the loan contributed an additional \$70,000 to free an operations account seized by the bank.

Members pay \$750 per year in dues and a special assessment of \$500 over seven years.