

NEWS OF MALTA

der of June 18, 1492, which stripped Jews of their property and banished them from his kingdom.

Fifty years later, Jews were back in Malta, brought there as slaves by the crusader Knights of St. John, who governed the

island. Ousted from their bastion in Rhodes by their Turkish Moslem foes, the knights were granted Malta by Spanish Emperor Charles V to defend it as a stronghold of Christianity.

The Malta knights waged a long war of piracy against the

ships of their infidel enemies in the Mediterranean, seizing hundreds of Jews, Moors and Turks.

But Jewish communities in Venice, Amsterdam and Hamburg, in keeping with the tradition of *pidyon sh'vuyim* redemption of captives, paid the heavy ransoms to free their co-religionists.

Only after Napoleon's defeat

of the Malta knights in 1798, and the subsequent takeover of the island by the British, were equal rights granted to Maltese Jews. The present Republic of Malta, established in 1974, guarantees full civil rights to all its citizens.

On Saturday morning at the St. Ursula Street synagogue, the atmosphere was welcoming and intimate. Two other visitors — a young French couple — and I were warmly greeted by the 16 men and women congregants.

While Joel Levy chanted the familiar prayers on the makeshift bimah in the center of the tile floor, the shammash, British-born Stanley Davis, bustled about, offering siddurim, arranging aliyot, opening and closing the blue and gold velvet curtain of the holy Ark.

In late morning, after we had sung the closing lines of "Adon Olam," a table appeared filled with wine and homemade pastries.

Between bites of strudel and sips of Italian kosher wine, Stanley Davis, veteran resident of Malta and holder of an OBE (Order of the British Empire) decoration for social and humanitarian service on the island, recounted how the community had been without a synagogue for five years after the old premises were torn down to make a new roadway.

During that time, High Holy Day services were held in the Israeli Embassy. The government had been helpful in finally locating a new site, and with Joel Levy's aid, the congregation sold one of its venerable Torahs to the Jewish Museum in New York and acquired funds to furnish the new synagogue.

*Continued in next issue;
courtesy the Jewish Exponent*

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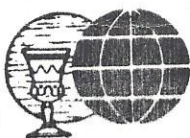
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Lerner gets visa

MOSCOW — Aleksandr Lerner, who has been denied permission to leave the Soviet Union for nearly 17 years, said that he has been told he could emigrate to Israel.

Lerner, 74 years old, was one of the best known campaigners for Jewish emigration remaining in Moscow after many leaders of the movement were allowed to leave this year.

WI Congress leader is