

Morristown Jewish Center – Beit Yisrael
Jewish Historical Society of MetroWest Archives
Prepared by Jill Hershoin – February 4, 2009

Record Group: RG1

Collection Number: 14-01

Creator:

Morristown Jewish Center, Beit Yisrael

Inclusive Dates:

1929 – 2004, includes a facsimile of a deed from 1899.

Extent:

12 cf

Abstract:

Congregational records and published material

Acquisition information:

These records were transferred from MJCBY to the JHSMW in 2001. Items from the time capsule were exhumed on December, 12, 2004, and delivered to the JHSMW by Fern Spitzer on January, 3, 2005.

Preferred Citation:

Morristown Jewish Center Beit Yisrael, Jewish Historical Society of MetroWest

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History:

The congregation Morristown Jewish Center Beit Yisrael (MJCBY) was incorporated in 1899 as Beit Yisrael or House of Israel. A Hebrew school and services were held on 4 Race Street, where Hebrew School classes but Beit Yisrael grew and moved between several buildings until purchasing a Victorian estate from the estate of Heyward G. Hemmel on Speedwell Avenue. The nineteen twenties saw the establishment of a 'Jewish Center League'. This movement encouraged wider use of the facility for religious,

cultural and social purposes. The Jewish Center was opened March 3, 1929, an event which was noted in the 'New York Times'.

Beit Yisrael housed three congregations-Conservative and Orthodox in the 1950's. B'nai Or, a reform congregation was housed in MJCBY until it incorporated in 1954 and eventually dedicated its own building in 1958. In 1980, orthodox members founded their own congregation, Ahavath Yisrael leaving the conservative MJCBY at the Speedwell Avenue building. Letters describing this change, and conflict with Chabad, who had established a community center in Morristown can be seen in this collection. The MJCBY considered moving, due to less membership, but decided to keep the building after an increase in the 1980s from 275 to 400 families.

In 1999, the MJCBY celebrated its 100th Anniversary and the driveway from Speedwell Avenue to the rear parking lot would be named Beit Yisrael Way. The event included a parade culminating in the dedication of a sefer torah, specially written for the congregation, an event amply photographed and recorded.

An extensive history of the Morristown Jewish community in the late 19th century can be found in this collection in Box 7, folder 2. Histories of the Morristown Jewish Center and of the Jewish community in Morristown in the late 19th century, can be read in all synagogue publications from 1929 to 1999, in 'The Jews of Morris and Sussex County', at various sites on-line, and in newspaper articles.

Additional synagogue history can be found on-line at <http://www.mjcbby.org/>:

Scope and Content:

This collection includes printed booklets, loose papers, scrapbooks, loose photographs, a T-Shirt, and several commemorative yarmulkes.

The MJCBY is a large congregation with many organizations such as sports leagues, the Brotherhood, Sisterhood, the B'nai Brith and Zionist Organization of America (ZOA.) Highlights of the collection include pictures of local area synagogue figures with President Taft and President Eisenhower (no MJCBY leaders represented). In addition, there are many letters in the bulletins from congregants in U.S Armed Forces including writing from one soldier who volunteered for the Haganah (a paramilitary group that became the nucleus of the Israeli Defense Forces).

Also worth noting is a newspaper article from 1942, where Rabbi Perlzweig describes some of the atrocities of the Holocaust before they became widely known. The Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) files have much material on Zionist activity before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and on it's absorption of immigrants into the 1950's. Brotherhood and Sisterhood articles within the bulletins are rich in descriptions of current fashion, sports, and descriptions of Jewish and Morristown's social history.

Also included are the dozens of newspapers and several announcements and letters from 1929's Time Capsule (which was opened in 2004.)

There are two folders with materials that are submissions and drafts for the synagogue's newsletters. It was decided that these materials should not be de-accessioned because there are handwritten notes throughout.

Conservation Notes:

Most scrapbooks have been disassembled and many pages are ripped at the corners. Newspapers are decaying with age, but have been reproduced on archival paper. Many photographs have not been put in protective plastic sheets and the time capsule newspapers have been encapsulated.

Removals:

The photographs were too abundant and have been de-accessioned to Lewis Stone, MJCBY Historian.

Organization:

An attempt has been made to keep original order, but due to the extent to the collection, and the various donations of material, the collection has been arranged alphabetically, by series, then chronologically.