

**Congregation B'nai Israel of Millburn**  
**Jewish Historical Society of MetroWest Archives**  
Prepared by Jill Hershoin (8/5/09)

**Record Group: 1**

**Collection Number: 25-93**

**Creator:**

Congregation B'nai Israel of Millburn

**Inclusive Dates: 1931-2005**

**Extent:**

15.5 cf

**Abstract:**

Historical records of Congregation B'nai Israel of Millburn and Congregation Sons of Israel

**Acquisition information:**

Acquired by the Society in 1993 and 2009.

**Preferred Citation:**

Congregation B'nai Israel of Millburn, Jewish Historical Society of MetroWest

**Access restrictions:**

The collections of the Society shall be available for examination and study by any member of the public under the normal security procedures and other special procedures established for the protection of the specific collections.

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**History:**

Congregation B'nai Israel traces its origin back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Like many small Jewish communities, Millburn's Jewish families met in private homes or rented stores. In 1923 and 1924 the group was invited to conduct High Holy Day services in the Parish House of St. Stephen's Church.

In 1925 ground was broken on Lackawanna Place and a Synagogue was completed later within the year. By 1929 thirty-five families were affiliated with the Congregation. Soon after a Hebrew school was established, followed by a High school. By 1941 the Congregation established and conducted Friday Night

Services on a regular basis. The first newsletter, The Bulletin, was begun that same year.

The first constitution was adopted in 1944. The Religious school hired its first principal and later that year, Dr. Max Gruenewald became the week-end Rabbi, eventually becoming the Congregation's full-time Rabbi in 1946.

In 1950, ground was broken for a new Synagogue and a year later the new building was officially dedicated and one of the guest speakers was Dr. Max Arzrt, then professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Notably, three artists were commissioned to create works of art for the synagogue. Adolph Gottlieb designed the ark curtain, Robert Motherwell created the mural, and Herbert Ferber the sculpture, The Burning Bush. These works of art were dedicated in 1952, at a ceremony highlighted by the address by Renee D'Harmoncourt, Director of the Museum of Modern Art. In addition, two portal stones from Rabbi Gruenewald's two former synagogues in Mannheim, Germany, which had been destroyed by the Nazis, were sent to Millburn by the American Jewish chaplain stationed in Heidelberg. The portal stones were set in the memorial wall of the synagogue.

As the congregation membership grew, more programs were offered and the congregation became affiliated and accredited with numerous local and national associations, including the Jewish Education Association of Essex County. The involvement with other faiths led the congregation to join the Interfaith Thanksgiving Services.

To date, the congregation is participates in local and national activities.

**Scope and Content:**

In 1993, the Congregation allowed the Jewish Historical Society to have photocopied board minutes, Rabbi Gruenewald's sermons and a few boxes of original Sisterhood records. In 2009, after discovering the congregation was going through a major building renovation, Linda Forgosh of the Jewish Historical Society was able to secure the transfer of the original minutes, the original sermons, photographs, newsletters and other materials.

The Congregation's archivist/historian, Ida "Jenks" Schacter had organized a large part of the Max Gruenewald materials in impeccable order. Where there was explanation for any gaps or missing materials, Ms. Schacter wrote down. The arrangement was kept as close to original order as possible (few removals were made, only where it was obviously necessary.) Mrs. Schacter had organized these files with alphabetical letters assigned to them (see "Collection Notes" Box 5 folder 3 for more information).

Of interest is the autobiography of Rabbi Gruenwald found in box 6, folder 4. Also of interest are 3 hand bound books of handwritten (Hebrew) commentary by Rabbi Gruenwald on portions of the weekly Torah portion (Parshah.) This was identified by Rabbi Shmuel Green, Director of Teen Initiative, Partnership for Jewish Life and Learning, 7/31/09). In addition, material related to the building's world-known architect, Percival Goodman can be found in this collection.

This collection is comprised of paper, audio cassette tapes,  $\frac{3}{4}$ " reel tapes, a trophy and photographs and is divided into eighteen series as follows:

- I. Administrative
  - a. Board
    - 1. Officer's Lists
    - 2. Schedules
  - b. Committees
  - c. Donations
  - d. Misc.
  - e. Office-related
- II. Artifacts
- III. Audio-Visual Materials
- IV. Building
  - a. Architect
  - b. Artwork
    - 1. Art Tour
    - 2. Chuppah
    - 3. Ferber, Herbert
    - 4. Gottlieb, Adolf
    - 5. Motherwell, Robert
- V. Constitution and Bylaws
- VI. Correspondence
- VII. Departments – Library
- VIII. Education
  - a. Adult Education
  - b. Board of Education
  - c. Hebrew School
  - d. Hedwig Gruenwald Nursery School
  - e. Parent-Teacher Association (P.T.A.)
- IX. Employees
  - a. Cantors
  - b. Caretakers
  - c. Rabbis
  - d. Other
  - e. Rabbi Max Gruenwald
    - 1. Correspondence

## 2. Speeches and Writings

- X. Events
- XI. Finance
- XII. History
- XIII. Membership
- XIV. Miscellaneous
- XV. Photographs
- XVI. Press
- XVII. Programs
  - a. Choir
  - b. Russian Resettlement
- XVIII. Publications
  - a. 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary “The Family Album”
  - b. Newsletters

### **Conservation Notes:**

Some of the materials were glued onto construction paper and can not be easily removed. Rabbi Gruenwald’s 3 handwritten notebooks are bound by twine only and may need some preservation care in the future (Box 28). A memorial book and a “Book of Life” was dismantled and taken from the original binder. These pages contain hand calligraphies and photographs. They remain in their original plastic sheets and need to be placed in appropriate sized mylar sheets (when resources are available) (Box 27). A separated item is a trophy and has been placed in large plastic zip-lock type bags in the artifacts aisle (Aisle 11.) This item will need proper housing.

### **Removals:**

None

### **Organization:**

The materials are organized alphabetically, then chronologically within the series.