

**Congregation Beth El**  
**Jewish Historical Society of MetroWest Archives**  
Prepared by Jill Hershoin – January, 2009

**Record Group: 1**

**Collection Number: 45-06**

**Creator:** Congregation Beth El of the Oranges and Maplewood

**Inclusive Dates:**

1947– Present

**Extent:** 8 cf

**Abstract:**

Records from Congregation Beth El. The collection includes correspondence, newsletters and photographs.

**Acquisition information:**

These materials have been acquired by the Society in 2006 from Linda Forgosh and a box of yarmulkes were donated in 2008 by Sam Convissor

**Preferred Citation:**

Congregation Beth El of the Oranges and Maplewood, Jewish Historical Society of MetroWest

**Access restrictions:**

N/A

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**History:**

The founding of Congregation Beth El in June of 1946 marked the establishment of the first synagogue in South Orange and Maplewood. At that time, there was not a place for Jewish groups to meet. To address this need, 13 families met in the South Orange home of Jennie and Stanley Beck and Beth El was formed. The congregation's first High Holy Day Services were held later in the year at the Masonic Temple in South Orange. By October, Congregation Beth El was formally launched with a membership of 125 people.

In 1949, Beth El established its first permanent home on Kilburn Place at a cornerstone laying ceremony conducted by New Jersey Governor, Alfred E.

Driscoll. By 1958 an addition was completed and heralded in the New York Times for displaying the “richness of expression” characteristic of the new trend in contemporary synagogue architecture.

In the first few decades, the synagogue had three different rabbis. In 1970 Rabbi Jehiel Orenstein became its spiritual leader and stayed in that position for 35 years. Following Orenstein’s retirement in 2005, Rabbi Francine Roston was hired as Beth El’s rabbi – making it the first Conservative synagogue of its size to hire a woman as its senior rabbi.

In 1979, Congregation Beth El and Oheb Shalom Congregation of South Orange merged their religious school programs to form the Academy for Jewish Studies (AJS), instituting a program of study and experience designed to foster in students a strong, positive Jewish identity and life-long love of learning. In addition, in 1988 Beth David Jewish Center merged with Congregation Beth El.

**Scope and Content:**

Beth David Jewish Center merged with Congregation Beth El of The Oranges and Maplewood in 1988. There are only a few items related to Beth David Jewish Center (a written history and a folder containing a few photocopied newspaper clippings). These items are clearly marked on the folder and described in the Past Perfect Database.

This collection is deficient in some important documents, especially from the infancy of the synagogue. While this collection is lacking in certain materials, it does hold only a small amount of the minutes from 1975-1984 and contains newsletters from 1947-present.

Of note is the plan and agreement of the merger between Congregation Beth El and the Beth David Jewish Center and the written history of the Beth David Jewish Center (both found in Box #4).

This collection is comprised of paper and photographs and is divided into 17 series as follows:

- I. Administrative
- II. Awards & Certificates
- III. Building
- IV. Committees
- V. Constitution
- VI. Correspondence

- VII. Events
- VIII. Finance
- IX. History
- X. Legal
- XI. Membership
- XII. Men's Club
- XIII. Miscellaneous
- XIV. Photographs
- XV. Press
- XVI. Publications
- XVII. Publicity

**Conservation Notes:**

Brittle newspaper clippings have been photocopied onto acid-free paper.

Blueprints need to be flattened and transferred to appropriate sized boxes

**Removals:**

N/A

**Organization:**

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