

Guide to the Judaic Studies Collection

99.1

Special Collections
Benjamin F. Feinberg Library
SUNY Plattsburgh
Plattsburgh, N.Y. 12901

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Introduction by
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Introduction

Incorporated September 1, 1861, the Jewish Congregation of Plattsburgh acquired what had previously been the Oak Street Universalist Church on April 4, 1866. In 1868 it became Beth Israel and was one of the seventy-eight Congregations in the United States at that time. Jacob Ehrich, hired as the first Rabbi in 1862, delivered his sermons in German. These services were not only attended by Plattsburgh Jews, but also by visitors from other parts of upstate New York and Vermont. Most of Beth Israel's founders migrated from New York City and sold farm and assorted dry goods as self-employed pack-peddlers. Those who moved directly to Plattsburgh usually were following relatives who had already established themselves and found some degree of success locally. Others moved to Plattsburgh because their goods sold well in this area. Many of them were not wealthy when they arrived, but through education, labor, and networking, eventually became successful businessmen.

Despite a strong congregational unity, eventually the children of the migrants began to associate with non-Jewish children in this heavily Christian-populated area. Two assemblages within the congregation, the Fraternal Brotherhood of Joel Lodge (B'nai B'rith) and the women's National Federation of temple sisterhoods worked to neutralize the secularization effects that resulted from this interfaith association.

The original Beth Israel congregation was Orthodox in character. Though the reform movement was quite popular after the mid-nineteenth century, this orthodoxy remained vibrant as evidenced in the early B'nai B'rith No. 118 ledgers. Established as an independent order in 1843, B'nai B'rith originated as a mutual aid and insurance project launched in New York City. Over two decades later, it had extended its activities to philanthropy and political action for the protection of Jewish rights at home and abroad.

In 1868, the Plattsburgh branch was organized with twenty-nine members between the ages of 21 and 49. The majority of these members were unmarried and had to pass an eligibility examination for acceptance in the order and to determine placement in the first, second, or third degree.¹ Lodges exchanged information and funding to share religious and economic support, to keep track of delinquency and membership, and was the main financial tracking system.

Just prior to the turn of the twentieth century, the local Jewish population dramatically declined—by 1987 its membership totaled sixteen families. Newer generations were steering the congregation towards the Reform movement, which Beth Israel formally joined in 1913. Despite this shift, religious practice remained relatively consistent with the original orthodoxy. However, the changes attributed to Reform were a change in women's status, a shift from the use of German to almost exclusively English in the synagogue, and greater interaction with non-Jewish Plattsburghers after the turn of the century. These changes served to increase the integration of the Jewish people into the secular community.

Even after reform, however, the women of Beth Israel retained their traditional roles and passed on these customs to the next generations. Due to their economic security, women were not employed outside their homes. Instead they worked within the community, most notably in the Temple's sisterhood. This organization had several functions: they ran the Sabbath school and worked hard to encourage children to attend. Plattsburgh's branch of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods was created in 1918, and by 1922 had assisted at least one poor Jewish family, visited sick congregants in hospitals, and sent "resolutions" of their deceased to the local newspaper. They used the local theater to stage holiday plays for Sabbath school children and opened these plays to the general community. They found much strength in the National Federation and were very involved in the communications and activities offered by the organization.

Documentation in the Judaic Studies Collection demonstrates a correlation between local Sisterhood issues and those of the national organization. This collection provides rich documentation of the importance of the local synagogue and its people to the history of Plattsburgh.

¹ Joel Lodge, Declaration Book of Joel Lodge I.O.B.B. No. 118. April 16, 1871-July 8, 1936.

Background Sources in Special Collections

Averill Jr., H.K. *Geography and History of Clinton County, New York, 2d ed.* Plattsburgh, New York, 1885.
(Spec. Coll. F127 .C77 A9 1885)

Everest, Allan S. *Briefly Told: Plattsburgh, New York 1784-1984.* Vermont: Queen City Printers, Inc., 1984.
(Spec. Coll. F129 .P7 E95 1984)

Freedman, Henry K. *The Jewish Congregation of Plattsburgh: 1785-1975.* Plattsburgh, New York: Clinton County Historical Association, 1984.
(Spec. Coll. PAM 126/4)

Plattsburgh Directory for the Year 1882-1883. Embracing Also the Residents of West Plattsburgh, South Plattsburgh, and Cadville (sic): a Business Directory. Albany, New York: R.S. Dillon & Co., [1883].
(Spec. Coll. F129 .P7 A18 1882/83)

Plattsburgh, New York Bicentennial Committee. *Historical Sketches of the Town of Plattsburgh, 1785-1975.* Elizabethtown, New York: Denton Publications, 1975.
(Spec. Coll. F129 .P75 .H57)

Schoenkopf, Rabbi Solomon. *Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of Beth Israel Congregation, 1861-1936.* Plattsburgh, New York, 1936.
(Spec. Coll. PAM 1/11) (A copy of this is also in Box 5, File 4 of this manuscript collection.)

Contents of the Judaic Studies Collection

Box 1: Union Prayer Books

The Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship Part II. Special Edition published for the Jewish Welfare Board-U.S. Army and Navy. Publication date: 1918. 2 copies

The Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship Part I: Prayers for the Sabbath, the Three Festivals, and the Week Days. Publication date: 1910. 1 copy

The Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship Part I: Prayers for the Sabbath, the Three Festivals, and the Week Days. Publication date: 1912. 1 copy

The Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship Part I: Prayers for the Sabbath, the Three Festivals, and the Week Days. Publication date: 1961. 1 copy

- The Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship Part I: Prayers for the Sabbath, the Three Festivals, and the Week Days*, date unknown. 1 copy
- The Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship Part II: New Year's Day, Day of Atonement*, 1917. 1 copy
- The Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship Part II: New Year's Day, Day of Atonement*, 1950. 1 copy
- The Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship Part II: New Year's Day, Day of Atonement*, 1961. 1 copy
- The Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship Part II: New Year's Day, Day of Atonement*, 1962. 1 copy
- Service of the Synagogue: A new edition of the Festival Prayers with an English Translation in Prose and Verse, Day of Atonement Part I Evening Service*, 1904. 2 copies

***Note:** A few of the prayer books have the names and addresses of previous owners on the inside covers. Several of them note that the book was presented by someone in the memory of someone. One of the military prayer books has sermon notes in pencil on a few of the pages.

Box 2: Children's Books, Activities and Religious School

- 2/1: Enrollment and Record Books for Religious School 2 items
- 2/2: Newspaper Clippings 6 items
- 2/3: Religious School Memos, Children's reports and participation in the cornerstone ceremony of new temple 8 items
- 2/4: Holiday programs, choir book, service book and youth group memo. 5 items

Books in Box 2

- Sabbath Service for Young People*. Youth People's League Publication, Seventh Printing, 1947. 3 copies
- Shavuot*. Miriam Schlein, 1983. 1 copy
- The Bible Story, volume 2*. Sulamith Ish-Kighor, 1923. 1 copy
- Yiddish Instructional Book for Children, Part II*, 1939. 1 copy
*Yiddish language

***Note:** A couple of the books have the names and addresses of previous owners on the inside covers.

Box 3: Hymnals and Music related items

3/1: Newspaper Clippings 1 item

Books in Box 3

Union Hymnal for Jewish Worship. Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1914. 1 copy

New Jewish Hymnal for Religious Schools and Junior Congregations: Songs and Anthems, Seventh Edition. Edited and Compiled by Henry L. Gideon. Services Compiled and Adapted by Louis Weinstein, 1919. 1 copy

Union Hymnal Songs and Prayers for Jewish Worship, Part II Musical Services. Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1961. 1 copy

Union Hymnal Songs and Prayers for Jewish Worship, Part II: Musical Services. Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1964. 1 copy

***Note:** 1919 hymnal has the inscription “Remembrance from Beth Israel Sisterhood on the occasion of Chanukah 5683 (Dec. 17, 1922)”. With Edith Goldman’s name and address, as does the 1914 hymnal. The 1914 hymnal is inscribed with the dates 1928-1929 and Beth Israel Sunday School.

Box 4: Beth Israel Sisterhood and the U.J.A. Women’s Division

4/1: Sisterhood Meeting Minutes (Loose papers). Late 1920s-mid-1930s. 16 items

4/2: Sisterhood Meeting Minutes (Loose papers), 1957-1966 68 items

4/3: Sisterhood Meeting Minutes (Notebook), 8/10/1983-1/20/1990 1 item

4/4: Miscellaneous Sisterhood papers and clippings 13 items

4/5: U.J.A. Women’s Division ledger, 1962-1984 2 items

Sisterhood Meeting Minutes Ledgers

1922-1935

1936-1949

1957-1965

***Note:** Many of the loose meeting minutes have additional “insert” numbers in pencil indicating where in the meeting ledgers they may belong.

Box 5: Temple and Jewish Anniversary Materials

5/1: Newspaper Clippings	1 item
5/2: Holocaust Memorials and Dedication Ceremony	2 items
5/3: Senator Kenneth B. Keating's Centennial Speech (37pgs.) and letter to the congregation of Temple Beth Israel, 1961.	2 items
5/4: Anniversary pamphlets	7 items
70 th Anniversary of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods	
Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of Beth Israel Congregation, 1861-1936	
Ninetieth Anniversary of Beth Israel Congregation, 1861-1951 (2 copies)	
100 years of Living Judaism (3 copies)	
120 th Anniversary temple Beth Israel, April 3, 1982	
135 th Anniversary Temple Beth Israel, May 1996	
The Tercentenary Program: Marking the Three Hundredth Anniversary of Jewish Settlement in the United States of America	
5/5: Miscellaneous Anniversary invitations, papers and sponsors	6 items
5/6: Video from 135 th Anniversary Celebration of Temple Beth Israel Dated: Friday, 5/17/1996-Rabbi Schindler, speaker.	On Video shelf

Box 6: Building Maintenance and Construction

6/1: Newspaper Clippings	8 items
6/2: Contract-General Construction	1 item
6/3: Contract-Electrical and Electric Heat	1 item
6/4: Building Committee Correspondence (Incoming)	2 items
6/5: Building Committee Meeting Minutes	5 items
6/6: Jeremiah Oosterbaan, Architect	5 items
6/7: Bids	3 items
6/8: Floor plans for New Temple	1 item
6/9: Map of Walworth Park and New Temple Site	1 item
6/10: Building plans in pamphlet form	3 items
6/11: Promissory Pledge Agreements	52 items
6/12: Building Funds	14 items
6/13: Price list for New Temple furnishings	4 items
6/14: Fixture Catalogs and Pamphlets	2 items
6/15: Agreements and Contracts	11 items
6/16: Bills and Invoices	13 items
6/17: Correspondence concerning installation of Temple fixtures	3 items
6/18: Cornerstone and Dedication Ceremonies for New Temple	6 items
6/19: Complete newspaper with article and pictures of Temple Dedication Ceremony	1 item
6/20: Applications for use of building	1 item

6/21: Tax papers	11 items
6/22: Bond Issue and Frank De Carlo	11 items
6/23: Moving from Old Temple (Oak St.) to New Temple (Marcy Ln)	2 items
6/24: Old Temple (Oak St.) Deeds, Plans and Papers	2 items
6/25: Beth Israel Cemetery	7 items
6/26: Property Acquisition by State University in the vicinity of Temple Beth Israel	3 items

Box 7: Special or Specific Services

7/1: Yom Kippur, Book of Remembrance and Memorial Services	8 items
7/2: Shabbat Services	2 items
7/3: Confirmation Services	4 items
7/4: Rabbi Installation Services, pamphlets and invitations	10 items

Box 8: Photographs

8/1: Negatives-Children	10 items
8/2: Negatives- Old Temple (Oak St.)	2 items
8/3: Rabbi Judelson, Ahavas Sholom Synagogue, 1918-1926	3 items
8/4: Old Temple interior and exterior (Oak St.)	8 items
8/5a: Rabbi's Speech for ground breaking of the Mark and Pearlie Rabin Religious School	1 item
8/5b: Ground breaking of the Mark and Pearlie Rabin Religious School	8 items
8/6: Temple Beth Israel, February 1990, Photo Album 35 photos	1 album
8/7: New Temple (Marcy Lane)	12 items
8/8: Children and Religious School	35 items
8/9: Social/special events	28 items

Box 9: Haggadash Books

<i>Die Beiden pessachabende (The Two Passover Evenings)</i> . Translated by Dr. R.J. Furstenthal, 1879. German and Hebrew	1 copy
Kaplan, Mordecai M, Ed. <i>The New Haggadah: For the Pesah Seder</i> , 1942. English and Hebrew	1 copy
<i>Ben Shanhn's Haggadah</i> . Ben Shanhn, 1965.	1 copy

Box 10: Meeting Minutes for the Board of Trustees (Loose Files)

10/1: Memos to Board Members	13 items
10/2: Annual Meeting of Beth Israel Congregation Minutes	5 items
10/3: Correspondence-Incoming	22 items
10/4: Correspondence-Outgoing	9 items

10/5: Memos to the Congregation	6 items
10/6: Job Descriptions	3 items
10/7: By-laws, Constitutions and Procedures	4 items
10/8: Committees	3 items
10/9: Special Meeting Minutes	4 items
10/10: Board Meeting Minutes: 5/1978 to 6/1982	29 items
10/11: Board Meeting Minutes: 8/1985 to 7/1987	27 items
10/12: Board Meeting Minutes: 9/1987 to 2/1988	72 items
10/13: Board Meeting Minutes: 4/1988 to 6/1989	87 items
10/14: Meeting Agendas	17 items
10/15: Temple membership lists	43 items
10/16: Treasurer's Reports	53 items

Box 11: Prayer Books

11/1: <i>The Matzah of Oppression</i>	
11/2: <i>Prayer Book for Rosh Hashanah</i> . Hebrew	
11/3: <i>Prayer Book for Yom Kippur</i> . Hebrew	
11/4: <i>Book of Repentance (Year Round)</i> , 1833. Hebrew	
11/5: <i>Prayer for Sukkot and Simeha Torah</i> . Hebrew	
11/6: <i>High Holiday Prayer Book</i> , 1862. Hebrew text with Yiddish and Aramaic Commentaries	
11/7: <i>Prayer Book</i> . Hebrew with Yiddish Commentary	

Box 12a: B'nai B'rith Meeting Ledgers and Declaration Book of Joel

12a/1: Endowment Gift(s) for Joel Lodge	1 item
12a/2: B'nai B'rith Newspaper	1 item
12a/3: Declaration Book of Joel Lodge No. 118 1871-1915, Membership declarations	
12a/4: Ledger for Joel Lodge No.118 1867-1874 (Membership dues)	
12a/5: Ledger for Joel Lodge No.118 1868-1875 (Minutes)	
12a/6: Ledger for Joel Lodge No.118 1885-1899 (Membership lists and Minutes)	
12a/7: Ledger for Joel Lodge No.118 1900-1921 (Minutes/receipts)	

*** Note: Nearly all writing is in Hebrew or Yiddish except for the Declaration Book.**

Box 13: Jewish Culture and Religion Books

13/1: <i>Religion Tomorrow: A Symposium</i> , June 18-22, 1933, Chicago.	1 copy
13/2: <i>Legends of the Jews</i> , vol.I, 1913.	1 copy
13/3: <i>Legends of the Jews</i> , vol.II, 1913.	1 copy
13/4: <i>Legends of the Jews</i> , vol.III, 1911.	1 copy
13/5: <i>Legends of the Jews</i> , vol.VI, 1913.	1 copy
13/6: Prayer Book (probably for personal use) Publication date: Unknown.	1 copy
13/7: <i>Scripture History</i> , 1887.	1 copy
13/8: <i>The Jewish Religion</i> , 1913. (probably for personal use)	1 copy

13/9: *The Jew and the Moors in Spain*, 1887. 1 copy
13/10: *Hebrew Union College Annual Valve*, 1930. 1 copy

***Note:** 13/6 this small pocket size prayer book once had a latch/lock attached to it. Inside it says "From the library of Mark A. Rabin" and "Bound in Czecho-Slovakia."

Box 14: Membership Ledgers

Ledger 14/1: 1918 This ledger maybe from the Ahavas Sholom congregation
Ledger 14/2: 1923
Ledger 14/3: 1926
Ledger 14/4: 1927
Ledger 14/5: 1931
Ledger 14/6: 1932
Ledger 14/7: 1940
Ledger 14/8: 1941
Ledger 14/9: 1927 This ledger maybe from the Ahavas Sholom congregation

***Note:** Nearly all writing in the ledgers is in Hebrew. Ledgers 14/1 and 14/9 are different in how they are set up and may have belonged to the Ahavas Sholom congregation, which for a number of years existed in Plattsburgh along side the Beth Israel congregation.

Box 15: Temple Board Meeting Minutes- Notebooks

Notebook 15/1: c. 5/26/1940-2/01/1952
Notebook 15/2: c. 5/27/1956-12/16/1962
Notebook 15/3: c. 1/24/1963-5/26/1970
Notebook 15/4: c. 11/03/1969-12/19/1973
Notebook 15/5: c. 5/29/1974-3/14/1978
Notebook 15/6: c. 11/15/1979-5/13/1980
Notebook 15/7: c. 8/11/1982-4/18/1984
Notebook 15/8: c. 5/16/1984-5/22/1985
Notebook 15/9: c. 7/01/1992-5/31/1994

Box 16: Presidents' Books

Notebook 16/1: c. 1976-1978, GL Reuter
Notebook 16/2: c. 1979-1982, David Hirsch
Notebook 16/3: c. 1985-1987, Barbara Lichtig
Notebook 16/4: c. 1987-1990, Jerry Davis

Box 17: Presidents' Books

Notebook 17/1: c. 1996-1997, Phyllis Freedman

Notebook 17/1: c. 1997-1998, Phyllis Freedman

Box 18: Miscellaneous File

18/1: Newspaper Clippings	4 items
18/2: Holocaust Memorial Dedication at Feinberg Library	1 items
18/3: War Department Theatre Schedule. Unknown list in Hebrew on back of poster	1 items
18/4: Temple Bulletins	4 items
18/5: Dr. Henry K. Freedman's research on Jewish History in Plattsburgh	11 items
18/6: Scrapbook pages	8 items
18/7: Jewish activities and points of view	9 items
18/8: Historical Articles on Jews in Plattsburgh	9 items
18/9: Artifacts belonging to members of the Jewish community	6 items
18/10: Article on local art and a religious print	2 items

Box 19: Ahavas Sholom Congregation

19/1: Ledger for Ahavas Sholom Congregation, 1921-1939	
19/2: Ledger for Ahavas Sholom Congregation Records, June 1954-January 1959	
19/3: Ahavas Sholom	16 items

Box 20: Restricted Access

20/1: Resignation Issues	3 items
20/2: Religious School Board Issues	2 items
20/3: Legal Issues	31 items