

**Jewish Community of Central Vermont
Records, 1913-
Doc 836-838, Size B & D**

Introduction

This collection contains the surviving records of the Jewish Community of Central Vermont, focused on Montpelier and Barre, from 1913 to the present. The initial gift of records was donated to the Vermont Historical Society by Beth Jacob Synagogue of Montpelier in the 1980s. A second gift of research records was donated to the VHS by Alan Kaufman in the 1990s. Informal additions to the collection have been made in the years since. The collection is housed in three records center boxes and two oversized folders; it consumes 3 linear feet of shelf space.

History

Jews began arriving in Central Vermont at the turn of the twentieth century, settling first in Montpelier, and then in Barre. Primarily immigrants from Russia who fled persecution there, they landed in New York, and came north as peddlers, up the Hudson valley and across the Champlain basin, before continuing on to Montpelier. Common professions among the men in the early years were shopkeepers, scrap dealers, machinists, and blacksmiths. They organized themselves into a congregation named “Bais Yaacouve” (later spelled Beth Jacob) which was formally incorporated 1913. They then purchased a house to serve as a synagogue on Harrison Avenue in Montpelier, the location of today’s reconstructed synagogue building.

Shortly after the synagogue was purchased in 1914, many congregants moved to Barre, where there were more business opportunities. In 1931, the Barre families formally organized a congregation named Thiphereth Mosha, and leased various spaces for religious services and social events. Although a building was never purchased, the Barre congregation was larger than the Montpelier one for at least a decade. The two communities remained closely connected, however, and shared resources. Thiphereth Mosha dissolved and merged with Beth Jacob in the early 1960s, when Jewish life in both towns was at its lowest ebb. The only written records that remain of Thiphereth Mosha are in the notebooks of its sisterhood organization from the 1940s and 1950s.

Although there were unofficial rabbis in the early decades who served as teachers, ritual slaughterers, and in one case a scribe, the congregations themselves were only led by a rabbi for three years in their collective history, at Beth Jacob from 2004 to 2007. Neither congregation ever held an affiliation with a national Jewish group, and membership has ebbed and flowed over the years. At its peak in the mid-1990s, there were over a hundred households who held memberships at Beth Jacob, and over fifty children attended its school.

Of note from a sociological perspective is the fact that cultural and demographic shifts have resulted in a lack of continuity in the Jewish community of Central Vermont.

For most of its existence, religious services have been led by community members, and these people have come and gone. In the early decades religious practice was traditional, but since the early 1980s there has been a wide variety of religious expression. The Beth Jacob community has striven to be inclusive since that time. Secular expressions of Jewish identity have also been promoted, sometimes within the synagogue community itself, and sometime through the formation of other Jewish organizations, such as the Conference on Judaism in Rural New England.

Only recently has there been an administrator at Beth Jacob, and there is still no office, which is perhaps the reason why so many organizational documents are housed in this collection.

Scope and Content

This collection contains various records of the Jewish Community of Central Vermont (Barre and Montpelier), from ca. 1914 to the present. Although there are a few early documents, primarily photocopies, most of this collection is comprised of materials from the late 1970s to approximately 2007, when documentation went digital. It is an active collection, with materials still being added. The collection is organized into nine series.

The collection is especially strong in newsletters published by Beth Jacob Synagogue (BJS) from 1976 until 2013, which are filed here in their entirety; the minutes of BJS board meetings from 1983 to 2007, which contain a few notable gaps; and the records of the Sisterhood, which included members from the Barre and Montpelier Synagogues, from 1947 to 1988. There is also a significant collection of research about the early decades of the community, done primarily by Alan Kaufman in the early 1990s. These include both notes and published articles. Also notable are oral histories conducted in the late 1970s and the early 1990s.

The first series (BJS Organization) begins with a photocopy of the handwritten “Laws and Rules of Chevra Bais Yaakov,” which was composed in Yiddish in 1913, and which serves as the first document of the governance of the Jewish community of Central Vermont. The original framed document is located at the Montpelier synagogue (as of 2022); a translation from 1993 is included here. Copies of the original land acquisition and the articles of association appear from 1914-1915, and then the official synagogue documents jump to 1977.

The organizational records date from 1979 to the near present (2022). The 1980s and 1990s are quite detailed, and include board minutes and financial reports, as well as occasional bursts of both official and informal correspondence, donor lists, congregational surveys, reports, petitions, and other miscellaneous documents. There are significant gaps after 1998, when a secretary resigned in the midst of a controversy. The years of Rabbi Shana Margolin’s tenure from 2004 to 2007 are well documented, and then regular minutes dwindle away again, except for annual meetings, and the president’s annual letters to the congregation. Member lists are, however, well represented, from 1980s to the present.

The second series (Publications) includes the following subseries: publicity about Beth Jacob Synagogue programs and events in both printed and digital format beginning in 1970; High Holiday publications beginning in 1989, including Yizkor booklets and worship service programs; articles written by members of the congregation contemporaneous with their involvement in the community; and the largest of the subseries, BJS newsletters, beginning with the original “Temple Times” in 1973. From the late 1970s through the 1990s, the monthly synagogue newsletter “Beth Jacob Bulletin” provides a treasure trove of information about the community.

The third series (BJS Property) details property owned by Beth Jacob Synagogue, dated from 1986 to the present. There is a large subseries about the synagogue building itself on Harrison Ave., detailing numerous renovations, and the complete rebuilding which began in 2010. Other subseries include documents pertaining to the purchase and subsequent sale of land on Elm St., the cemetery, the library, and the Torah scrolls.

The fourth series (BJS Sunday School) contains documents about the Beth Jacob Synagogue School (variously called “Sunday School,” “Hebrew School,” and “Religious School”). For many decades run by the Sisterhood, its governance was formalized into a school board sometime in the 1970s or early 1980s. The independent school board was disbanded in the early 2000s, at which point administration of the school was by a paid principal, with finances determined by the synagogue board. The records in this collection are quite haphazard but do include school board minutes and principals’ reports from the 1980s, and class lists from when enrollment was at its peak in the mid-1990s. There are also samples of principals’ letters, teacher-made curricula, publicity about school projects and events, students’ work (including a large and ambitious Passover Haggadah from 2001), educational policy and expectations, and Bar and Bat Mitzvah programs.

The fifth series is comprised of Sisterhood documents. The Sisterhood included synagogue members from the synagogues in both Montpelier and Barre, and its records include handwritten notebooks which are the oldest original documents in this collection. There are carefully compiled membership lists from 1947 to 1988, minutes, financial records, correspondence, and other miscellany. One item of particular interest is the “Flower Fund” notebook, spanning the years from 1958 to 1969, and detailing personal events, gifts, expenditures, and dues. On the cover, the name “Thiphereth Mosha” is crossed out and replaced by “Beth Jacob.”

The sixth series (Historical Research and Family Files) is structurally the most complex, and is divided into six subseries. The primary sources in the first subseries are all either copies or photographs but provide valuable demographic information and historical context about Jewish life in the early decades of the twentieth century. The second subseries is comprised of the notes, papers, and correspondence of researchers working in the 1980s and early 1990s, most notably Alan Kaufman. The third contains the listings of recorded interviews (oral histories) of early members of the Jewish community that are housed at the Vermont Historical Society, as well as several detailed transcripts of interviews from a project conducted in 1978 by the Barre Ethnic Heritage

Project and more recent projects. The published histories in the next subseries are from the 1970s to 2013, and are of varied length and detail, the longest being the Beth Jacob centenary history by Sara Lisniansky.

The subseries of family files contains a wide variety of both primary and secondary documents pertaining to eleven families from both Barre and Montpelier, including photographs (originals and copies); contemporaneous and more recent published articles; researchers' notes; correspondence; and birth, death, and immigration records. (Note that some oral histories and interview transcripts exist of people who have family files. These may be found in the "Oral Histories" subseries.) The sixth and last subseries contains obituaries and tributes of Jewish community members dating from 1951 to the present.

The "Other Organizations" series includes documents from three Central Vermont based Jewish groups which were not affiliated with either the Barre or Montpelier synagogues, although the leadership of each one was at sometime held by Beth Jacob members. The Jewish Brunch Group was a secular, politically progressive group that met in Montpelier in the 1980s. The Conference on Judaism in Rural New England began in 1982; its folders contain board minutes, a few photographs, newsletters, and conference programs (additional copies of its published materials may found on the shelves of the VHS Library). Chai Chodesh was a charitable organization founded by Beth Jacob member Sue Barasch in the late 1980s.

The photographs series includes several pictures of early twentieth century inscriptions in Hebrew and Yiddish from the walls of the Montpelier synagogue. The series then jumps to synagogue events held in Barre and Montpelier from the 1970s through the early 2010s. Several folders of synagogue interiors, including Beth Jacob renovations, are included. The most recent years' images are digital and stored on CDs.

The ninth and last series is comprised of educational and religious books from the early to mid-twentieth century, and several artifacts: a *pushke* (donation box) and a collection of *mezuzahs*. The latter were removed from unknown doorposts, and are squashed and painted over, but still contain the handwritten, sacred texts from the Torah which proclaim God-s oneness, and the necessity of love. It is not known how or when they came to be in this collection.

Related Collections

The collections of the Vermont Historical Society include

- *The Jewish newsletter* published by the Conference on Judaism in Rural New England (call no. 296.6 J556)
- *K'fari : the Jewish newsmagazine of rural New England and Québec* (call no. 296.6 K526)
- Myron Samuelson, *The story of the Jewish community of Burlington, Vermont : the story of the Jewish community of Burlington, Vermont, from early times to 1946, with much about the Jewish community in the state* (call no. 325.256 Sa49)

- Sara Lisniansky, *From generation to generation : one hundred years of Beth Jacob Synagogue, Montpelier, Vermont, 1913-2013* (call no. 296.09 L69f)
- *Harrison Avenue memories : perspectives on Beth Jacob's past* by members of Beth Jacob Synagogue, Montpelier, Vermont (call no. 296.09 H245)

Organization

The records are organized into nine series, some of which include subseries:

1. Beth Jacob Synagogue (BJS) Organization
2. Publications
3. BJS Property
4. BJS School
5. Sisterhood
6. Historical Research and Family Files
7. Other Organizations
8. Photographs
9. Books and Artifacts

Inventory

I. Beth Jacob Synagogue (BJS) Organization

A. Governance

- Doc 836:01 "Laws and Rules of Chevra Bais Yaakov" (1913)
 02 Articles of Association (1914)
 03 Synagogue Land Records (1914/15 and 1980/81)
 04 Employer Identification Number (1981)
 05 Articles of Incorporation (1990)
 06 Constitution and By-Laws (1977 - 1988)
 07 Proposed Changes to Constitution and By-Laws (2006)

B. Organizational Records

- Doc 836:08 Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence (1979 - 1982)
 09 Minutes and Reports (1983)
 10 _____ (1984)
 11 _____ (1985)
 12 _____ (1986)
 13 Yahrzeits / High Holiday Seating (ca. 1986)
 14 Petition re Soviet Jewry (1986)
 15 Congregational Survey (1987)
 16 Minutes and Reports (1987)
 17 _____ (1988)
 18 _____ (1989)
 19 Para-Rabbi Foundation Proposal (1989)
 20 Correspondence (1982 - 1989)
 21 _____ (1990 - 1991)
 22 Minutes and Reports (1990)
 23 Remarks at Rededication (1991)
 24 Minutes and Reports (1991)

- 25 _____ (1992)
- 26 _____ (1993)
- 27 _____ (1994)
- 28 _____ (1995)
- 29 _____ (1996)
- 30 _____ (1997)
- 31.1 _____ (1998)
- 31.2 Space Committee (1997-1999) (see also Series III)
- 32 Donations (1985 - 1990)
- 33 Donations and Dues (1991 - 1998)
- 34 Rabbi/Spiritual Needs Controversy (1997 - 2001)
- 35 Rabbi Search Committee (2002 - 2004)
- 36 Minutes and Reports (2000 - 2003)
- 37 Community Dinners (2000 - 2007)
- 38.1 Minutes and Reports (2004)
- 38.2 _____, (2005)
- 39 _____, (2006)
- 40 Tenure of Rabbi Shana Margolin (2004 - 2007)
- 41 Adult Education/Programming (2005 - 2006)
- 42 Reports by Gene Levine (2006)
- 43.1 Minutes and Reports (2007)
- 43.2 Building Advisory Committee (2007-2008) (see also Series III)
- 44 Annual Meetings (2008 -)
- 45 President's Letters (2008 -)
- 46 Congregational Survey (2013)
- 47 Bequests (2010, 2016)
- 48 Minutes and Reports (2009 - 2015)
- 49 _____ (2016 - 2020)
- 50 Staff and Policies (2010 -)
- C. Membership
 - Doc 836:51 Membership Lists (1980 - 1991)
 - 52 Membership Booklets (1986 - 2011)
 - 53 Membership Booklets (2012 - 2018)

II. Publications

- A. Publicity
 - Doc 836:54 Times-Argus Publicity (1970 - 1998)
 - 55 Brochures
 - 56 Website (2003)
 - 57 _____ (2009)
 - 58 Event Publicity (2004 -)
- B. High Holidays & Liturgy
 - Doc 836:59 Yizkor Booklets (1989 - 2007)
 - 60 Programs and Liturgy (1995 -)
- C. Articles by Congregants
 - Doc 836:61 Rosh Chodesh Article (1988)

- 62 Eno Article (1990)
- 63 Clark Articles
- D. Newsletters
 - Doc 837:01 "Temple Times" (1973)
 - 02 Beth Jacob Bulletin (1976 - 1983)
 - 03 _____, (1983 - 1988)
 - 04 _____, (1988 - 1992)
 - 05 _____, (1993 - 1996)
 - 06 _____, (1997 - 1999)
 - 07 _____, (2000 - 2002)
 - 08 _____, (2003 - 2005)
 - 09 _____, (2006 - 2008)
 - 10 _____, (2009 - 2013)

III. Beth Jacob Synagogue Property (see also Doc 836:31.2 and Doc 836:43.2)

- A. Synagogue Building on Harrison Ave. (see land records in Doc836:03)
 - Doc 837:11 Renovations (1986)
 - 12 Building Survey and Inspection (1989)
 - 13 Renovations (1990 - 1991)
 - Size D _____, architectural sketches, Gossens Bachman Architects (1990), 3 sheets
 - Size B _____, schematic floor plan, construction details, and textual description, Gossens Bachman Architects, 4 sheets
 - 14 _____, fundraising
 - 15 Landscape Project (1991)
 - Size B _____, planting plan, Gossens Bachman Architects, 1 sheet
 - 16 Renovations (1994)
 - 17 Structural Assessment and Repair (1997 - 1998)
 - 18 Building Inspections (2005 - 2007)
 - 19.1 Rebuilding Plans (2008 - 2010)
 - Size D _____, architectural sketches, Gossens Bachman Architects (2010), 5 sheets including existing plans and proposed changes
 - Size B _____, Construction Documents marked "As-Built Plans", Gossens Bachman Architects, (2010)
 - 19.2 _____, capital campaign
 - 19.3 Rebuilding Plans (2013-2015)
 - Size D _____, sketches and plans, Black River Design, 4 sheets
 - Size B Schematic Floor Plan, Black River Design (2014)
- B. Elm Street Land Purchase
 - Doc 837:20 Elm St. Land, Chronology (1997 - 2002)

- 21 _____, Permit Application (1999)
- Size D _____, plans, Gossens Bachman Architects, 4 sheets
- Size B _____, site plan, Gossens Bachman Architects, 1 sheet
- C. Cemetery
 - Doc 827:22 Cemetery Agreement and Deeds (1991 - 1994)
 - 23 Cemetery Policy, Plots, Donations
 - 24 Cemetery Map
- D. Library and Torah Scrolls
 - Doc 837:25 Manuel Rockwood Library
 - 26 Torah Scrolls

IV. Beth Jacob Synagogue School

- Doc 837:27 Sunday School (1970 - 1985)
- 28 Bar/Bat Mitzvah Policy (1980s)
- 29 School Board (1986 - 1998)
- 30 School Records (1985 - 1993)
- 31 _____, (1993 - 2001)
- 32 _____, (2006 -)
- 33 School Projects and Events (1993 - 2016)
- 34 Lisniansky Curriculum Samples (1995 - 2015)
- 35 Curriculum Design Project (2000 - 2001)
- 36 School Haggadah (2001)
- 37 Bar/Bat Mitzvah Programs

V. Sisterhood

- MSA 939:01 Sisterhood By-Laws
- 02 _____ Membership Lists (1947 - 1987)
- 03 _____ Records/Membership (1947 - 1972)
- 04 _____ Minutes (1953 - 1960)
- 05 _____ Records (1961 - 1969)
- 06 _____ Minutes (1970 - 1978)
- 07 _____ Records (1971 - 1988)
- 08 _____ Correspondence/Miscellaneous (1970 - 1982)
- 09 _____ Minutes and Records (1979 - 1988)
- 10 Flower Fund (1958 - 1974)
- 11 Sisterhood Holiday Planning (ca. 1980)

VI. Historical Research and Family Files

- A. Primary Sources from Early Decades
 - Doc 837:38.1 Early references to Jews in newspapers (1901-1910)
 - 38.2 Census Information (1900 - 1915)
 - 39 Burlington Cemetery Monuments
 - 40 Montpelier Argus and Directory (1914 - 1931)
 - 41.1 Yahrzeit Board (early 20C), copies
 - Size B _____, original
 - 41.2 Congregation Thiphereth Mosa, Barre
- B. Research Projects about Early Decades

- Doc 837:42 BJS Oral History Committee (1981 - 1990)
- 42.2 _____, inventory of oral history tapes at VHS
- 43 Kaufman Research Notes and Correspondence
- 44 Kornreich Article Research and Correspondence
- 45 “Junk Dealers” Research
- 46 Excerpts from Related Research
- 47 Timelines (ca. 1996, 2010, 2013)

C. Oral Histories

- Doc 838:01 Oral History Listings
- 02 Oral History Interview Notes (1978)
- 03 BJS Congregational Interviews (1989)
- 04 “Conversations with our Elders” (2008)

D. Published Histories

- Doc 838:05 Times-Argus Articles (1970s)
- 06 Lerner Article (1978)
- 07 Kaufman Articles (1994)
- 08 “Harrison Ave. Memories” (2010)
- 09 “From Generation to Generation” (2013)

E. Family Files

- Doc 838:10 Carr Family
- 11 Cohen Family
- 12 Gould Family
- 13.1 Hyman Family
- 13.2 Jacobs Family
- 14 Leventhal Family
- 15 Nathan Family
- 16 Popack Family
- 17 Rockwood Family
- 18.1 Schwartz Family
- 18.2 Segal Family
- 19 Stekolchik Family
- 20.1 Yett Family
- 20.2 Unknown family documents, Ketubbah, 5651 (1881)
- Size D _____, two documents in Cyrillic
- 20.3 Other families

F. Obituaries and Tributes

- Doc 838:21 Galansky Obituaries
- 22 Sirkin Obituary and Tributes
- 23 Obituaries and Tributes (2000 -)

VII. Other Organizations

- Doc 838:24 Jewish Brunch Group (1982-1987)
- 25 Conference on Judaism in Rural New England (1987-1999)
- 26 _____ (1999 - 2004)
- 27 Chai Chodesh

VIII. Photographs

- Doc 838:28 Hebrew and Yiddish Inscriptions (early 20C)
 29 BJS Interior Photos (late 1970s)
 Size D _____, enlargements with Morris Leventhal
 30 Barre Ethnic Heritage Festival (1970s)
 31 Passover Seders (1970s - 1980s)
 32 BJS Events (1980 - 1993)
 33 Holiday Celebrations (ca. 1980 - 1990)
 34 Synagogue Renovations (1984, 1991)
 35 BJS Annual Meetings (1989 - 1992)
 36 BJS Religious School (1990s)
 37 Holiday Celebrations (2000 – 2015)
 Size B _____, “Sukkah Building” (1997)
 38 BJS Events (2004 - 2005)
 39 Synagogue Renovations (2000s) – 3 CDs and 2 DVDs
 40A “Hunger in Our Community,” World Food Day, October
 16, 2012
 40B BJS Centenary Celebration (2013)
 Size B _____, large sign with signatures and well wishes (2013)

IX. Books and Artifacts

- Doc 838:41 Haggadahs
 41.1 “The Beth Jacob Megillah: A Story of Lost and Found,” by
 Sara Lisniansky, 2023
 42 Soldiers and Sailors Prayerbooks
 43 Hebrew School Books
 44 _____
 45 Bar Mi vah Book
 46 Hebrew School Book
 47 Child’s Prayerbook (inscribed, Gould family)
 48 Pushkeh (donation box)
 49 Mezuzahs

Sarah Lisniansky
 April 2022
 JewishCommunityCentralVermont.docx