

Beth Israel Ner Tamid Synagogue

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May 5, 2022

Congregation Beth Israel Ner Tamid also Connects to:

- B'ne Jacob
- Moses Montefiore Gemeinde
- Anshe Jacob
- Beth Hamedrash Hagodol
- Anshe Emeth
- Beth El Ner Tamid
- Greater Galilee Missionary Baptist Church

Historical Overview:

The history of Congregation Beth Israel Ner Tamid (CBINT) is one of community building, adaptation, and triumph over adversity. While the first wave of Jewish immigrants to Milwaukee started in 1844, these settlers were not the progenitors of the synagogue now known as CBINT. The original Jewish settlers were mainly from Western Europe and primarily practiced Reform Judaism by 1880. When the second wave of Jewish immigrants from Eastern European countries such as Lithuania, Russia, and Latvia arrived 40 years later, they were met with a Judaic landscape that held little resemblance to their own. It was this second wave of over 1.5 million Orthodox Jews which settled in Milwaukee between 1881 and 1910 that would help form CBINT.

The Hay Market District in Milwaukee, where these new Jewish immigrants built their new community, is demarcated by Juneau Avenue to the south, 3rd St to the east, Walnut St to the north, and ending at 8th St to the west. As the population settled into their new homes, the next two decades saw the rise, fall, separation, and integration of a variety of small Orthodox congregations. Due to the instability inherent during this period, CBINT has had some difficulties deciding how long their congregation has existed. The earliest congregation linked to CBINT was B'ne Jacob, established in 1884. Another common point of origin identified by CBINT was the Moses Montefiore Gemeinde Congregation which was established in 1886. In 1891 Moses Montefiore combined with Anshe Jacob, also established in 1886, due to low membership at both congregations. This merger formed Beth Hamedrash Hagodol. There is a disagreement among sources whether B'ne Jacob joined Beth Hamedrash Hagodol after this point or if they had been the predecessors of the congregation Moses Montefiore Gemeinde. In either case, Beth Hamedrash Hagodol was born out of the merging of at least 3 established Orthodox Jewish congregations at the end of the 19th century.

While only officially existing for 10 years, Beth Hamedrash Hagodol was a landmark of their community as evidenced by the fact that their membership in 1895 was near 90, almost triple that of the next largest Orthodox synagogue in the neighborhood. They were also the first synagogue to install electricity. They also held deeds to the first Orthodox cemetery, Second Home Cemetery located in Greenfield, WI, in the area. At the founding of their first permanent synagogue on 462 5th St, a choir from Chicago came to participate in the ceremony and prominent community leaders from other congregations helped lay the cornerstone.

This successful beginning to Beth Hamedrash Hagodol would soon be complicated by finances. Struggling to pay for the mortgage on the new property, the synagogue was forced into foreclosure. To preserve their synagogue, Beth Hamedrash Hagodol officially disbanded and reincorporated as Beth Israel in 1901. Through

a series of financial maneuvers, the congregation was able to maintain ownership of their synagogue. In 1902 Beth Israel would attract the services of Lithuanian Rabbi Solomon Isaac Scheinfeld, serving until his death in 1943. As the congregation grew, they were able to build an ornate synagogue at 2432 N. Teutonia Avenue. The dedication of this synagogue was met with wide community support. The ceremony involved a procession of congregation elders carrying the synagogue's 10 Torahs to the new location and was attended by so many people that the Milwaukee police had to shut down the roads surrounding the synagogue in order to allow the procession through.

The Teutonia Avenue synagogue is an imposing structure, which still stands today. It was originally built with an attached Talmud Torah school, modern amenities, a stage for plays, kitchens, and a large sanctuary. Aiming to attract the younger generations to Orthodox Judaism, the synagogue consciously chose to become a center of family and community activity and even integrated English services. Rabbi Scheinfeld was behind many of these changes, attempting to accommodate Orthodox traditions to an American way of life without compromising the core of their beliefs. Unfortunately, this success would only last a few decades. Due to a schism that split the congregation over the choice to remain Orthodox and declining attendance as Jewish families moved to more affluent neighborhoods, the congregation officially resigned from the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations in 1957. As part of both the split, the synagogue sold its building to the Greater Galilee Missionary Baptist Church, which still resides at this location.

Following their congregants, Beth Israel purchased a plot of land in Glendale, WI, a suburb north of Milwaukee. Dedicating the first of a series of buildings in 1962, Congregation Beth Israel would start anew as a Conservative synagogue. Over the next 40 years, Beth Israel would expand slowly. Keeping to their previous commitments to community building, their current building has a school, youth center, large kitchens, an event room, a library, memorials, and impressive sanctuary. They also have a long history of organizations attached to the synagogue such as the Chevra Hadisha (Holy Brotherhood burial society) Gemilith Chesed Shel Emeth, Eva's Sisters (formally Daughters of Eva), a Men's Club, a youth group, a Boy Scout troop, and the Three Doors Catering Company to name a few. In a nod to the community's origins, the congregation would also welcome a shrinking Beth El Ner Tamid into their ranks in 2012 and officially change their name to Congregation Beth Israel Ner Tamid to reflect this union.

Reflecting the tenants of Conservative Judaism of tradition and change, CBINT has slowly incorporated new elements to their practice such as the changing roles of women within service. They have also been active with the wider international Jewish community with the establishment of a Red Cross chapter during WWII, the sponsorship of Russian Jewish immigrants fleeing the Soviet Union, and the development of both financial and cultural organizations linked to Israel.

Timeline:

- 9/5/1884 Incorporation of B'ne Jacob
- 1/26/1886 Incorporation of Moses Montefiore Gemeinde and a potential combination with B'ne Jacob (Fourth & Vliet Streets)
- 4/27/1886 Anshe Jacob splits off from Moses Montefiore Gemeinde (Market and Knapp Streets)
- 1890 Moses Montefiore and Anshe Jacob purchased adjoining lots in Greenfield, WI that would be known as Second Home Cemetery
- 8/31/1891 Formation of Beth Hamedrash Hagodol; Reunion of Moses Montefiore Gemeinde and Anshe Jacob; 80 members; Rabbi Solomon Isaac Scheinfeld (Fourth & Vliet Streets)
- 9/3/1893 Dedication of new Beth Hamedrash Hagodol synagogue at 462 Fifth Street

- 5/25/1901 Congregation renamed Beth Israel in response to foreclosure; approximately 100 members
- 1902 Rabbi Solomon Isaac Scheinfeld returns to Milwaukee to lead Congregation Beth Israel until his death in 1943
- 1911 Organization of the Ladies Auxiliary Society of Congregation Beth Israel
- 1917 Founding of Chevra Mishnais for formal adult Jewish education
- 11/1924 Land purchases at 2432 N. Teutonia Avenue between Meinecke and Wright Streets. Building at Fifth & Vliet was sold to a Greek Orthodox Church. Worship for 315 members was held at the Rose Theater at Seventh and Walnut Streets
- 2/15/1925 Groundbreaking at Congregation Beth Israel's location on Teutonia Avenue
- 1926 Rabbi Max J. Mintz launches youth programs at Beth Israel: Boy and Girl Scouts, Junior Builders, Junior Orchestra, Daughters of Israel and Junior Maccabees. The Men's Club is organized.
- 1930's Founding of Chevra Madrash and Chevra Chai Odom for Jewish education; efforts to attract a more Americanized generation to Jewish worship. Inclusion of some English prayers at Friday night services; English sermon and mixed gender seating
- 1937 Separate High Holiday English services are instituted
- 1940 British War Relief Organization formed to distribute clothing
- 1942 Beth Israel Red Cross Chapter organized to roll bandages and knit clothing
- 1950s Pressure from some members to adopt the Conservative form of worship. Beth Israel Rabbi Baumrind opposed Conservatism and later resigned. Congregants wishing to remain Orthodox formed the Anshe Emeth congregation on Appleton Avenue. Beth Israel's membership declined to 100 families
- 1952 New Chapel built on Second Home Cemetery grounds
- 1957 Committee selected to locate and purchase a site for a new synagogue in Milwaukee's northern suburbs; Purchase of 15 acres in Glendale, WI at 6800 North Green Bay Avenue; Beth Israel resigned from the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations and hired Conservative Rabbi Milton Arm
- 12/06/1959 Groundbreaking for Glendale location
- 1959 Teutonia Avenue location sold to Greater Galilee Missionary Baptist Church
- 1960 Beth Israel's worship moves temporarily to the East Side Hebrew School at 4060 North Oakland Avenue
- 1962 Dedication of the Donald Blankstein School Building (Phase I); First worship services held in the School Building; First mixed gender choir
- 5/1966 Completion of Phase II Siegel Hall social hall; congregation grows to 300 members
- 1968 Congregation Beth Israel affiliates with the United Synagogues of America
- 1970 Rabbi Herbert G Panitch accepts Beth Israel pulpit

- 1980 Completion of Phase III and dedication of the new sanctuary; Membership grows to 600 families
- 1985 100th anniversary of Congregation B'ne Jacob, ancestor of Beth Israel
- 1989 Ritual Committee proposes Aliyot for women at Services; first two Aliyot are reserved for men after which a man or woman may read Torah for any Aliyah; establishment of synagogue youth organization Kadima
- 1990 Women receive Aliyot for High Holidays; Rabbi Buckman begins his tenure; Adult Academy of Jewish Studies is established
- 1991 Passport to Israel begins to enroll children at Beth Israel
- 1995 Rabbi Panitch retires after 25 years of spiritual leadership; Rabbi Buckman becomes Senior Rabbi
- 1999 Rabbi Buckman resigns and Rabbi Paul D. Kerbel is selected as the new Rabbi
- 2001 Congregational meeting to discuss the role of women in synagogue ritual; announcement from Rabbi Kerbel on role of women is expected in May
- 10/22/2006 Dedication of Marvin and Marilyn Zetley Family Campus (Phase IV)
- 2012 Congregation Beth El Ner Tamid and Congregation Beth Israel united to form Congregation Beth Israel Ner Tamid
- 8/27/2012 Boards of Directors at Beth El Ner Tamid and Beth Israel officially approved the merger; Beth Israel joined Ner Tamid to its name to recognize the coming together of congregations
- 9/9/2012 Ceremonial Joining of Beth El Ner Tamid and Congregation Beth Israel
- 2014 Memorial plaques installed at Beth Israel Ner Tamid Glendale Synagogue
- 2015 Roll out of newly branded CBINT logo mark, a six-pointed, double-lined star representing the coming together of two families
- 2018 Rabbi Joel Alter was the first Rabbi to be hired by Congregation Beth Israel Ner Tamid

Annotated Bibliography

Cohen, Sheila Terman. *Jews in Wisconsin*. Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2016.

This book provides a general overview of the history of Jews within Wisconsin. However, there are mentions of CBINT. There is also a summary of the evolution of the Jewish community within Milwaukee.

Congregation Beth Israel A Century of Celebration 1901-2001: Recognizing our Past Presidents and Lifetime Trustees
Milwaukee, WI: Congregation Beth Israel, 2001.

This anniversary book is the program for the anniversary celebration on Sunday, May 20, 2001. It includes the schedule of events, historical photographs, messages from current and past Rabbis, messages from congregation leaders and a comprehensive timeline. Trustees and past presidents are highlighted in this book.

Congregation Beth Israel Archival Collection. Jewish Museum Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. 2022.

All paper and photographs were donated from Beth Israel to the Jewish Museum Milwaukee for safe keeping. This collection consists of two boxes and is accessible to the public upon request. The boxes contain anniversary books, newsletters, newspaper articles, congregation documents and historical photographs. These items illustrate the rich and long history of Congregation Beth Israel and how it is intertwined with the Milwaukee Community. This holding also contains a manuscript for the book, *History of Congregation Beth Israel: Milwaukee, Wisconsin* by Eric M. Bloch 1988.

Congregation Beth Israel Centennial: Milwaukee, Wisconsin 1884/5645 – 1985/5745 Milwaukee, WI: Congregation Beth Israel, 1985.

This Centennial Book dates from 1985. It contains early historical photographs and documents pertaining to CBI's early history. There is a helpful congregation genealogy on page 4. This book also contains historic photographs including rich images of the synagogue on Teutonia Avenue as well as breaking ground to build the Green Bay Avenue location.

Congregation Beth Israel Ner Tamid (website). "History." Accessed March 8, 2022.
<https://www.cbintmilwaukee.org/welcome/history>.

This webpage, owned by the congregation, provides information in the congregation's own words, on their rich history as well as an interactive timeline of congregational history. It provides an overview of key events as remembered by CBINT, especially within the last two decades.

Congregation Beth Israel of Milwaukee Records, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Archives. Golda Meir Library. Milwaukee, WI.

This archival holding at UWM contains a booklet from the dedication of the David Seigel Hall at the current location in 1966 plus a variety of administrative books from the 1920s through the 1940s such as cash books, the general ledger, the tablet fund, a secretary journal, seating fees for High Holy Days, a check register, membership and contribution books, and English services. There are also books for a variety of religious societies associated with CBI such as the Sisterhood, the Brotherhood, the Benevolent Society, and the Benevolent Society of Truth, covering the period between 1900 through 1949. This archive also contains a hand-in-inked book, Memorial to the Dead, which documents the deaths of members from 1900-1941. The last folder in this archive is a series of correspondence involving the studying to Milwaukee Jewish History for the American Jewish Tercentenary in the 1950's though the relationship to CBI is unclear.

Gurda, John. *One People, Many Paths: A History of Jewish Milwaukee*. Milwaukee, WI: Jewish Museum of Milwaukee, 2009.

John Gurda's work illustrates the complexity of Milwaukee's Jewish community in the past as well as in the present. There are many elements that unite the Jewish Community as well as aspects that add diversity. This resource is a solid reference on the geographical transitions of Milwaukee's Jewish community as well as its political and social transitions. Specific to Congregation Beth Israel, maps, images and information are provided on the congregation's early locations and eventual move to Glendale, WI.

Haymarket Square History. Duke Migration Memorials. Accessed May 4, 2022.
<https://migrationmemorials.trinity.duke.edu/items/haymarket-square-history>

This website describes the history of the Haymarket District in Milwaukee. It was this neighborhood where the Jewish immigrant community within Milwaukee congregated, especially those from Eastern Europe starting in the 1880s.

Morgan, Michael [HYPERLINK "http://about:blank/"](http://about:blank/) L. and Peter J. Park. *City of Steeples: An inventory of architecturally significant worship structures in Milwaukee*. Department of City Development, Milwaukee, 1996. <https://city.milwaukee.gov/ImageLibrary/Groups/cityHPC/Books/CityofSteeple.pdf>

This report was compiled by the city of Milwaukee and contains a general history of religion within Milwaukee while also exploring the history and significance of various buildings. This report mentions Congregation Beth Israel only in a list. However, there also is a small paragraph describing the neighborhood of historic synagogues that was torn down for the freeway, which also likely included CBI's first synagogue at 462 Fifth Street.

Schle, J. "Historic Designation Study Report Beth Israel Synagogue." Historic Designation Study Report Beth Israel Synagogue. City of Milwaukee, July 1989. Accessed May 3, 2022. <https://city.milwaukee.gov/ImageLibrary/Groups/cityHPC/DesignatedReports/vticnf/BethIsrael1.pdf>.

The historic designation study is a 12-page report focusing on Congregation Beth Israel's Teutonia location and preservation recommendations for that building. Section VIII contains a useful historical background prior to 1989. Additionally, the report contains detail about the congregation and synagogue structures.

Swichkow, Louis J., and Gartner, Lloyd P. *The History of the Jews of Milwaukee*. Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1963.

Written in part by a local Rabbi and historian, this book explores the histories of various Jewish communities within Milwaukee tracing back to the mid-1800's. This book seems particularly popular with those that have an interest in the Jewish History of Milwaukee and is a widely cited secondary source.

Traxler, Ruth. *"The Golden Land" 150 years of Jewish Life in Milwaukee*. Sesquicentennial Celebration, 1994.

A great introduction and summary of the history of Jewish communities within Milwaukee. This resource also contains a summary of the life of Rabbi Scheinfeld.

Young, Mary Ellen and Wayne Attoe. *Places of Worship: Milwaukee*. 1979.

This book contains an overview of notable places of worship within Milwaukee. It includes a brief entry on the former synagogue on Teutonia Avenue.

Zimmermann, H. Russell. *The Heritage Guidebook: Landmarks and Historical Sites in Southeastern Wisconsin*. Heritage Banks, 1989.

This guidebook explores various landmarks and historical sites in southeastern Wisconsin, including the Milwaukee area. There is only one small entry describing the former synagogue on Teutonia Avenue, which is now the Greater Galilee Baptist Church.