

# Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun

## Final Place of Worship Report

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May 14, 2018

### PoW Connects to:

- Congregation Shalom, Fox Point, WI
- Congregation Sinai, Fox Point, WI
- UWM's Helene Zelazo Center for the Performing Arts is currently located in Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun's former Kenwood Blvd. Synagogue.

### Historical Overview

Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun's story began with the first Jews who arrived to Milwaukee in the mid 1840s. Some of these Jews later formed a small group that would worship in the homes of members, and shortly after establishing themselves, the group formally became Congregation Imanu-El. Arguably, the goal of this first Jewish congregation was to form a close-knit community of Jewish people who could worship together in a new city. However, due to worship style and culture clashes, two groups of members broke off to form separate congregations, leaving Milwaukee with three Jewish places of worship in the 1850s. When Isaac Mayer Wise, the founder of Reform Judaism in America, visited Milwaukee, he urged two of the congregations to come back together to form one, larger congregation. Three years later in 1859, Milwaukee's first synagogue, B'ne Jeshurun was built on 5<sup>th</sup> street in Milwaukee.

Dissent within the congregation continued, however. In 1869, thirty-five members left B'ne Jeshurun and formed Congregation Emanu-El. Emanu-El's temple was dedicated only three years later. Despite the considerably small Jewish population in the city (in 1880 there were 2,100 Jews in Milwaukee), both congregations claimed prominent members of the Milwaukee community as members. They formed organizations and clubs, and joined the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now the Union for Reform Judaism).

In 1919, negotiations began for the construction of a new synagogue for Congregation Emanu-El on Kenwood Blvd, and on May 30, 1923, the synagogue was dedicated. Things were changing for B'ne Jeshurun as well; Milwaukee county chose the spot of their synagogue to build a County Courthouse, and their synagogue was razed. In September of 1927, the two Congregations met to discuss a possible consolidation, and in that same year they held their first service together as one.

Now Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun, the congregation continued to prove itself as a viable and substantial member of the city of Milwaukee. Although two groups who did split from Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun in the 1950s to form Congregations Sinai and Shalom, they still had enough members to thrive. But in the 1970s, Milwaukee's Jews, like much of the city's white population, began to move into northern suburbs. The shift caused anxieties for Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun. Noticing the growing trend, the board of trustees began to search for a new place to build, and in December of 1995, the Congregation purchased a property in the Village of River Hills. Although the property in River Hills was established initially to be a religious school and meeting center, it was decided that the sanctuary needed to be located there as well. In 1999 the Congregation sold its Kenwood Blvd. synagogue to the University of Wisconsin-

Milwaukee, a decision which led to some turmoil within the congregation. The Congregation held its first service in River Hills on September 11, 2009. This shift out of a more urban setting is extremely important in understanding the state of Jewish life and community in Milwaukee; the synagogue followed its members out of the city. As the oldest Jewish congregation in Milwaukee, Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun exemplifies the evolution and diligence of Judaism in Milwaukee.

### Timeline

1840s- The first Jews arrive in Milwaukee

1847- A small group of Jewish men met at the home of Isaac Neustadel to worship. This would be the first Jewish service in Milwaukee.

1848- Yom Kippur- The same group of Jewish men celebrated the Holy Day at the home of Henry Neuhaus.

1850- The group formally became Congregation Imanu-El

1854- A group of members broke off to form a second congregation, called Ahavath Emuno.

1856- Members who preferred the German style of worship broke off to form a third congregation, Anshe Emeth.

1856- Isaac Mayer Wise, the founder of Reform Judaism in America, visited Milwaukee.

1856- Wise urged two of the three Milwaukee congregations to merge, Imanu-El and Ahavath Emuno. This resulted in the establishment of B'ne Jeshurun.

1859- Milwaukee's first synagogue, B'ne Jeshurun, was built at 820 North Fifth Street.

1869- Thirty-five members left B'ne Jeshurun and formed Congregation Emanu-El.

1872- Dedication of the Temple Emanu-El at Broadway and Martin Sts. (now State St.)

1872- The Emanu-El Ladies Society was organized.

1874- Congregation Emanu-El joined the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now Union for Reform Judaism)

1875- Rabbi Moritz Spitz held the first Confirmation class consisting of six girls and two boys.

1880- Milwaukee's Jewish population was 2,100.

1886- 10<sup>th</sup> and Cedar Street Building was erected for Congregation B'ne Jeshurun. The site is now the Milwaukee County Courthouse.

1892- The Great Fair of Temple Emanu-El was organized by the Ladies Society.

1894- Congregation Emanu-El celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> year.

1899-October 27. At the urging of Rabbi Sigmund Hecht during his last sermon to Congregation Emanu-El, Bar Mitzvah was eliminated with the idea that Confirmation was more effective for young children.

1896- Congregation Emanu-El's Broadway and Martin St. Temple was remodeled.

1904- Rabbi Samuel Hirschberg was appointed to Congregation Emanu-El.

1905- English became the language of record at B'ne Jeshurun. (Replacing...German?)

1912- Rabbi Charles S. Levi was appointed to B'ne Jeshurun

1919- Negotiations concluded for a new building for Congregation Emanu-El on Kendwood Blvd.

1919- The Emanu-El Ladies Society was renamed Emanu-El Sisterhood.

1920- Milwaukee's Jewish population hit 20,000. The U.S. Jewish Population was 3,602,150.

1922-Memorial Day. Cornerstone was laid for the Kenwood building that is presently University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

1923-May 30. The synagogue on Kenwood Blvd was dedicated in Congregation Emanu-El.

1923- A new organ for the new building was dedicated

1923- Sisterhood Sabbath began.

1924- High Holy Day cards of admission began around this year.

1926- Rabbi Joseph L. Baron moved to Milwaukee to become an assistant to Rabbi Hirschberg,

1927- B'ne Jeshurun was informed that Milwaukee County would raze their existing building in order to make room for the County Courthouse.

1927-September 15. The two congregations, Emanu-El and B'ne Jeshurun met to discuss possible consolidation.

1927- Congregation Emanu-El and Congregation B'ne Jeshurun merged by an overwhelming vote.

1927-September 23. Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun held their first Friday evening service as one.

1929- Rabbi Hirschberg celebrated his 25 years of service.

1947- Rabbi Hirschberg retired, and the congregation was turned over to Rabbi Joseph L. Baron

1947- The congregation hired Rabbi Harry B. Pastor as an assistant to Rabbi Baron.

1948- The first cantor of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Anthony Scott, began his career at Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun.

1948- The new State of Israel is established by the United Nations.

1951- Rabbi Harry B. Pastor left to form his own congregation, taking with him a group of Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun members who wished to be located in the suburbs. This congregation would be called Congregation Shalom.

1951- Rabbi Baron retired to emeritus status due to health complications, and the search for a new Senior Rabbi began.

1952- Bar Mitzvahs reintroduced.

1954- The first Bat Mitzvah took place. This was the first Bat Mitzvah in the congregation's long history.

1955- Rabbi Dudley Weinberg arrived to serve the congregation.

1955- Another group of members leave the congregation to form yet another congregation named Sinai.

- 1956- A large movement of Jewish families to the suburbs began, and the congregation purchased a plot of land in Fox Point. However, Congregation Sinai moved to the property adjacent to the land, causing unsettling problems. This land would later be sold.
- 1964- Rabbi Weinberg invited Archbishop William A. Cousins to the synagogue to speak about Vatican II. This was the first time a Catholic prelate appeared in a local synagogue.
- 1974-August. Expansion of Kenwood Building took place.
- 1979- Lillian Freedman, the first executive secretary of the congregation, retired as secretary and became the congregation's first archivist.
- 1983- The Temple brotherhood raised enough funds to remodel the chapel.
- 1995-December. Village of River Hills property purchased with the hope of building a religious school and meeting center with a small chapel.
- 1996-May. Lillian Freedman recruited board members to lead tours of the synagogue, as an educational tool for non-Jews.
- 1996- The building was opened and named the Joseph and Vera Zilber Campus. The building on Kenwood remained the congregation's main location.
- 1999- Current Rabbi, Rabbi Marc Berkson became Senior Rabbi.
- 1999- The congregation met with UWM to discuss a possible sale of the synagogue on Kenwood Blvd.
- 1999- The congregation sold the Kenwood building to UWM, but still met there on High Holy days. Another local synagogue allowed Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun to make a temporary home in their space.
- 1999- Members sue for the sale of the synagogue on Kenwood Blvd.
- 2001- David Barash joined the staff as cantor.
- 2006- Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun celebrated its 150 year anniversary.
- 2009-September 11. The congregation held its first service in the River Hills sanctuary, where they are still meeting today.

## Annotated Bibliography

Ruth Fromstein. In *This Place: Congregation Emanu El B'ne Jeshurun's First 150 Years* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2006).

This source is very useful to our research because it provides a brief, yet extremely clear overview of the first 150 years of the congregation's history. The book is less than one hundred pages, but it is useful when examining the past merges and splits within the congregation.

Louis J. Swichkow. "The Jewish Community of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1860-1870." *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 47, no. 1 (September 1957): 34-58. Accessed February 12, 2018. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43059005>.

This article provides a detailed account of the early years of the Jewish population in Milwaukee. It offers specific dates of the beginnings of the three original Jewish congregations, along with a context of national events and Jewish migrations to the U.S.

Myron Berman and Theodore B. Richter. "A New Spirit on the East Side: The Early History of the Emanu-El Brotherhood, 1903-1920." *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (September 1964): 52-81. Accessed February 12, 2018. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23874789>.

Along with providing a history of the Brotherhood, this article also provides additional context concerning national and world events, and changing demographics in the Jewish population of Milwaukee.

Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun Records Collection. Jewish Museum of Milwaukee Archives.

This collection consists of 39 boxes from the entire history of the congregation, dating from its inception in the 1850s, to today. The collection was first donated in 2004. This collection is arranged in a series of eight sections: Antecedent Congregations; Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun; Congregational Leaders: Presidents; Congregational Leaders: Rabbis; Congregational Organizations; Non-Congregational Publications; People; and, Audio-Visual Material. Materials include texts (handwritten and typed), legal documents and deeds, photographs, bulletins, flyers, newspaper and magazine clippings, correspondence, oral histories, cemetery records, confirmations and wedding records, obituaries, videos, and sound recordings.

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

Provides a comprehensive account of the Jewish people in Milwaukee, from their first arrival in the 1840s, through 1950. How and why they arrived in Milwaukee, and began the first congregations. Their place in the community.

Jewish Museum of Milwaukee website. <https://jewishmuseummilwaukee.org/>

The website of Jewish Museum of Milwaukee provides valuable resources for the Jewish community in Milwaukee, and archival records of most Jewish congregations in the Milwaukee area. It also provides a timeline of the Jewish people in Milwaukee.

Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun website. <https://www.ceebj.org/>

The congregation's website provides information about the congregation today, its worship services, organizations, and educational services. They also provide a live stream video feed of worship

services for those not able to attend, and monthly blog posts from various leaders in the organization.