A Finding Aid to the
John J. Tepfer Papers

Manuscript Collection No. 586
Collection Summary

Title: John J. Tepfer Papers
Dates: 1896-1986
Collection Number: MS-586
Repository: The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives
Creator: Tepfer, John J., 1898-1988
Extent: 2.4 linear feet (6 Hollinger boxes)
Language of the Material: English

Administrative Information

Biographical Sketch

John J. (Jay) Tepfer (1896-1988) was a rabbi, author and faculty member at the New York campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Tepfer was born in London to a prosperous Orthodox Jewish family. After World War I, he studied economics and then came to the United States to attend Wharton. He abandoned his business studies after hearing Rabbi Stephen S. Wise preach and instead attended the Jewish Institute of Religion. He graduated from JIR in 1927, and after briefly working as a pulpit rabbi, returned to JIR to teach Talmud and remained on the faculty of HUC-JIR until his death.

HUC-JIR honored Tepfer on the occasion of his 90th birthday during the 1986 Founders Day celebration. In a recorded speech, Tepfer spoke of the three men who influenced him most: Rabbi Abraham Abba Werner (died 1912), a famous rabbi in London, his first Talmud teacher; Claude Montefiore (1888-1938), who taught him it was possible to balance being a Jew and an Englishman; Pinchas Rokeah, his uncle, an observant Orthodox Jew who was also a pacifist, who chose prison during World War I rather than serve in His Majesty’s Army.

Tepfer was married to Naomi Flax (1903-2005); they had two daughters, Ruth and Nina.

Scope and Content

The John J. Tepfer Papers consists of correspondence, writings, sermons, class and lecture notes, and miscellaneous items. A portion of the material consists of pamphlets and articles written by others on topics that were relevant to Tepfer’s research. Topics of interest include Hasidism, Talmud, and Mishna. The collection also contains a folder of material on Naomi Flax Tepfer.

Arrangement

The collection has been maintained in original order.

Terms of Access

The collection is open for use; no restrictions apply.

Preferred Citation

Footnotes and bibliographic references should refer to the John J. Tepfer Papers and the American Jewish Archives. A suggestion for at least the first citation is as follows:

[Description], [Date], Box #, Folder #. MS-586. John J. Tepfer Papers. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Provenance

Received from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, N.Y.

Processing Information

Processed by American Jewish Archives staff, July 2009.

Index Terms

Subjects: College teachers / Jews -- New York (State) -- New York / Rabbis / Reform Judaism
Personal Names: Tepfer, John J. (John Jay), 1898-1988
Corporate Names: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Media: Sermons

Series A. General, 1898-1986
Box and Folder Listing

Box 1. Folder 1. Correspondence, A-Z, 1940-1986, undated
Box 1. Folder 2. Spiro, Dr. A (Cambridge, England). Correspondence, 1954, undated
Box 1. Folder 3. Writings and lectures, 1921-1975, undated
Box 1. Folder 4. Article, "Palestinian Personalities," in Avukah Annual, 1930
Box 1. Folder 5. Pamphlet, "Martin Burber and Neo-Mysticism," with preparatory notes, 1934
Box 1. Folder 6. Plainfield sermons, undated
Box 1. Folder 7. Review of Balzac's Wild Ass's Skin, undated
Box 1. Folder 8. The Parables, Eight Chapters, undated
Box 1. Folder 9. Speech and program from HUC-JIR (New York) 50th anniversary dinner, 1972 May 31
Box 1. Folder 10. Founder's Day (HUC-JIR, NY). Tribute to Dr. Tepfer, 1986 March 12
Box 1. Folder 11. Hasidism. Notes and articles, 1928-1930, undated
Box 1. Folder 12. Hasidism and Polish-Jewish History. Notes, articles, speeches, 1931-1942, undated
Box 1. Folder 13. Hasidism. Lectures, undated
Box 1. Folder 14. Hasidism and Polish Synagogue. Original notes, undated
Box 2. Folder 1. Early notes on readings, grammar, etc., undated
Box 2. Folder 3. Notes regarding lectures, scholarship, readings, ideas, 1958-1960
Box 2. Folder 4. Notes regarding lectures, scholarship, readings, ideas, 1961-1964
Box 2. Folder 7. Notes on Reading, Lord's Prayer, 1979
Box 2. Folder 8. Notes regarding personal, activities and books, 1981-1986
Box 2. Folder 11. Notes regarding Bernard Shaw and Judaism, with an article and play by Shaw, 1907, 1912, undated
Box 2. Folder 12. Criticism of Baron's work, 1943
Box 2. Folder 13. Notes, possibly from Gottheil's course on Jews in Egypt during Talmudic period, undated
Box 2. Folder 14. Summer Institute (JIR), 1938-1940
Box 2. Folder 15. Memo to Dr. Nelson Glueck reporting Tepfer's daily activities at HUC-JIR, 1951
Box 2. Folder 17. Class outlines and notes, 1936, undated
Box 2. Folder 18. Teaching pages and outlines, undated
Box 3. Folder 1. Teaching papers and class notes, 1950s, undated
Box 3. Folder 2. Class notes, 1950-1952
Box 3. Folder 3. Class notes, 1957
Box 3. Folder 4. Class notes, 1959
Box 3. Folder 7. Class notes, 1968
Box 3. Folder 8. Class notes, 1977-1978
Box 3. Folder 10. Class notes, 1982
Box 3. Folder 11. Class notes, 1984-1985
Box 3. Folder 12. Class notes, undated
Box 3. Folder 13. Class notes, undated

Box 4. Folder 1. Talmud correspondence, undated
Box 4. Folder 2. Talmud pages for lessons, undated
Box 4. Folder 4. Mishna: class notes and teaching papers, undated
Box 4. Folder 5. Class notes: Talmud (Hamafrid), 1955-1956
Box 4. Folder 6. Class notes: Mishna introductory material, 1970
Box 4. Folder 7. Class notes: Lamentations, 1971
Box 4. Folder 8. Class notes: Introductory Mishna, 1974
Box 4. Folder 11. Class notes: Legal concepts, 1951

Box 5. Folder 1. Jewish history: Bibliographies, outlines, miscellaneous, 1938-1967
Box 5. Folder 2. Class notes: History, 1943
Box 5. Folder 3. Class notes and sources for Jewish History, 1946
Box 5. Folder 5. Class notes regarding Poland, 1939-1940
Box 5. Folder 6. Class Notes: Polish Jewish history, Hasidism, 1959

Box 6. Folder 2. Articles by Jean-Paul Sartre, 1946
Box 6. Folder 3. Herbert Baumgard Papers, 1949
Box 6. Folder 6. Memorandum book: German words and translation, undated
Box 6. Folder 7. Vocabulary cards, undated