



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

**A Finding Aid to the
Ahron Opher Papers**

Manuscript Collection No. 694



Collection Summary

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| Title | Ahron Opher Papers |
| Dates | 1929-1994 |
| Collection Number | MS-694 |
| Repository | The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives |
| Creator | Opher, Ahron, 1911-2002 |
| Extent | 9.2 linear feet (23 Hollinger boxes) |
| Language of the Material | English and Hebrew |

Administrative Information

Biographical Sketch

Ahron Opher was born in Safed, Israel in 1911. He studied at the Radbaz Yeshiva and graduated from the Teacher's College of Jerusalem before emigrating to the United States in 1929. He then received his BA from the College of the City of New York with a degree in Psychology and Sociology. Opher later obtained a M.H.L. at the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City and a D.D. from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1935.

Opher held many rabbinic positions during his life of service. He was the rabbi of the Child Guidance Clinic of the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society and Cedar Knoll Schools in Pleasantville and Hawthorne, New York from 1935-1938. In 1938 he transferred to Hebrew Tabernacle of Washington Heights in New York City where he stayed until 1946 when he left for Congregation B'nei Jeshurun in Paterson, New Jersey. In 1952 Opher moved to Chicago to become the rabbi of the South Shore Temple for ten years. In 1962 he was presented with a unique opportunity that would both challenge and frustrate him. Opher accepted the position of Rabbi Chief Minister at the United Progressive Congregation of Johannesburg, South Africa. His time there was fraught with controversies between himself, a progressive and reform oriented rabbi, and the conservative congregations already there. The difficulties were mainly about how many changes would be allowed into services and rituals. Opher was adamant about changing things to make them more relevant to the times, such as allowing more English into the services.

In 1964 Opher left South Africa for Temple Solael in Canoga Park, California where stayed for four years. In 1968 he moved to Overland Park, Kansas to become the rabbi at Temple Beth El. He stayed there for only one year when he moved on to Beth Am in Teaneck, New Jersey. In 1973 Opher moved to Sarasota, Florida where he became a rabbi at Temple Emanu-El. He stayed in Sarasota for the remainder of his career.

In addition to his rabbinic duties Opher was quite involved in Jewish, community and civic organizations. He held positions of leadership in many local and national organizations and institutions. In New York he headed the Manhattan-Washington Lodge of B'nai B'rith (1939-1940) and in New Jersey he was president of the State Region of the American Jewish Congress (AJC), 1949-1952. When he lived in Chicago he was the president of the Midwest Council of the AJC and served on its National Executive Board (1954-1956). For six years he was Executive Vice-President of the Synagogue Council of America (SCA) (1944-1948) and also served as Vice-President of the National Association of Boards of Rabbis which comprised the main religious branches of American Jewry. He was a member of the Board of Governors of the Jewish Institute of Religion (1942-1946), the Executive Board of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) (1942-1944) and for twelve years served on the Committee on Rabbinic Ethics (1942-1944). Opher was also a member of the Committee of Liturgy of the CCAR (1950-1962) and was among the pioneers in the field of creative worship.

Ahron Opher had a wide reputation as a dynamic speaker, erudite scholar and civic leader, and served his community diligently throughout his life. Opher served on the Governor's Commission on Human Rights in New Jersey (1950-1952) and on the Mayor's Commission on Youth Welfare in Chicago (1958-1960). He chaired the Citizens Committee on Children's Shelter in Passaic County, New Jersey. He was a member of the Panel on Theological Problems of the War Department and of the Tri-Faith Consultative Body to the US Delegation at the United Nations. He was active in various local and national inter-faith endeavors, having been president of the Ministerial Association of Chicago's South Shore, the San Fernando Valley Interfaith Commission, and national vice president of Religion in American Life. Opher was also a president of the Ministerial Association of Sarasota and a president of the National Association of American Reform Retired Rabbis. Opher served many other organizations in various capacities.

Opher was also a dedicated scholar and instructor. In 1949-1952 he was an instructor at the Hebrew Union College (HUC) School of Education and Sacred Music in New York City. He later was a lecturer at the College of Jewish Studies in Chicago, Illinois (1958-1962) and at the College of Jewish Studies in

Los Angeles, California (1964-1968). In 1968 Opher was a lecturer as well in Park College in Parkville, Missouri. He also took the time to write some books, such as *The Conversions of the Khazars*; *Bialik, A Giant of Hebrew Literature*; *Judaism - Orthodox, Conservative and Reform* and *Experiments in Creative Worship*. He has also contributed to numerous periodicals in both Hebrew and English as well as being a frequent lecturer on college campuses, radio, and television.

In 1936 Opher married Irene Zinman of Minneapolis, Minnesota and later had one son, Michael. Ahron Opher died in 2002.

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| Scope and Content | Collection contains correspondence, writings, and sermons of Ahron Opher. |
| Arrangement | The collection is arranged into five (5) series: A. Correspondence and Subject Files; B. Writings and Lectures; C. Services; D. Personal; E. Audiorecordings. |
| Terms of Access | The collection is open for use; no restrictions apply. |
| Preferred Citation | Footnotes and bibliographic references should refer to the Ahron Opher Papers and the American Jewish Archives. A suggestion for at least the first citation is as follows: [Description], [Date], Box #, Folder #. MS-694. Ahron Opher Papers. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio. |
| Provenance | Received from Ahron Opher, Chicago, Ill., 2002. |
| Processing Information | Processed by Christine A. Crandall, January 2003. |

Index Terms

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|------------------------|--|
| Subjects | Jews -- South Africa / Rabbis |
| Personal Names | Opher, Ahron, 1911-2002 |
| Corporate Names | Congregation B'nai Jeshurun (Paterson, N.J.) / South Shore Temple (Chicago, Ill.) / Temple Beth Am (Teaneck, N.J.) / Temple Beth El (Overland, Kan.) / Temple Emanu-El (Sarasota, Fla.) / Temple Menorah (Chicago, Ill.) / Temple Solael (Canoga Park, Calif.) |
| Media | Sermons |

Series A. Correspondence and Subject Files, 1932-1994

Extent 1.2 linear feet (3 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note Contains the letters and files of Opher. The exchange of letters between Opher and fellow members of the Synagogue Council of America (SCA) is quite important as he was the Executive Vice-President at that time (3/1-3). Also of interest is the file and scrapbooks on South Africa (2/13, 22/1-4). The scrapbooks contain correspondence, newspaper clippings, temple programs, and some of the creative services that Opher wrote for the congregation. These files also detail the many controversies that Opher faced, being a Reform rabbi, a progressive and imaginative man and a foreigner.

Arrangement The series is arranged in the original order received.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 1. Folder 1. American League for a Free Palestine, 1946-1947, 1953

Box 1. Folder 2. Anderson, Charles E., 1989

Box 1. Folder 3. Arfa, Cyrus, 1994

Box 1. Folder 4. Artz, Max, 1947

Box 1. Folder 5. Award dinner, 1984

Box 1. Folder 6. Bamberger, Bernard J., 1961

Box 1. Folder 7. Berman House, Inc., 1946

Box 1. Folder 8. Bible Study Group, 1992

Box 1. Folder 9. Blumberg, H., 1964

Box 1. Folder 10. Brandeis Institute, 1966

Box 1. Folder 11. Cobb, Lee J., 1966

Box 1. Folder 12. Congregation Bnai Jeshurun (Paterson, N.J.) Nathan Barnert Memorial Temple, undated

Box 1. Folder 13. Dreffin, Scott A., 1990-1991

Box 1. Folder 14. Fleck, Aaron, 1976

Box 1. Folder 15. General correspondence, 1952, 1989, 1998

Box 1. Folder 16. Gerstein, Stanley R., 1980

Box 1. Folder 17. Goldstein, Israel, 1962

Box 1. Folder 18. Holocaust memorial service, 1991

Box 1. Folder 19. Hospice of Sarasota County, Inc., 1984

Box 1. Folder 20. Interfaith work, 1940-1983

Box 1. Folder 21. Jewish Chautauqua Society, 1965

Box 1. Folder 22. Jewish Community Council of Sarasota, Fla., 1978-1982

Box 1. Folder 23. Konovitch, Barry, 1978

Box 1. Folder 24. Kapner, Jerome, 1979

Box 1. Folder 25. Lazarus, Helen, 1977

Box 1. Folder 26. Lederman, Arthur N., 1979

Box 1. Folder 27. Maggin, Sherwood, 1993-1994

Box 1. Folder 28. Mashioff, Harold H., 1940-1943

Box 1. Folder 29. Messianic Jews, 1990

Box 1. Folder 30. New College (Sarasota, Fla.), 1985

Box 2. Folder 1. Park College (Parkville, Mo.), 1968-1969

Box 2. Folder 2. Park College (Parkville, Mo.). Modern Jewish Life and Thought course, 1968

Box 2. Folder 3. Praise, 1978-1997

Box 2. Folder 4. Radio program, 1982

Box 2. Folder 5. Raisin, Max, 1946-1952

Box 2. Folder 6. Rodriguez Country Growers, 1987

Box 2. Folder 7. Rosenblum's Hebrew Book Store, 1967

Box 2. Folder 8. Religious Schools, undated

Box 2. Folder 9. Sarasota Board of Rabbis, 1990

Box 2. Folder 10. Sarasota Jewish Community, 1986

Box 2. Folder 11. Schulman, Albert M., 1979-1980

Box 2. Folder 12. Segal, Henry, 1985-1986

Box 2. Folder 13. South Africa, 1961-1968

Box 2. Folder 14. South Shore Temple (Chicago, Ill.), 1962

Box 2. Folder 15. State Attorney, 1989

Box 3. Folder 1. Synagogue Council of America, 1943-1956

Box 3. Folder 2. Synagogue Council of America. United Nations organizations, 1945

Box 3. Folder 3. Synagogue Council of America. Resignation, 1945-1947

Box 3. Folder 4. Temple Beth Am (Teaneck, N.J.), 1969-1972

Box 3. Folder 5. Temple Beth El (Overland, Kan.), 1968

Box 3. Folder 6. Temple Emanu-El (Sarasota, Fla.), 1985

Box 3. Folder 7. Temple Israel of the City of New York (New York, N.Y.) Hebrew Tabernacle, 1945-1946

Box 3. Folder 8. Temple Menorah (Chicago, Ill.), 1955

Box 3. Folder 9. Temple Solael (Canoga Park, Calif.), 1964, 1968

Box 3. Folder 10. Temple Solael (Canoga Park, Calif.). Resignation, 1968-1970

Box 3. Folder 11. Torah, 1983-1984

Box 3. Folder 12. Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1977-1984

Box 3. Folder 13. Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1984

Box 3. Folder 14. World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1962-1964

Box 3. Folder 15. Wise, David J., 1982-1983

Box 3. Folder 16. Wise, Stephen S., 1932-1945

Box 3. Folder 17. Yorty, Sam, 1966

Series B. Writings and Lectures, 1929-1993

Extent 1.4 linear feet (3.5 Hollinger boxes)

Arrangement The series is arranged in the original order received.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 4. Folder 1. "Bio Ethics."

Box 4. Folder 2. Bulletins. Congregation Bnai Jeshurun (Paterson, N.J.). Nathan Barnert Memorial Temple, 1945-1947, 1952

Box 4. Folder 3. Bulletins. Hebrew Tabernacle (Washington Heights, N.Y.), 1943-1946

Box 4. Folder 4. Temple Emanu-El (Sarasota, Fla.), 1991-1993

Box 4. Folder 5. Bulletins. Temple Solael (Canoga Park, Calif.), 1947-1966

Box 4. Folder 6. How the Jews Will Repossess Jesus, undated

Box 4. Folder 7. Interview, undated

Box 4. Folder 8. Interview, undated

Box 5. Folder 1. The Jewish Concept of Messiah, undated

Box 5. Folder 2. Jewish Identity notes, undated

Box 5. Folder 3. The Jews of Khazaria thesis, 1934

Box 5. Folder 4. Lectures, undated

Box 5. Folder 5. Message of Israel, 1983-1985
Box 5. Folder 6. Notes. English, undated
Box 5. Folder 7. Notes. Hebrew, undated
Box 5. Folder 8. Notes. Hebrew, undated
Box 5. Folder 9. Notes. Hebrew, undated
Box 6. Folder 1. Notes. Hebrew, undated
Box 6. Folder 2. Poetry, undated
Box 6. Folder 3. Revelations - The Jewish Law, undated
Box 6. Folder 4. School notes, 1929-1935
Box 6. Folder 5. School notes, undated
Box 6. Folder 6. School notes, undated
Box 6. Folder 7. Union of American Hebrew Congregations School of Jewish Studies exams, undated
Box 7. Folder 1. Writings, undated
Box 7. Folder 2. Writings, undated

Series C. Services, 1931-1974, undated

Extent 5.8 linear feet (14.5 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note Opher's services would be mainly of interest to scholars tracing the history and growth of the creative liturgy movement. Opher integrated new aspects of worship to the services, such as incorporating more English and less Hebrew in both the spoken and sung sections. These services can be found throughout the series, but some examples that were printed in booklet form are available to look at as well (19/1-2).

Arrangement The series is arranged in the original order received.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 7. Folder 3. English, 1937-1938
Box 7. Folder 4. English, 1946-1948, 1952
Box 7. Folder 5. English, 1946-1958
Box 8. Folder 1. English, 1946-1958
Box 8. Folder 2. English, 1946-1959
Box 8. Folder 3. English, 1947-1948
Box 9. Folder 1. English, 1947-1948
Box 9. Folder 2. English, 1947-1956
Box 9. Folder 3. English, 1947, 1957-1958
Box 9. Folder 4. English, 1952-1953, 1962, undated
Box 10. Folder 1. English, 1956-1961, undated
Box 10. Folder 2. English, 1957, undated
Box 10. Folder 3. English, 1958
Box 10. Folder 4. English, 1968-1974, undated

Box 10. Folder 5. English, undated
Box 10. Folder 6. English, undated
Box 11. Folder 1. English, undated
Box 11. Folder 2. English, undated
Box 11. Folder 3. English and Hebrew, 1931-1951
Box 11. Folder 4. English and Hebrew, 1949-1951
Box 11. Folder 5. English and Hebrew, 1956-1959
Box 11. Folder 6. Hebrew, undated
Box 12. Folder 1. Hebrew, undated
Box 12. Folder 2. Hebrew, undated
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Box 17. Folder 6. Hebrew, undated
Box 17. Folder 7. Hebrew, undated
Box 17. Folder 8. Hebrew, undated
Box 17. Folder 9. Hebrew, undated
Box 17. Folder 10. Hebrew, undated
Box 17. Folder 11. Hebrew, undated
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Box 18. Folder 12. Hebrew, undated
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Box 19. Folder 7. Hebrew, undated
Box 20. Folder 1. Creative services, undated
Box 20. Folder 2. Creative services, undated
Box 20. Folder 3. Experiments in Ritual, undated
Box 20. Folder 4. Experiments in Ritual, undated
Box 20. Folder 5. Holocaust and High Holy Days. Hebrew, undated
Box 20. Folder 6. "The Meaning of Passover." Hebrew, undated
Box 20. Folder 7. Prayers. English and Hebrew, undated
Box 21. Folder 1. Prayers. English and Hebrew, undated
Box 21. Folder 2. Prayers. Hebrew, undated
Box 21. Folder 3. Sabbath prayer book, undated
Box 21. Folder 4. Special services, undated
Box 21. Folder 5. Special services, undated
Box 21. Folder 6. Special services and prayers, undated
Box 21. Folder 7. Summer sermonettes, undated
Box 21. Folder 8. Summer sermonettes. Number 13 - Deuteronomy 26, undated

Series D. Personal, 1929-1989

Extent 0.8 linear feet (2 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note Contains the scrapbooks that Opher put together throughout his life and career. Since some of the scrapbooks were rapidly deteriorating, photocopies of the pages were made and kept in order so the integrity of the scrapbook remains. This series highlights aspects of Opher's life that he felt most strongly about, whether it was pride in some achievement, vindication in the storm of controversy, or letters of support from congregants in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Arrangement The series is arranged in the original order received.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 22. Folder 1. Awards, 1980, 1989, undated
Box 22. Folder 2. Biographical information.
Box 22. Folder 3. Photographs, undated
Box 22. Folder 4. Photographs, undated

Box 22. Folder 5. Photographs, undated

Box 22. Folder 6. Rabbi's manuals.

Box 22. Folder 7. Scrapbook. Through Hebrew Tabernacle, 1929-1943

Box 22. Folder 8. Scrapbook. Through Hebrew Tabernacle photographs, 1929-1943

Box 22. Folder 9. Scrapbook, 1944-1946

Box 22. Folder 10. Scrapbook. Paterson, New Jersey and Synagogue Council of America, 1945-1947

Box 22. Folder 11. Scrapbook. Paterson, New Jersey and Synagogue Council of America, 1947-1949

Box 22. Folder 12. Scrapbook. Paterson, New Jersey and American Jewish Congress, 1947-1949

Box 22. Folder 13. Scrapbook. Children's shelter and nuclear conference, 1949-1952

Box 22. Folder 14. Scrapbook. South Shore Temple (Chicago, Ill.), 1952 October-1961 May

Box 23. Folder 1. Scrapbook. South Africa, 1962 August-1963 July

Box 23. Folder 2. Scrapbook. South Africa, 1963 June-1964 April

Box 23. Folder 3. Scrapbook. Johannesburg, California, Kansas, New Jersey, 1963 September-1973 March

Box 23. Folder 4. Scrapbook. South Africa, 1964 April-July

Box 23. Folder 5. Scrapbook. Kansas., 1968-1969

Box 23. Folder 6. Scrapbook. Sarasota, Fla., 1972-1978

Box 23. Folder 7. Scrapbook. Faith without Prejudice, 1979-1984

Box 23. Folder 8. Scrapbook, 1980

Series E. Audiorecordings, 1978-1989, undated

Box and Folder Listing

Item C-4217. Akiba and Talmud, 1983 January 19

Item C-4218. America and Israel - Lands of Paradise, 1989

Item C-4219. Antisemitism, 1984 January 11

Item C-4220. Assimilation, 1984 January 18

Item C-4221. Baal Shem Tov and Hasidism, 1983 February 2

Item C-4222. The Challenge of Freedom and "Rebirth, undated

Item C-4223. Covenant, undated

Item C-4224. Encountering the Divine Presence. Kushner, Malino, Geller, undated

Item C-4225. Encounters, 1979 January 17

Item C-4226. Five Faces of Judaism, 1982 February 17

Item C-4227. Herzl - Zionism, 1983 February 23

Item C-4228. Israel Future, 1986 February 5

Item C-4229. Jewish Mission, undated

Item C-4230. Judaism is a Social Religion and "Christmas and Chanuka, undated

Item C-4231. Moses, 1984 January 23

Item C-4232. Paganism and Judaism, 1981 January 14

Item C-4233. Prophets, 1983 January 12

Item C-4234. Prophets, 1986 February 12

Item C-4235. Rabbinic Literature - Synagogue Judaism. Samuel Sandmel, 1978 January 12

Item C-4236. Rebirth, undated

Item C-4237. Reform, 1982 January 27

Item C-4238. Roots, undated

Item C-4239. Roots, 1979 January 10

Item C-4240. WGSA, 1981 April 1

Item C-4241. You Can't Please Everyone and "The Many Faces of Man.", undated