A Finding Aid to the
Morris N. Kertzer Papers

Manuscript Collection No. 709
Collection Summary

Title  Morris N. Kertzer Papers  
Dates  1936-1983  
Collection Number  MS-709  
Repository  The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives  
Creator  Kertzer, Morris Norman, 1910-  
Extent  5.6 linear feet (14 Hollinger boxes)  
Language of the Material  English and Hebrew  

Administrative Information

Biographical Sketch  
Morris Kertzer was born on October 18, 1910 in Cochrane, Ontario. He received his bachelor’s degree from the University of Toronto and his master’s degree from the University of Illinois. He then studied under Mordecai Kaplan at the Jewish Theological Seminary where he earned a doctorate in Hebrew literature and he was ordained in 1934. Kertzer would eventually separate from the Jewish Conservative movement to join the Reform Rabbinate. Kertzer served congregations in Illinois, Alabama, and Iowa before joining the army to serve as a Jewish Chaplain in World War II. During World War II, Kertzer was the only Jewish chaplain at the Anzio beachhead, earning a bronze star for his services there. He entered Rome shortly after the liberation and spoke at the liberation ceremonies. He also served in Africa as well as Southern and Central France before returning home in 1945. Kertzer was active in Jewish-Christian relations, earning the International University of Rome’s Pro Deo Medal for promoting understanding between Catholics and Jews. He traveled internationally lecturing in Italy, Rumania, Japan, Turkey, India, Thailand and Israel. Kertzer authored several books including With an “H” on my Dog Tag; his memoirs as military chaplain in World War II, What is a Jew?; (which went into more than 30 printings), Today’s American Jew, Tell me Rabbi, and The Art of Being a Jew. He also published numerous articles. Kertzer led the first Jewish delegation to the Soviet Union in 1956 and subsequently won the George Washington Medal for his analysis of the Soviet Union’s anti-Semitism. He served as the national president of the Jewish Military Chaplains Association, he was the national chaplain of Amvets and was the chairman of the social action commission of the Synagogue Council of America (1950’s), secretary of the New York Board of Rabbis (1957-1959), member of the executive board of the CCAR (1964-1966), and trustee of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (1962-1967). He served as rabbi in Larchmont, then in Riverdale, New York, in the 1960s and 1970s. He retired in Scottsdale, Arizona, where he taught at Mesa Community College and was a member of the Jewish Federation of Greater Phoenix. He passed away on December 29, 1983.

Scope and Content  
The collection traces Morris N. Kertzer's career as a military chaplain, rabbi, and author. The papers include sermons and lectures, publications, correspondence, chaplain material, travel information, and miscellaneous files. The bulk of the collection consists of his sermons and lectures as well as his publications.

Arrangement  
The collection is arranged into six (6) series: A. Sermons and Lectures; B. Publications; C. Personal/Correspondence Files; D. Chaplain Files; E. Travel Materials; F. Miscellaneous Files.

Terms of Access  
The collection is open for use; no restrictions apply.

Preferred Citation  
Footnotes and bibliographic references should refer to the Morris N. Kertzer Papers and the American Jewish Archives. A suggestion for at least the first citation is as follows:

[Description], [Date], Box #, Folder #. MS-709. Morris N. Kertzer Papers. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Provenance  
Received from Ruth K. Seidman, 2003.

Processing Information  

Index Terms
Series A. Sermons and Lectures, 1945-1983

Extent 3.2 linear feet (8 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note Includes notes and articles that relate to the sermons and lectures. Rabbi Kertzer wrote on a number of topics including Civil Rights, current events, intermarriage, The Bible, Jewish-Christian relations, and his experiences in World War II.

Arrangement The series is arranged chronologically.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 1. Folder 1. Sermons and lectures, 1945, 1947-1949
Box 1. Folder 2. Sermons and lectures, 1950
Box 1. Folder 3. Sermons and lectures, 1951
Box 1. Folder 4. Sermons and lectures, 1952
Box 1. Folder 5. Sermons and lectures, 1953
Box 1. Folder 6. Sermons and lectures, 1954
Box 1. Folder 7. Sermons and lectures, 1955
Box 1. Folder 8. Sermons and lectures, 1956
Box 1. Folder 9. Sermons and lectures, 1957
Box 1. Folder 10. Sermons and lectures, 1959
Box 1. Folder 11. Sermons and lectures, 1960
Box 1. Folder 12. Sermons and lectures, 1961
Box 1. Folder 13. Sermons and lectures, 1962
Box 1. Folder 14. Sermons and lectures, 1963
Box 2. Folder 1. Sermons and lectures, 1964 January-June
Box 2. Folder 2. Sermons and lectures, 1964 September-December
Box 2. Folder 3. Sermons and lectures, 1965 January-March
Box 2. Folder 4. Sermons and lectures, 1965 April-June
Box 2. Folder 5. Sermons and lectures, 1965 September-December
Box 3. Folder 1. Sermons and lectures, 1966
Box 3. Folder 2. Sermons and lectures, 1967
Box 4. Folder 1. Sermons and lectures, 1970
Box 4. Folder 2. Sermons and lectures, 1971 January-June
Box 4. Folder 3. Sermons and lectures, 1971 September-December
Box 4. Folder 4. Sermons and lectures, 1972
Box 4. Folder 5. Sermons and lectures, 1973
Box 5. Folder 1. Sermons and lectures, 1974
Box 5. Folder 2. Sermons and lectures, 1975
Box 5. Folder 3. Sermons and lectures, 1976
Box 5. Folder 4. Sermons and lectures, 1977
Box 5. Folder 5. Sermons and lectures, 1978
Box 5. Folder 6. Sermons and lectures, 1979
Box 6. Folder 1. Sermons and lectures, 1980
Box 6. Folder 2. Sermons and lectures, 1981
Box 6. Folder 3. Sermons and lectures, 1982
Box 6. Folder 4. Sermons and lectures, 1983
Box 6. Folder 5. Sermons and lectures, undated
Box 6. Folder 6. Sermons and lectures, undated
Box 7. Folder 1. Academy of Conservative Synagogues of Riverdale, 1970 January 19
Box 7. Folder 2. Adult education at Temple B'nai Sholom, 1966
Box 7. Folder 3. Attitudes toward Jews, undated
Box 7. Folder 7. Church and State Conference. The Bible and the Public School, 1961
Box 7. Folder 8. Confirmation. Riverside Temple, 1972 May 19
Box 7. Folder 9. Conversion, 1960s
Box 7. Folder 12. Installation, 1946 September 20
Box 7. Folder 13. Invocations, 1950s, 1970s
Box 7. Folder 14. Jewish Communal Service Conference, undated
Box 7. Folder 16. Lecture tour, 1976 November
Box 7. Folder 17. Miscellaneous, 1970s
Box 7. Folder 18. Mordecai M. Kaplan, 1966 June 11
Box 8. Folder 1. Problems of Jewish Youth, 1940s
Box 8. Folder 3. Rambam material, undated
Box 8. Folder 5. Reverence for Life, 1965 September 24
Box 8. Folder 7. What does a Rabbi do?, undated
Box 8. Folder 8. Wisdom Literature. United Methodist Church, 1982
Series B. Publications, 1953-1978

Extent  0.8 linear feet (2 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note  Included with each publication are research notes and correspondence. Also included are copies and notes from articles written for newspapers and magazines.

Arrangement  The series is arranged alphabetically by title.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 9. Folder 1. Article, "Four Jewries", undated
Box 9. Folder 2. Face to Face with Gabriel, 1953
Box 9. Folder 3. Healer from Iowa. Reader's Digest, 1956
Box 9. Folder 5. Look Magazine article notes, 1963
Box 10. Folder 1. Tell Me Rabbi, 1976
Box 10. Folder 5. What is a Jew? correspondence, 1953-1955
Box 10. Folder 8. What is a Jew? miscellaneous, 1970s
Box 10. Folder 10. What is a Jew? revisions, undated

Series C. Personal/Correspondence Files, 1948-1978

Extent  0.4 linear feet (1 Hollinger box)

Scope and Content Note  Includes an article on Italy written by his son David Kertzer, some financial information, and biographical sketches that he used on the lecture circuit. There is also correspondence
pertaining to his lectures at various synagogues.

**Arrangement**

The series is arranged alphabetically.

**Box and Folder Listing**

Box 11. Folder 2. Temple B'nai Yehuda (Homewood, Ill.), 1978
Box 11. Folder 4. Secretary General of the UN to President of the Rotary International, undated
Box 11. Folder 5. Temple Beth Shalom, 1975-1977
Box 11. Folder 6. Tulsa, Okla., 1972 February 6
Box 11. Folder 7. Insurance information from accident, 1952 March 14
Box 11. Folder 8. Italy article. David Kertzer, undated
Box 11. Folder 9. Ives, Irving M. U.S. Senate Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments, undated

**Series D. Chaplain Files, 1943-1945**

**Extent** 0.4 linear feet (1 Hollinger box)

**Scope and Content Note**

Includes a scrapbook containing letters to his daughter Ruth and his wife Julia, and copies of newspaper clippings that mention Rabbi Kertzer. Also included in the series are marriage certificates, official correspondence, burial information, as well as published and unpublished articles and sermons that Kertzer delivered while serving as chaplain.

**Box and Folder Listing**

Box 12. Folder 1. Scrapbook, 1943-1945
Box 12. Folder 2. Official correspondence, 1944-1945
Box 12. Folder 3. Chaplains Association, 19,471,960
Box 12. Folder 4. Army welfare, 1944-1945
Box 12. Folder 5. Burial information, 1945
Box 12. Folder 6. Marriages, 1943
Box 12. Folder 7. Writings. Published and unpublished, 1944-1945
Box 12. Folder 8. Jews Cross the Atlantic, 1940

**Series E. Travel Materials, 1936-1960**

**Extent** 0.4 linear feet (1 Hollinger box)
Scope and Content Note
Contains correspondence, diaries, writings, sermons, lectures, and newspaper articles regarding Rabbi Kertzer's trips to various countries.

Arrangement
The series is arranged chronologically.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 13. Folder 1. Travel diary, 1936
Box 13. Folder 2. Russian trip, 1956
Box 13. Folder 3. Russian trip news articles, 1956
Box 13. Folder 4. Round the world tour, 1958
Box 13. Folder 6. Israel, 1973
Box 13. Folder 8. Spain, 1979

Series F. Miscellaneous Files, 1939-1977

Extent 0.4 linear feet (1 Hollinger box)

Scope and Content Note
Contains articles that Rabbi Kertzer kept pertaining to issues such as Catholic-Jewish relations, and intermarriage. There are notes from a class that he took in 1939 as well as information about Watergate, the Jewish Defense League, and a drug abuse meeting in Washington D.C. in 1971. Also included is an audiotape of his memorial service at Larchmont Temple in 1984 as well as two interviews.

Arrangement
The series is arranged alphabetically.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 14. Folder 1. Bar mitzvah notes, 1970s
Box 14. Folder 2. Catholic-Jewish relations, 1973
Box 14. Folder 3. High school graduation. Riverdale Temple, 1972 June 16
Box 14. Folder 7. Lebanon, undated
Box 14. Folder 11. Usher recognition, 1971 June 18
Box 14. Folder 12. Washington drug abuse meeting, 1971 March 31
Box 14. Folder 15. Yiddish, 1972 February 11
Box 14. Folder 18. Montreal interview [audio tape], undated
Box 14. Folder 19. Interview of the rabbi [audio tape], 1977 October 23