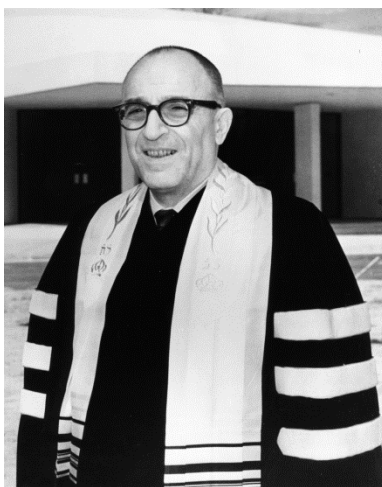




THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

**A Finding Aid to the
Perry E. Nussbaum Papers**

Manuscript Collection No. 430



Collection Summary

Title	Perry E. Nussbaum Papers
Dates	1932-1973
Collection Number	MS-430
Repository	The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives
Creator	Nussbaum, Perry E., 1908-1987
Extent	1.6 linear feet (4 Hollinger boxes)
Abstract	The Perry E. Nussbaum Papers contain the correspondence, writings, and sermons of Perry E. Nussbaum, a prominent rabbi in Jackson, Mississippi. These papers highlight his work with Beth Israel Congregation and in the civil rights movement. Also included are articles and reactions to the bombing of both Nussbaum's house and the Beth Israel temple in 1967.

Language of the Material English

Administrative Information

Biographical Sketch

Perry E. Nussbaum was born February 2, 1908 in Toronto, Ontario, Canada to Eisig and Adela (Newman) Nussbaum. In 1931 he received a bachelor's degree from the University of Cincinnati. Encouraged by Barnett R. Brickner and Ferdinand Isserman, Nussbaum received his BHL and was ordained as a rabbi in 1933. Not satisfied with his education he went on to receive a Master's degree in Modern History from the University of Colorado at Boulder. In 1958 he received an honorary Doctorate of Hebrew Letters from HUC-JIR. Education was always forefront in Nussbaum's mind and he brought his own zeal to his congregations. Nussbaum began adult education classes in many of the congregations that he served.

Nussbaum's rabbinic career was one constantly on the move. He began his career rather reluctantly in Melbourne, Australia in 1933. He was the last of his class to be given an assignment by Dr. Julian Morgenstern and blamed his own inexperience for his uneventful tenure there. After returning to the United States, Nussbaum went to Amarillo, Texas, and then quickly moved on to Pueblo, Colorado in 1937. In 1941 Nussbaum left for Wichita, Kansas where he stayed for two years until he joined the army chaplaincy. He remained in the chaplaincy until 1947 though his participation as a chaplain was a lifelong concern. After his time in the army Nussbaum took a position in Trenton, New Jersey which was especially unpleasant. He left within the same year and went to Long Beach, New York where he stayed until 1950. He left that congregation for another in Pittsfield, Massachusetts where he stayed for four years despite disagreements with his congregation. In 1954 a position opened up at Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, Mississippi which he took with the thought that it could be a permanent home. He would stay there until his retirement in 1973.

Nussbaum had hoped that his time in Jackson would bring him the peace and stability that he sought. What he encountered was a small congregation thoroughly entrenched in the mores of its predominantly Protestant neighbors. Nussbaum soon learned that small congregations in the south like this one were not similar to their northern counterparts. He found a congregation that disliked rituals and much of anything that set them apart from the rest of the community.

Nussbaum quickly integrated and ingratiated himself to the Jackson community and became a member of many groups such as the American Legion. As his influence within the city and congregation grew he slowly began to add bar mitzvahs and other rituals into the services, though it was never without a fight. He even formed the Mississippi Assembly of Jewish Congregations in an attempt for some unity on these and other social issues. The assembly was short-lived.

Most disappointing to Nussbaum was his congregation's acceptance of the status quo regarding segregation and blatant racism. The Jewish community of Jackson was rightfully concerned for its own safety and many did not like Nussbaum's aggressive style of leadership. Once a member of Jackson social life, Nussbaum began to test the city's limits for tolerance. He initiated inter-faith services which were shocking enough for many. Nussbaum then pushed farther and began working with Jackson's African-American religious leaders in both worship and community services. His congregation balked at this and he was barely able to have his contract renewed.

Unfazed, Nussbaum pushed farther and ministered directly to the young Freedom Riders of the early 1960s who were imprisoned in his region. He was a tireless champion of the rights of these young people, Jew and non-Jew alike, to receive guidance through his many visits to the jails. He even wrote to the parents of these youths explaining their legal situation and reassuring them of their child's safety. Many of these youths stopped at Nussbaum's house after getting out of jail.

Nussbaum's house was bombed on September 15, 1967 and Beth Israel's new temple was also bombed on November 22, 1967. Nussbaum refused to believe that it was only because of his ties to

the civil rights movement. He firmly believed that it was an act of anti-Semitism and the congregation was fooling itself if they believed otherwise. Though thoroughly disillusioned, Nussbaum stayed in Jackson for six more years before retiring in San Diego, California.

In 1936 Nussbaum married Arene Talpis of El Paso, Texas. They had one daughter, Leslie Irene, in 1939 who incidentally married Paul Arthur Rubenstein, the son of pianist Arthur Rubenstein.

Rabbi Perry E. Nussbaum died in March 1987.

Scope and Content

The Perry E. Nussbaum papers (1908-1987) contain the correspondence, writings, and sermons of Perry E. Nussbaum, a prominent rabbi in Jackson, Mississippi. These papers highlight his work with Beth Israel Congregation, the civil rights movement and his attempts at interfaith work. Also included are articles and reactions to the bombing of his house and the Beth Israel temple in 1967.

In 1967 Nussbaum's house and temple were bombed. Though the perpetrators were never caught Nussbaum was sure that it was an act of anti-Semitism and not just a reaction to his work in the civil rights movement. This collection contains newspaper clippings of the bombings and their subsequent investigation as well as correspondence between Nussbaum and fellow rabbis and others in which he discusses the situation. Researchers should examine the files on Beth Israel Congregation (2/1-5) and the Nussbaum home bombing (3/4-7)

Although Nussbaum wanted his congregation to come to terms with racism, he was also defending the Jewish southerners against the criticism of northern Jews and tried to explain the challenges that were particular to the region. He repeatedly begged his northern counterparts not to judge the southern Jews too harshly, for they could not understand the awkward position they were in. Though Nussbaum was aware of the financial and social pressures upon his congregants he did not excuse them from examining their conscience and acting upon it. An important file to look at regarding this is the Mississippi Assembly of Jewish Congregations (3/2). Nussbaum placed himself upon the precipice, knowing that he could not go back to a quiet life after his work with the Freedom Riders in the 1960s, but he did it nonetheless.

This collection contains important information regarding Nussbaum's work with the civil rights movement. Especially important is the file on the Freedom Riders (1/7), his oral history interview (4/6) and his memoirs (4/5).

Terms of Access

The collection is open for use; no restrictions apply.

Preferred Citation

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

[Description], [Date], Box #, Folder #. MS-430. Perry E. Nussbaum Papers. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Provenance

Received from Perry E. Nussbaum, Jackson, Miss.

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Index Terms

Subjects Civil rights / Jews -- Mississippi -- Jackson / Rabbis
Personal Names Nussbaum, Perry E. (Perry Edward), 1908-1987
Media Autobiographies / Oral histories / Sermons

Series A. General, 1932-1973

Box and Folder Listing

Box 1. Folder 1. A, General.

Box 1. Folder 2. Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1957-1964

Box 1. Folder 3. B, General.

Box 1. Folder 4. C, General.

Box 1. Folder 5. D-E, General.

Box 1. Folder 6. F-G, General.

Box 1. Folder 7. Freedom Riders in Mississippi, 1961

Box 1. Folder 8. H-K, General.

Box 2. Folder 1. Beth Israel Congregation (Jackson, Miss.), 1954-1973, undated

Box 2. Folder 2. Beth Israel Congregation (Jackson, Miss.) bombing, 1967

Box 2. Folder 3. Beth Israel Congregation (Jackson, Miss.) bombing, 1967

Box 2. Folder 4. Beth Israel Congregation (Jackson, Miss.) bombing, 1967

Box 2. Folder 5. Beth Israel Congregation (Jackson, Miss.) bombing, 1967

Box 2. Folder 2. L-M, General.

Box 3. Folder 1. Temple Emanu-El. (Long Beach, N.Y.), 1947-1950

Box 3. Folder 2. Mississippi Assembly of Jewish Congregations, 1956-1961

Box 3. Folder 3. N-R, General.

Box 3. Folder 4. Nussbaum Home Bombing. Correspondence, 1967

Box 3. Folder 5. Nussbaum Home Bombing. Correspondence, 1967

Box 3. Folder 6. Nussbaum Home Bombing. Correspondence, 1967

Box 3. Folder 7. Nussbaum Home Bombing. Newsclippings, 1967

Box 3. Folder 8. S, General.

Box 3. Folder 9. Soviet Jewry, 1971-1972

Box 4. Folder 1. T-Z, General, unidentified.

Box 4. Folder 2. Sermons and addresses. A-W.

Box 4. Folder 3. Sermons and addresses. Untitled.

Box 4. Folder 4. Critical Examination of The Menorah Journal as a Source for Modern Jewish History [master's thesis], undated

Box 4. Folder 5. Memoirs.

Box 4. Folder 6. Oral history interview, undated

Box 4. Folder 7. Civil Rights. Newsclippings.

Box 4. Folder 8. Civil Rights. Printed matter.

Box 4. Folder 9. Civil Rights. Printed matter.