A Finding Aid to the
Norma U. Levitt Papers

Manuscript Collection No. 720
Collection Summary

Title: Norma U. Levitt Papers
Dates: 1945-2005
Collection Number: MS-720
Repository: The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives
Creator: Levitt, Norma U.
Extent: 10 linear feet (25 Hollinger boxes)
Language of the Material: English

Administrative Information

Biographical Sketch

Norma U. Levitt, a graduate of Wellesley College (1937) and the University of Chicago, has participated in many organizations and projects throughout her life with the goal of working for understanding and cooperation between religions improving the quality of life for women and children.

Levitt is well known for her groundbreaking work as the non-governmental organization (NGO) representative to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on behalf of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. She later became vice-president of the United States' UNICEF Committee. She continued her work by founding and becoming the co-chair of the National Organizational Advisory Council for Children and also the International Year of the Child in 1979.

At the United Nations, Levitt strove to improve conditions for women and children throughout the world. She was active in the United Nations' "Decade for Women" (1975-1985), which scheduled conferences to debate women's rights in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), and Nairobi (1985). Contemporary global politics often intruded upon these conferences; resolutions critical of Israel and Zionism were often introduced and approved.

Also important was her work with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), where she served on the Executive Committee and as head of the Metropolitan New York Chapter of the U.S. Organization for UNIFEM. She was also was named chair of the NGO Inter-Generational Committee and Committee on Aging. She participated in the White House Conferences on Aging in 1971 and 1981, and also called attention American Reform Judaism’s relations with elderly Jews.

Levitt worked with many Jewish organizations such as the World Union for Progressive Judaism, where she served as the first woman chair of the Executive Committee. The same was true of her work with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) and the Synagogue Council of America as she was the first woman officer in both organizations. She is an honorary life member of the Board of Governors of HUC-JIR and was on the College-Institute’s Committee on Faculty and Academic Affairs. Levitt was instrumental in the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) and was their president for the Americas. Levitt was a founding officer of the Association of Reform Zionists of America (ARZA), and was the Vice President of the American Section of the World Jewish Congress and of the Shalom Center.

As the first woman officer of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Levitt focused on the structure of traditional reform synagogue services; for example, she was instrumental in arguing that language not exclusive to women be incorporated into prayers that until then still referred to a non-gendered G-d as "Lord" or "King." Levitt also worked on interfaith relations with Catholics and other Christian sects. As a member at Academic and Faculty Affairs Committee at HUC-JIR, Levitt worked to support the inclusion of women as both students and faculty members at the College-Institute.

In addition to this work, Levitt was as an active member and President of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS), where she was later named honorary President after her active terms ended. She combined her organizational and leadership skills with her artistic qualities and produced many of the anniversaries services for the NFTS. These artistic qualities of Levitt’s are apparent in the work that she produced for Temple Beth El in Great Neck, New York, where she is an honorary member of the board. She composed services, confirmations, installations, and anniversaries for the temple. Levitt remains an honorary member of many of these organizations.

Scope and Content

The collection contains correspondence, publications, reports, programs, organizational records, conference materials and working papers documenting Norma Levitt’s extensive activities in many organizations, both Jewish and non-Jewish. The papers reflect her interests in social and economic justice, peace, women’s issues, children’s issues, aging, and environmental concerns.

Included are records documenting her work as both active and honorary president of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (later, Women of Reform Judaism), as the first woman officer of the
Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), and as a member of the Academic and Faculty Affairs Committee at Hebrew Union College — Jewish Institute of Religion.

Also of note are records connected with her work in United Nations' non governmental organizations (NGOs) such as UNIFEM, the United Nations Development Fund for Women; UNICEF, United Nations Children's Fund; the Committee on Aging; and the Intergenerational Committee. As President of the Americas for the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), these materials reflect Levitt's interest in inter-religious dialogue and her work on "Project Green," the WCRP's environmental program.

The collection also contains scrapbooks created and organized by Norma Levitt, and prayers and poems authored by her for her synagogue, Temple Beth-El in Great Neck, New York.

**Arrangement**

The papers are divided into six (6) series: A. Organizations; B. Women's Rights; C. Children's Rights; D. Aging; E. Scrapbooks; F. Miscellaneous.

**Terms of Access**

The collection is open for use; no restrictions apply.

**Preferred Citation**

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

[Description], [Date], Box #, Folder #. MS-720. Norma U. Levitt Papers. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

**Provenance**

Received from Norma U. Levitt, Great Neck, N.Y., 2004-2005.

**Processing Information**

Processed by David Greenberg, July 2005.

**Index Terms**

**Subjects**

- Jewish women / Women civic leaders

**Personal Names**

- Levitt, Norma U.

**Corporate Names**


**Media**

- Minutes / Scrapbooks

**Series A. Organizations, 1945-2005**

**Extent**

5.2 linear feet (13 Hollinger boxes)

**Scope and Content Note**

Each subseries reflects Norma Levitt's work with just one of many different organizations. However, she would occasionally utilize her position in one organization to aid her goals in another, especially if the organizations were closely related in both structure and purpose, so materials from one organization can appear in another organization’s subseries. For example, NFTS letters can be found in the UAHC sub-series.

**Arrangement**

The series is divided into five (5) subseries: 1. National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS) Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ); 2. Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC); 3. Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR); 4. World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP); 5. Miscellaneous Organizations.

**Subseries 1. National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS)/Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ), 1945-2005**

**Extent**

2 linear feet (5 Hollinger boxes)

**Arrangement**

The subseries is arranged alphabetically.
Box and Folder Listing

Box 1. Folder 1. 44th Assembly 1, 2003
Box 1. Folder 2. 44th Assembly 2, 2003
Box 1. Folder 3. 50th anniversary, 1963
Box 1. Folder 4. 60th anniversary, 1973
Box 1. Folder 5. 70th anniversary, 1983
Box 1. Folder 6. 75th anniversary, 1987
Box 1. Folder 7. 90th anniversary, 2003
Box 1. Folder 10. Biennial, 1989
Box 1. Folder 13. Board of Directors, 1999-2005
Box 2. Folder 1. Board of Directors. "First Ordination.", 2002
Box 2. Folder 2. Board of Directors meeting, 2000
Box 2. Folder 4. Commission on Nomination of Officers, undated
Box 2. Folder 5. Constitution, 1993
Box 2. Folder 6. Constitution and alumnae, 2001
Box 2. Folder 7. D'var Torah, 1989 May 7
Box 2. Folder 8. Domestic violence, undated
Box 2. Folder 11. Executive Agenda. Executive Committee Meeting, 2004 January 31-February 3
Box 2. Folder 12. Evans, Jane, 1945-1992
Box 3. Folder 1. Evans, Jane, 1992-2002
Box 3. Folder 2. Evans, Jane. Memorial speeches, undated
Box 3. Folder 4. International Year of the Child, 1979
Box 3. Folder 5. Kibbutz Yahel, 1976
Box 3. Folder 7. Logo for WRJ, undated
Box 3. Folder 10. National Federation of Temple Youth 50th anniversary, undated

Extent  0.8 linear feet (2 Hollinger boxes)

Arrangement  The subseries is arranged alphabetically.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 6. Folder 7. Commission on Worship. Prayer, 1985 November 1
Box 6. Folder 8. Committee on Older Adults, 1995-1999
Box 6. Folder 10. Eisendrath, Maurice, 1968 November 22
Box 6. Folder 11. Inclusive Liturgy language, undated

Extent  0.4 linear feet (1 Hollinger box)

Arrangement  The subseries is arranged alphabetically.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 8. Folder 1. Academic and faculty affairs, 1977-1986
Box 8. Folder 2. Centennial, 1976
Box 8. Folder 4. Dean's Council, 1996
Box 8. Folder 5. General, 2001-2003


Extent  1.6 linear feet (4 Hollinger boxes)

Arrangement  The subseries is arranged alphabetically.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 9. Folder 1. 4th Assembly, 1984
Box 9. Folder 2. 5th Assembly, 1989
Box 9. Folder 3. 6th Assembly, 1994 January 28-February 1
Box 9. Folder 10. Executive Committee minutes, 1989 June 1-10
Box 10. Folder 1. Interreligious service. Prayers authored by Levitt.
Box 10. Folder 2. Iran-Iraq War and Punjab, 1987
Box 11. Folder 1. Project Green. Reports, 1990-1993
Box 11. Folder 5. Recommendation to the WCRP on human rights and responsibility, 1980
Box 11. Folder 6. Religious reading taken to WCRP, undated
Box 11. Folder 9. Templeton Award. Dr. Ismail Khan controversy, 1988
Box 12. Folder 1. UNICEF, 1985
Box 12. Folder 3. USA-WCRP mission statement, 2000
Box 12. Folder 6. Women's program, 2002
Box 12. Folder 8. World Parliament of Religions, 1993

Extent 0.4 linear feet (1 Hollinger box)

Arrangement The series is arranged alphabetically.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 13. Folder 3. CIJAL — The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, 1986-1988


Extent 1.2 linear feet (3 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note The series relates to Norma Levitt's work in support of women's rights. It includes materials on the Copenhagen and Nairobi International Conferences, UNIFEM, the Leadership Conference of National Jewish Women's Organizations, and other files containing articles from Ms. magazine to efforts related to helping Soviet Jews.

Arrangement The series is organized alphabetically by topic.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 14. Folder 2. Breakthrough: Focus on Women, 1986
Box 14. Folder 10. International Woman's Year (IWY), 1975
Box 14. Folder 11. IWY and Zionism, 1975
Box 15. Folder 4. Nairobi Conference. Workshop on Child Care, 1985
Box 15. Folder 5. Paris Conference, 1985 July 8-10
Box 15. Folder 10. UNIFEM. Letters to Congress, 1989-1990
Box 15. Folder 12. UNIFEM. METRO. Bylaws, undated
Box 15. Folder 13. UNIFEM. METRO. Flyers for UNIFEM, 1990-1995
Box 15. Folder 14. UNIFEM. METRO. Membership lists, 1989
Box 15. Folder 15. UNIFEM. METRO. Programs, 1991-1992
Box 15. Folder 16. UNIFEM. METRO. Programs, 1993-1997
Box 16. Folder 1. UNIFEM. METRO. Programs. Academic -“The UN Development Fund and it's Relevance to the Academic Community.”, 1990
Box 16. Folder 3. UNIFEM. METRO. Programs. "Hail to the Chefs" gourmet benefit dinner. "Disturbed" by the "Lesbian Avengers.", 1994 April 30
Box 16. Folder 8. UNIFEM. METRO. Reports to U.S. Committee for UNIFEM, 2003
Box 16. Folder 9. UNIFEM. METRO. Welcoming letter, 1988, undated
Box 16. Folder 10. UNIFEM. Miscellaneous papers, 1995-1996, undated
Box 16. Folder 14. UNIFEM. United States Committee for UNIFEM. Bylaws, 1999

Series C. Children's Rights, 1960-2003

Extent 0.8 linear feet (2 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note Contains materials mostly related to Norma Levitt's activities for UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) and the IYC (International Year of the Child).

Arrangement The series is organized alphabetically by topic.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 17. Folder 3. International Year of the Child (IYC), 1979
Box 17. Folder 5. IYC other conferences, 1979
Box 17. Folder 6. IYC symposium, 1979 February 28
Box 17. Folder 7. IYC year in perspective, undated
Box 18. Folder 3. UNICEF. Documents, 1986-1994
Box 18. Folder 5. UNICEF and Israel, 1976-1980
Box 18. Folder 7. UNICEF and IYC, 1978-1979
Box 18. Folder 8. UNICEF. Lebanon and New York Times advertisement, 1982
Box 18. Folder 9. UNICEF. Letters to Jewish organizations, 1976-1979
Box 18. Folder 10. UNICEF. News of the world's children, 1988
Box 18. Folder 12. UNICEF. State of the world's children, 1990
Box 18. Folder 13. UNICEF. Succoth folders and letters, 1975-1976
Box 18. Folder 14. UNICEF and UNESCO, 1984
Box 18. Folder 15. UNICEF. USC clergy. "A Clergy Association for Children.", 1982
Box 18. Folder 17. UNICEF. United States Committee for UNICEF. Asian Mission to China and Indonesia, 1980


Extent 1.2 linear feet (3 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note Contains files related to intergenerational activities and other concerns relating to the elderly in the U.S. and the world.

Arrangement The series is organized alphabetically by topic.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 19. Folder 4. Intergenerational interviews, 1983
Box 19. Folder 8. Intergenerational tree planting, 1985
Box 19. Folder 11. NGO Committee on Aging. Director of Officers, 1995-1996
Box 20. Folder 1. Poverty and the elderly, 1971-1973

Extent 0.8 linear feet (2 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note Contains photographs, newspaper articles, invitations, letters, and other items. Most of the items relate to the NFTS and the Jewish Braille Institute, but other organizations such as the UAHC are present as well.

Arrangement The series is organized by year, though timeframes of some scrapbooks overlap with others.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 22. Folder 2. Scrapbook, 1969
Box 22. Folder 5. Scrapbook, 1971
Box 22. Folder 7. Scrapbook, 1972-1976
Box 23. Folder 2. Scrapbook, 1974-1975

Series F. Miscellaneous, 1953-2003

Extent 0.8 linear feet (2 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note Contains prayers and poems authored by Norma Levitt, either for use by her synagogue, or for publication in books. The series also contains some autobiographical information and items from the American Jewish Committee.

Arrangement The series is organized alphabetically by topic.

Box and Folder Listing
Box 24. Folder 1. American Jewish Archives autobiographical questionnaire, 1975
Box 24. Folder 2. American Jewish Archives autobiographical questionnaire, 1992
Box 24. Folder 10. Covenant with the Lord play, 1951
Box 24. Folder 11. Church women, 1974-1975
Box 25. Folder 2. Study Group, undated
Box 25. Folder 5. Women's Interreligious Study Tour of the Middle East, 1976