A Finding Aid to the

W. Gunther Plaut Papers

Manuscript Collection No. 743
Collection Summary

Title
W. Gunther Plaut Papers

Dates
1934-1994

Collection Number
MS-743

Repository
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

Creator
Plaut, W. Gunther, 1912-2012

Extent
4.8 linear feet (12 Hollinger boxes)

Language of the Material
English and German

Administrative Information

Biographical Sketch
Wolf Gunther Plaut was born in 1912 to Jonas and Selma Plaut, in Munster, Germany. He earned his law degree in 1934 from the University of Berlin, but was unable to practice law because of Nazi racial laws. In 1935 he was the recipient of a scholarship from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, where he and numerous other refugee scholars of the time studied. Astonishingly, he also participated in the Jewish Olympic Games in that same year (tennis). Plaut married Elizabeth Strauss in 1938, was ordained in 1939, and began his first pulpit in Chicago, at the Washington Boulevard Temple, where he served until 1948.

Of equal importance was Plaut’s attainment of American citizenship, granted in 1943. The day after this milestone, Plaut enlisted in the Army as a Chaplain. On leave with his congregation’s permission for three years, Rabbi Plaut was one of the first Allied soldiers to enter a liberated concentration camp, conducted the first post-war Jewish religious service in Germany, in the gutted Cologne Synagogue, and brought the first Sefer Torah back to Germany. He was decorated with the Bronze Star for his service.

Upon his return to civilian life, Plaut resumed his rabbinical duties, first at Washington Boulevard Temple, and then, beginning in 1948, at Mt. Zion Hebrew Temple, in St. Paul, Minnesota. Never one to rest on his laurels, Rabbi Plaut became President of the St. Paul Gallery and School of Art, and Chairman of the Governor’s Commission on Ethics in Government. In 1961, Plaut again decided it was time for a change and accepted the pulpit at Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Plaut not only discharged his rabbinical duties, but also wrote five books in five years, beginning in 1961. The Book of Proverbs - A Commentary, Judaism and the Scientific Spirit, The Rise of Reform Judaism, The Growth of Reform Judaism, and The Case for the Chosen People all appeared in quick succession, one per year. An additional book, Your Neighbour is a Jew, rounded out the 60’s, accompanied by articles in various periodicals. His contributions to the Toronto newspaper, the Globe and Mail, became a constant feature during the 70’s and ‘80’s. His book writing continued, albeit at a slower pace, on into the 1980’s. His autobiography, Unfinished Business, along with his Herculean undertaking in authoring and editing The Torah: A Modern Commentary, were both completed in 1981.

Gunther Plaut retired from his rabbinic appointment at Holy Blossom in 1977, but has continued his very productive affiliation with HBT as their first Senior Scholar. Subsequent to his retirement, he served on the Ontario Human Rights Commission as vice-chairman, and then as a member of a board of inquiry. He was President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis from 1983 to 1985, and has served as vice president of the Governing Board of the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

W. Gunther Plaut passed away on February 9, 2012, in Toronto.

Scope and Content

The collection consists largely, though not entirely, of articles written for the Toronto Globe and Mail, the Canadian Jewish News, and the CCAR Journal, and book reviews for a number of different publications. Assorted articles, off-prints, eulogies, sermons, and newsletters edited by Rabbi Plaut comprise the majority of the balance of the collection. Rabbi Plaut personally selected the items which constitute the papers donated to the American Jewish Archives, and certainly they give the researcher a thorough overview of Plaut’s writings.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged in seven (7) series: A. Articles; B. Eulogies; C. Personal; D. Book Reviews; E. World Federalists of Canada; F. Sermons; G. Miscellaneous.

Terms of Access

The collection is open for use; no restrictions apply.
Preferred Citation

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

[Description], [Date], Box #, Folder #. MS-743. W. Gunther Plaut Papers. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Provenance


Processing Information

Processed by Vicki Lipski, July 2007.

Index Terms

Subjects
Jews -- Ontario -- Toronto / Rabbis / World Federalists of Canada

Personal Names
Plaut, W. Gunther, 1912-2012

Corporate Names
Holy Blossom Temple (Toronto, Ont.)

Media
Academic theses / Book reviews / Eulogies / Sermons

Series A. Articles, 1937-1994

Extent
3 linear feet (7.5 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note
Articles range from regular columns written for the Toronto Globe and Mail and the Canadian Jewish News, to an article about Jewish pioneers, written for the periodical North Dakota History.

Arrangement
The series is arranged alphabetically.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 1. Folder 1. Published articles, 1930-1940s
Box 1. Folder 2. Published articles [German], 1930-1940s
Box 1. Folder 3. Page Two: Ten Years of News and Views, 1971
Box 1. Folder 3. Religious Education. The Open Society: Shaping Religion and Values, 1974 March-April
Box 1. Folder 4. Time to Think: Articles from the Globe and Mail, 1971-1977
Box 1. Folder 5. What Peace Means to Me, 1986
Box 1. Folder 6. Affirmation. Ontario Human Rights Commission. Edited by WGP.
Box 2. Folder 1. CCAR Commission of Justice and Peace. The Demands of Conscience, 1956
Box 2. Folder 2. CCAR Convention Off-print. Can We Speak of Reform Halacha?, undated
Box 2. Folder 3. CCAR. Introduction to The Growth of Reform Judaism: The Four Phases of Reform, 1993
Box 2. Folder 4. CCAR Journal. "Israel - Notes from a Diary.", 1968 June
Box 2. Folder 6. CCAR Journal. "Notes from a New Commentary on the Torah.", 1967
1960 June
Box 2. Folder 11. CCAR Journal. "Voluntary or Forced Giving?", 1965 June
Box 2. Folder 14. CCAR Journal off-print. "Commentary on passages from Genesis 8 and 9.", 1968 January
Box 2. Folder 15. CCAR Journal off-print. "Contrasts and Comparisons - Ruminations.", 1964 January
Box 2. Folder 16. CCAR Journal off-print. "Daily Services in the Reform Synagogue.", 1959 April
Box 2. Folder 20. CCAR Journal off-print. "The Man from Pethor.", 1972 Autumn
Box 2. Folder 21. CCAR Journal off-print. "New Directions for Reform Rabbis.", 1971 October
Box 2. Folder 22. CCAR Journal off-print. "Notes on the Akedah.", 1969 January
Box 2. Folder 24. CCAR Journal off-print. "Pharaoh's Hardened Heart.", 1962 October
Box 2. Folder 27. CCAR off-print. Rabbinic Authority. Can We Speak of Reform Halacha?, undated
Box 2. Folder 29. CCAR Journal off-print. "Socio-Psychological Aspects of Reform Judaism.", 1958 January
Box 2. Folder 32. CCAR Journal off-print. "The Trace of Joseph.", 1961 October
Box 2. Folder 33. CCAR Journal off-print. "Understanding Joseph.", 1969 April
Box 2. Folder 34. CCAR Journal off-print. "When Does God Help the Oppressed?", 1966 April
Box 2. Folder 35. CCAR lecture. The Sabbath in the Reform Movement: Fact, Fiction, Future, 1965 June 17
Box 2. Folder 37. CCAR President Addresses the Rabbinical Assembly, 1985 March 12
Box 2. Folder 38. CCAR President's Message. Looking Back, Looking Forward, 1985 June 24
Box 2. Folder 39. CCAR Yearbook Off-print. "Retreats for Laymen.", 1953


Box 5. Folder 22. Congressional Record. Opening Prayer, House of Representatives, 1950 December 6

Box 5. Folder 23. Currents: Readings in Race Relations. "Minorities Have Power.", 1984 Summer


Box 5. Folder 26. The Doctors Diary. Letter from Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut, 1964 January

Box 5. Folder 27. Emuna Horizone. "Ruckblick auf mein Leben.", 1971 October


Box 6. Folder 2. German-Jewish Bible Translations Linguistic Theory as a Political Phenomenon. Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture, 1992


Box 6. Folder 4. Hebrew Union College Monthly. "Vision.", 1937 March 1

Box 6. Folder 5. Hebrew Union College Monthly. "From Lehranstalt to HUC.", 1935 November 1


Box 6. Folder 8. Hymnal. "When the Tree Tops Whisper.", 1982

Box 6. Folder 9. Ideas of the University. "University and Society.", 1979 January 24


Box 6. Folder 12. Israel Among the Nations, 1975

Box 6. Folder 13. Israel diary, 1972 February 26


Box 6. Folder 15. Israel Since the Six Day War. Published by Holy Blossom Temple.


Box 7. Folder 14. Reform Judaism. "There are Limits." (Beth Adam application to UAHC), 1994 Winter
Box 7. Folder 17. Refuge or Asylum? Refuge or Asylum: The Canadian Perspective, 1990
Box 7. Folder 20. Reprint from Globe and Mail article regarding the U.N. Zionism Resolution.
Box 7. Folder 21. Reprint of Globe and Mail series. undated "Russia is Different: A Personal Report.".
Box 7. Folder 22. The Rise of Reform Judaism review by Bertram Korn.
Box 7. Folder 24. Der Sabbath als Protest [German], 1971
Box 7. Folder 27. Services for school and family, 1954
Box 7. Folder 28. Shalom. "On Israel's 32nd Anniversary.", 1980 March/April
Box 7. Folder 32. Torah Aura. Learn Torah with..."What did Isaac know?", 1994
Box 7. Folder 33. Torah Commentary Genesis. Reviews, 1975 January 5
Box 7. Folder 37. Toronto Star. "Reform Judaism.".
Box 7. Folder 38. Toronto Star. "Torchbearers for a New Approach to the Old Religion.".
Box 8. Folder 7. Viewpoints. Where is our Compassion?, 1986
Series B. Eulogies, 1953-1980

Extent 0.1 linear feet (0.25 Hollinger box)

Scope and Content Note There are five eulogies in this very brief series, one of them for Plaut's mother-in-law, Therese Abraham Strauss.

Arrangement The series is arranged alphabetically.

Box and Folder Listing

- Box 8. Folder 15. Harris, William, 1953 November 18

Series C. Personal, 1934-1964

Extent 0.1 linear feet (0.25 Hollinger box)

Scope and Content Note Plaut's law school dissertation (in German) and army papers are among the documents in this small series. His citation for the Bronze Star can be found here.

Arrangement The series is arranged alphabetically.

Box and Folder Listing

- Box 8. Folder 17. Documentation for the annulment of marriage in German and Swiss international family law [doctoral dissertation in German], 1934 July 25
- Box 8. Folder 18. Photo taken while a student at Hebrew Union College, 1937
- Box 8. Folder 19. Marriage to Elizabeth Strauss, 1938
- Box 8. Folder 21. Service as army chaplain, 1943-1945
- Box 8. Folder 22. Army papers, 1944-1946

Series D. Book Reviews, 1948-1989

Extent 0.2 linear feet (0.5 Hollinger box)

Scope and Content Note Plaut's love of the written word, while amply demonstrated by the sheer volume of his writings, is given further expression in his critiques of the writings of others. He was frequently invited to review books about Judaism or Germany.

Arrangement The series is arranged alphabetically.
Box and Folder Listing


Series E. World Federalists of Canada, 1961-1970

Extent 0.1 linear feet (0.25 Hollinger box)

Scope and Content Note The World Federalists believed world peace could be achieved through one-world government. Plaut served as president of the World Federalists of Canada from 1966 to 1968. The series consists largely of World Federalist publications.

Box and Folder Listing


Series F. Sermons, 1941-1982

Extent 0.5 linear feet (1.25 Hollinger boxes)
Arrangement

The series is arranged alphabetically.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 9. Folder 31. Your Neighbor is a Jew, 1972 October 22
Box 10. Folder 1. Children's Services for the High Holy Days, 1950, 1952
Box 10. Folder 3. Rosh Hashanah morning, 1951-1976
Box 10. Folder 4. Yom Kippur morning, 1941-1982

Series G. Miscellaneous, 1955-1985

Extent 0.8 linear feet (2 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note Consists of temple newsletters, convention proceedings, invocations, dedications, meeting reports, radio broadcast scripts, adult education materials, speeches, and more.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 11. Folder 1. Behind the news, undated
Box 11. Folder 2. Canadian Chess Chat. Chess problems on back cover, 1963 May
Box 11. Folder 4. Dedication - Mt. Sinai Hospital Synagogue, 1975 October 26
Box 11. Folder 8. Invocation. Minnesota Academy of General Practice, 1960 November-December
Box 11. Folder 11. Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture. Annual Board of Directors meeting, 1982
Box 11. Folder 12. Message for the Port Elizabeth Congregation, Temple Israel, 1985 August
Box 11. Folder 14. Program. Anniversary ball in honor of Rabbi and Mrs. Plaut, 1971 December 11
Box 11. Folder 15. Program. Evening of the Arts in honor of Plaut's 10th anniversary at Holy Blossom Temple, 1971 December 14
Box 11. Folder 16. Radio broadcast scripts, 1950s
Box 11. Folder 17. Religion and Adult Education. Continuous learning at Holy Blossom, 1966
Box 11. Folder 19. The Torah - A Modern Commentary order form, 1975
Box 12. Folder 2. Address, Glen Rush Public School PTA, 1965 February 4
Box 12. Folder 3. Address, Haifa University. Religion and Science, A New Initiative, 1980 December 29
Box 12. Folder 4. Address, Israel in Lebanon, Public and Private Perceptions, 1982 August 27
Box 12. Folder 5. Address to Kallah. World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1980 February 27
Box 12. Folder 6. Address, Negev dinner, 1975 November 26
Box 12. Folder 9. Address and article. On the Fourth Day of the War, 1973
Box 12. Folder 10. Address and prayer service for hijacked hostages, 1970 September 9
Box 12. Folder 15. New Year's speech [German].
Box 12. Folder 17. Program. Eightieth ordination service, Hebrew Union College, 1964 June 6
Box 12. Folder 18. The Review. Interview with Plaut's mother, Selma Plaut, 1979


