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Dreamkeeper

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on students of color and
our "education debt"

THIS WE BELIEVE

Wisconsinites take
part in NPR classic

MILWAUKEE OPENS A JEWISH MUSEUM

OF FARM AND FAMILY

A photo essay
by Richard Quinney

KIDS PLAN FUTURE CITIES



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Remembrance and Celebration



BY LAURA BARNARD

A new museum dedicated to the history and culture of Milwaukee's vibrant Jewish community opens this spring.

The Yiddish Folk's Schule photo above, taken in 1916, includes Golda Meir on the far right.

All photos courtesy Jewish Museum Milwaukee

“YOU CAME TO AMERICA ON THURSDAY, on Monday you were knocking on doors, selling socks and underwear.”
—Marty Stein, late Milwaukee Jewish philanthropist

For the early Jewish immigrants, Milwaukee was a frontier destination. It was far removed from the familiar points of entry and lay on the outskirts of what any of them thought of as the civilized United States.

And indeed, when Jews began arriving in Milwaukee in the 1840s, they were getting in on the ground floor. That was the decade when the City of Milwaukee was incorporated and Wisconsin achieved statehood. Much of the city

had yet to be built, and there was room for the newcomers to have a profound influence on how Milwaukee grew and expanded. Jewish Milwaukeeans shaped their new city and contributed to its institutions, growing into a community that now encompasses some 24,000 in greater Milwaukee.

But until now their story has not been told—at least not in a comprehensive way that would piece together their narrative and make it come alive with

photographs, artwork, the documents of their time, and the artifacts of their lives. For that you need a museum—and now Milwaukee will have one.

The Jewish Museum Milwaukee opens its doors in spring 2008. Its mission is to preserve, present, and celebrate the history, heritage, and culture of the Jewish people in southeastern Wisconsin. The museum found a home in a remarkably appropriate setting—the 30-year-old Helfaer Community Service Building on Prospect Avenue. Designed by Edward Durrell Stone, architect of the Kennedy Center for the Arts, the 30,000-square-foot Helfaer Building has clean lines and a spectacular lake view. Locating the museum there underscores the Jewish community's commitment to downtown Milwaukee.

And, almost prophetically, inside the Helfaer hung a one-of-a-kind, 14-by-19-foot tapestry designed by Marc Chagall specifically for that building's atrium (see back cover of this magazine). The tapestry, which now serves as the major artifact of the Jewish Museum Milwaukee, tells the story of the Jews through several major symbols explained by Chagall himself. The prophet Jeremiah tells the history of the Jews. A red bird sings joyfully, but its red color alludes to years of suffering. The woman stands for the brave women

of the Bible and Jewish history, especially Golda Meir, a Milwaukee woman who went on to become prime minister of Israel. A blue bird symbolizes hope, truth, good fortune, and the new Israel. And the moon permits us to dream of a better future.

HOUSE OF STORIES

Those themes are reiterated time and time again in the stories of Milwaukee's Jews. The Jewish people arrived in waves, most of the time fleeing malevolent forces in their homelands. By 1856, there were more than 200 Jewish Milwaukeeans, mostly of German descent. Their community grew and prospered, attracting more Jews from around the world—Milwaukee was no longer a secret.

A second, larger wave of immigration, this time from Eastern Europe, followed at the end of the 19th century as Jews fled new, harsher restrictions in Eastern Europe and pogroms in Russia. Museum visitors learn about the New York-based "Industrial Removal Office," which by the 1920s had helped some 79,000 Jewish immigrants relocate, including about 2,300 who came to Milwaukee. The early settlement of Jews in Milwaukee, the development of Jewish neighborhoods on Milwaukee's

East and West sides, and the growth of the first congregations and synagogues all are documented.

Later waves followed in the 1930s and '40s, leading up to and in the aftermath of the Holocaust. As discrimination against Jews continued in the Soviet Union, several thousand Russian families resettled in Milwaukee between 1969 and 2001. These Jews left behind economic hardship, danger, and persecution to seek freedom, opportunity, and hope in the United States. They came to Milwaukee by ship, by rail, and, later, by plane.

The museum's stories of individual Jews who found a welcoming home in Milwaukee make these mass movements come alive.

There's Sam Kamesar, born Shimen Komissarczyk, who fled persecution in Russia to sail to Galveston, Texas, in 1911. He made his way to Milwaukee and sent for his fiancée, Rose Katzman, two years later. A museum photograph shows a dinner given for the prosperous Kamesars in 1933, when they were about to set off to tour Europe and visit their former home. Local Jews had raised money for them to bring to the Jews of Kalinkovitch—but Soviet officials confiscated the money from the Kamesars on their arrival.

Lizzie Kander was born in Milwaukee to a family of early Jewish arrivals in 1858. Kander committed her life to helping poor children of Milwaukee access basic hygiene and life skills through the Milwaukee Jewish Mission. Kander is best known for publication of *The Settlement Cook Book: The Way to a Man's Heart*. The book has gone through 40 editions, sold more than 2 million copies, and is the most profitable charity cookbook ever published.

Educator Harry Garfinkel from 1914 until his death in 1964 gave life through his progressive teaching methods to the Hebrew lessons that complemented



Golda Meir visiting Milwaukee in 1969 shortly after becoming Israel's fourth prime minister. She is shown here with Yitzhak Rabin behind her on the left. Also pictured, left to right, are Milwaukee leaders Albert Adelman, Melvin Zaret, William Feldstein, and (far right) Mayor Henry Maier.

public school learning. For many Jews, education leads down two paths: the first toward memory, tradition, and faith, and the second toward achievement, independence, and security in the broader society. A people pushed from one continent to the next must always learn new ways, new skills, and new languages to survive.

New immigrants had to focus on earning a living. As the beloved late philanthropist Marty Stein, who made his fortune with pharmacies and optical stores, put it, "You came to America on Thursday, on Monday you were knocking on doors, selling socks and underwear." The museum tells the stories of those involved in the clothing trade, including Abraham Goldman, Adam Gimbel, and Florence Eiseman, who is remembered

with an example of her famous appliquéd children's dresses. There are also grocers, jewelers, butchers, tailors, and entrepreneurs.

And then there's the story of Henri's salad dressing. Helen Brachman and Henrietta Mahler made a batch of French salad dressing on a basement ping-pong table in 1935 to raise money for the Jewish Welfare Fund, the forerunner of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation. From that first batch, a successful and widely distributed product was born.

HORROR COMES HOME

The Holocaust narrative is made chilling and personal through the telling of Milwaukee-related stories. Documents illustrate anti-Semitism in Wisconsin in the 1930s, including the formation of

the "Milwaukee Bund," a local pro-Nazi group. Stories are told of Jews systematically stripped of their rights as the darkness gathered in Europe, and of Milwaukeeans who fled Germany as unaccompanied children in the Kindertransport of 1938, never to see their parents again.

There are daring stories of escape, survival, and eventual immigration to Milwaukee, documented by ghetto

Below, Helen Brachman and Henrietta Mahler with their highly successful Henri's salad dressing. The first batch was made in 1935 as a fundraiser for the Jewish Welfare Fund. Right, Lizzie Kander's charitable cookbook is the most profitable ever sold.



money and concentration camp release papers. Eva Zaret, age seven at the start of war, survived, along with a Torah cover she stitched from the yellow Star of David she was forced to wear. Mikhail Becker hid in a field and survived on raw potatoes and the help of local farmers. At age 12, Jack Dygola hid with a Christian family and later located his mother in Milwaukee in 1950.

But many did not survive, and their stories are here, too. Paul Strnad and his wife were trapped in Czechoslovakia as the Nazis closed in. We read the haunting letter that he wrote in December 1939, asking for help obtaining documents to enable their escape. Hoping that his wife's talents as a dress designer might help, he sent along a sampling of her sketches, which show stunning designs perfectly suited

for social events of the 1940s. The effort failed. Paul Strnad perished at Treblinka and his wife in Warsaw.

BIRTH OF THE JEWISH STATE

The birth of the Jewish State of Israel in 1948 brought to reality the centuries-long hope of Zionism. Always supportive of Zionism, by 1921 Milwaukee had 23 registered Zionist organizations.

Milwaukee's most famous connection with the developing State of Israel was linked to one woman. Eight-year-old Goldie Mabowehz arrived in Milwaukee from Russia in 1906. After graduating from North Division High School, she joined a local Zionist group and rose quickly through its ranks. Local Labor Zionist leader Louis Perchonok wrote: "Even then her innate talent had begun

to reveal itself—free of stage-fright, courageous and possessing a reservoir of energy." At age 21 she married and moved to Palestine, where she helped form the Labor Party and later signed Israel's Proclamation of Independence. In 1969 Golda Meir became Israel's fourth prime minister.

BIRTH OF THE MUSEUM

As these stories make clear, the history of Jewish Milwaukee is remarkable both in its uniqueness to that city and in bearing the hallmarks of the broader American Jewish story. It

The Kamesar family at a send-off dinner in 1933. Milwaukee Jews had raised money for the Kamesars to bring to Jews in their Russian homeland, but it was taken by Soviet officials.



begins with the essential Jewish idea of community: at the most basic level, group prayer requires a quorum of 10, a *minyan*. Individuals are interdependent, responsible for one another and obligated to take care of one another. Community is further defined by institutions such as synagogues, schools, and cemeteries.

And community is where the museum got started. In the 1980s Milwaukee's Jewish community began to seriously consider how to document its journey and preserve it for later generations. The Women's Division of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation formed an Archives/Roots Committee, and a group of exceptionally committed volunteers began collecting and archiving photographs and artifacts. Judy Guten, Women's Division president at that time, was a major force behind the initiative, which was staffed by Kathie Bernstein. Bernstein would later become the museum's executive director.

"The Jewish community in Milwaukee was over a century old by the 1980s, and we were becoming aware of the passage of time and the ephemeral nature of both memory and things. The urge to protect and preserve our history as a source of knowledge and pride for our children was very compelling," Guten recalls.

In addition, the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s had forced Americans to become more aware of the need for tolerance and understanding between peoples of different cultures and religious beliefs. It was clear that the story of the Jewish community had much to offer in terms of teaching respect for diversity and the consequences of intolerance.

In the 1990s, Jewish Milwaukee's sesquicentennial celebration provided an impetus to step up the collecting, archiving, and exhibiting. The community began to explore a permanent location for the archives and artifacts. At the end of 1997, the Archives Committee became the Milwaukee Jewish Histor-

The Jewish Museum Milwaukee's home in the renovated Helfaer Community Service Building on Prospect Avenue.

"The urge to protect and preserve our history as a source of knowledge and pride for our children was very compelling," says Judy Guten, one of the museum's early proponents.

ical Society, and Marianne Lubar was appointed president.

"From the beginning, this work was a personal passion for me," says Lubar. "I believe in the power of shared cultural experiences, of public art and learning: these are the things that elevate and define civilizations and societies, creating empathy and understanding."

Supported by Lubar's commitment, the work of archiving moved to the next level. Jay Hyland was hired as professional archivist. Project organizers began to focus on budgets and buildings.

In the first months of the new millennium, the Milwaukee Jewish Federation was preparing to launch a capital campaign to fund improvements to buildings that housed services essential to the Jewish community. The federation's executive committee approved an initial budget for the museum as well as the inclusion of the museum in

the Community Capital Campaign. And one of that campaign's priorities was the renovation of the Helfaer Community Service Building, which proponents realized would be a most appropriate space for the museum.

Museum organizers hired Gallagher and Associates of Bethesda, Maryland, to design the museum and create the displays. Dr. Jane Avner of Milwaukee signed on as historian and content developer.

"The process was highly collaborative," says museum executive director Kathie Bernstein. "The Gallagher staff designed the Maltz Jewish Museum in Cleveland, in addition to the Freedom Museum in Chicago and the Spy Museum in Washington, D.C. They brought valuable experience, but at the same time they listened to us and understood what was unique and special about Milwaukee's Jewish community."



The Jewish Museum Milwaukee is designed to present answers to a series of questions:

- Who are the Jews? What do Jews believe?
- Where did American Jews come from?
- Why did Jews come to Milwaukee?
- How did Milwaukee Jews earn a living?
- How many Jews are there in the world? In the United States? In Milwaukee?
- How is the Jewish community organized?
- How have Jews contributed to Milwaukee and America?
- What are the consequences of hatred and intolerance?
- What is the Milwaukee Jewish community's relationship to Israel?

"The museum is interactive, with audio, video, exhibits, letters, photographs, maps, artifacts, and an opportunity for visitors to videotape their own personal reactions," notes museum educator Ellie Gettinger. "The emphasis is on making a personal, emotional connection with every visitor."

All of these qualities make the museum a valuable community resource. "The museum is an educational tool with tremendous potential," says museum historian Jane Avner. The timeline that surrounds the exhibition areas, for example, frames the Milwaukee Jewish story in the larger local, national, and international context. "We tried very hard to make every visitor, young or old, Jewish or not, see how he or she could fit into this narrative," Avner says.

The Jewish Museum Milwaukee approaches visitors with an array of educational techniques aiming to address diverse learning styles so that self-guided touring is convenient and productive. This is complemented by a comprehensive docent program powered by 40 volunteers who have committed to an in-depth six-month education program. The docents guide visitors, answer questions, and enrich the museum experience for individuals, school groups, and adult groups.



A portrait of Lizzie Black Kander, author of *The Settlement Cook Book*. The painting was done by John Doctoroff in 1931.

Since 1986, hundreds of scholars and researchers have made use of the archives that form the foundation of the Jewish Museum Milwaukee. "Access to our archives will continue to contribute to research and enrich the worldwide academic community," says Jay Hyland, the museum's archivist since 2004.

In addition, the museum will offer lectures, seminars, and films on topics related to Jewish history and culture.

"Our goal is to engage people at all levels, from ages nine to 90, using a variety of media," says Bernstein. "It is our very great privilege to share the Milwaukee Jewish experience with our own Jewish community, with the broader Milwaukee community, and with people from across Wisconsin and the nation." *

Laura Barnard holds a Ph.D. in Classical Greek and Latin literature and has published numerous articles and two books. She is the marketing and communications director at the Milwaukee Jewish Federation. Previously, she served as a marketing director at Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare.

OPENING SOON

Jewish Museum Milwaukee

1360 N. Prospect Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202-3094
414/390-5730
www.jewishmuseummilwaukee.org

Museum Hours

Monday through Thursday: 10–4
Friday: 10–2
Sunday: Noon–4
Closed Saturdays and for Jewish holidays.

Docent tours will be available.

The Jewish Museum Milwaukee may be reserved and rented for special events. Contact the museum at 414/390-5730.

Admission Prices

Adults: \$6
Seniors: \$5
Students and children 6 and older: \$3
Children under 6: Free
Families: \$15
Group rates available. Museum members admitted free of charge.

To Learn More

To learn more about the Jewish Museum Milwaukee, about membership, or about volunteer or giving opportunities, please call 414/390-5730 or visit us on the web at www.jewishmuseummilwaukee.org. The Jewish Museum Milwaukee is a designated 501 (c) (3) nonprofit and accepts donations from individuals.

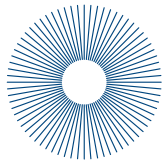


A tapestry created by Marc Chagall (1973) tells the story of the Jewish people—and it will hang in the atrium of the Jewish Museum Milwaukee, to open this spring. Story on page 17.

Image courtesy Jewish Museum Milwaukee
Tapestry dimensions 14 x 19 feet

Price: \$5

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