INSTRUCTIONS FROM AUTHOR TO LIBRARY FOR THESES AND PRIZE ESSAYS

AUTHOR Jeff Segall

TITLE Synagogue Mergers:
Case Studies and Historical Context

TYPE OF THESIS: Ph.D. [ ] D.H.L. [ ] Rabbinic [X]

Master's [ ] Prize Essay [ ]

1. May circulate [X]) Not necessary
) for Ph.D.
2. Is restricted [ ] for ___ years.) thesis

Note: The Library shall respect restrictions placed on theses or prize essays for a period of no more than ten years.

I understand that the Library may make a photocopy of my thesis for security purposes.

3. The Library may sell photocopies of my thesis. ___ yes X no

2/28/06
Date

J. Segall
Signature of Author

Library Record

Microfilmed
Date

Signature of Library Staff Member

ABSTRACT

Synagogue Mergers: Case Studies and Historical Context

This thesis analyzes a sample of synagogue mergers in order to better understand the historical influences on synagogue leaders' decisions. The most urgent motivations to merge -- such as neighborhood change and financial distress -- do not account for all of the behaviors exhibited by the leaders in our case studies. In order to more fully describe the merger phenomena, we overlay the complex interaction of historical trends and supporting socio-religious factors.

Several broad historical trends influenced synagogue leaders in their respective periods. Over the course of the nineteenth century, cities with growing Jewish populations experienced a proliferation of synagogues. This resulted in competition for the voluntary human and financial resources that leaders needed to sustain their congregations. Competition for resources continued into the twentieth century, when external events such as the Great Depression and neighborhood change often forced financially troubled congregations to consider merger. After a 20-year period of relative stability, synagogue merger activity peaked again during the 1960's and 1970's, when many Baby Boomers migrated to the suburbs -- leaving behind urban congregations that experienced significant changes in the ethnic composition of their neighborhoods.

The case studies reveal that a congregation's socio-religious circumstances could either impede or facilitate a merger transaction. The most relevant socio-religious factors fell into two broad categories: merger partner readiness, and clergy-lay leader relationships.

This thesis employs a hybrid methodology to better illuminate both the similarities and divergent attributes of the respective case studies. In addition to providing the historically salient facts, we shall also cross-analyze the cases in order to derive the most important motivations for synagogue leaders in merger situations.

ABSTRACT

Synagogue Mergers: Case Studies and Historical Context

Acknowledgements:

The author very much appreciates the advice and support of my thesis advisor Dr. Gary Zola. This was very much a collaborative effort, and I appreciate his willingness to let me try out alternative theories along the way. I am also indebted to Dr. Fred Krome, Kevin Proffit, and all of the American Jewish Archives staff for their timely and patient assistance. Others who played a role in the success of this project include: the staff of Chicago's Spertus Institute; Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf and the staff of KAM Isaiah Israel, and Norman Schwartz of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society.

I would also like to thank my parents Jay and Judy Segall for their love and support throughout my years of personal journey. This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents Ruth and Joseph Segall - may they rest in eternal paradise.

Synagogue Mergers: Case Studies and Historical Context

By Jeffery M. Segall

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination.

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion
2006

Referee, Dr. Gary Zola

SYNAGOGUE MERGERS:
CASE STUDIES AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

Background:

The successful merger of two complex organizations is a particularly difficult human endeavor. First, leaders and constituents of both entities must agree to merge (or choose some other option such as amalgamation).[1] This decision often raises a range of emotions because many people fear change and the unknown. Second, leaders need to combine the ongoing operations of two organizations with differing policies, procedures, and cultures. This stage is fraught with risks because leaders tend to be deferential with respect to a merger partner's customs – potentially leading to confusion among constituents. Thirdly, leaders themselves may clash as they struggle to set a new course for the combined organization. In short, successful merger efforts must overcome complex interactions between tactical matters and human motivations. A historical examination of merger events in American synagogues will contribute to our understanding of the American Jewish experience.

I came to this project based on my interests in American Jewish History, synagogue life, and extensive prior experience in corporate mergers. My initial inquiries found that very little had been written about the American synagogue as an institution. We are still awaiting the appearance of critical and interpretive histories of the synagogue in American life. The noted historian Jonathan Sarna explains:

> Except for Leon Jick's study and the collection of path-breaking articles on the American synagogue edited by Jack Wertheimer, the story of the American synagogue, like the history of American Judaism generally, has to a very large extent been written from the top down, generalizing from the experience of a few large and probably unrepresentative big city congregations. Now the time is ripe for...explaining change over time and

[1] Definition: Amalgamation is the dissolution of one party's legal status without the transfer of assets or rights. By contrast, merger partners must carefully define both sides' rights and responsibilities before legally combining the entities.

> space, paying attention to the many different factors associated with success and failure, alert to the various local, national, and religious contexts within which developments occurred.[2]

In particular, Sarna calls our attention to the need for scholarly *comparative* studies of synagogue activities. Although many individual synagogues have commissioned essays in conjunction with major anniversaries, such documents are often too general or inward looking to provide real historical insights.

Even less has been written on the specific topic of synagogue mergers, yet the dearth of published research in this area is not unique. Business researcher Jane Salk noted the lack of integrated research in the field of mergers in general: "When attempting to summarize the state of current knowledge concerning [mergers], one can quickly become frustrated. Some research stresses strategic and economic factors...Other researchers and practitioners have been more concerned with implementation and human resource issues."[3] Salk's concerns speak to the overwhelming complexity that is inherent in studying merger transactions.

The general tendency to split merger research into economic and human domains can present challenges to those interested in studying religious institutions. Synagogues exist to serve people's needs for emotional, spiritual, and physical support from their local community. The humane mission of a congregation necessitates a somewhat less structured approach to analyzing leadership interactions than studies of corporate and governmental entities. Indeed, most of the existing literature consists of anecdotal evidence from congregational consultants who struggle to treat *both* the economic and human issues as united. This thesis examines the interactions of these issues in an effort to help determine the motivations leading to our case study mergers. In order to better address Sarna's concerns, we have compared merger transactions that occurred in different time periods.

---

[2] Sarna, Jonathan and Alexandra Korros. *American Synagogue History: A Bibliography and State-of-the-Field Survey*. New York: 1988. p. 2.
[3] Salk, Jane. "Generic and Type-Specific Challenges in the Strategic Legitimation and Implementation of Mergers and Acquisitions." *International Business Review*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1994. p. 491.

Methodology:

This thesis provides readers with a critical and interpretive analysis of synagogue mergers. I investigated the stated *motivations* that lead synagogue boards to execute mergers, and have attempted to speculate – whenever appropriate – as to how the available data contributes to our understanding of the mergers. For example, *internal* pressures such as a synagogue's financial health may impact the timing of a merger decision. And *external* trends such as suburbanization during the 1960s affected some inner-city synagogues. The complex interactions of internal pressures, external trends, and human motivations provide readers with insights into the merger phenomenon that most synagogues (and other non-profits) undertake under conditions of strain or even crisis.

> Strategic restructuring can be, and often is, a counter-intuitive step for organizations that spend much of their energy and time on maintaining their identity. Full consolidations require stakeholders to transfer loyalty to a new institution...Organizations resist such difficult and even distasteful work unless they feel they have good, perhaps vital, reasons for doing so.[4]

The most important research artifacts are actual synagogue records (board minutes, financial statements, correspondence, bulletins) from the years surrounding a merger event, however these items cannot be viewed in isolation. Historical analysis requires a sense of context regarding the larger Jewish community and conditions of the era. In order to place synagogue mergers in context, existing scholarly research on American Jewish history, and community histories were consulted for the period of merger activity. The analytical framework for this analysis also includes a select review of the latest academic research on socio-religious behaviors and non-profit mergers.

---

[4] Kohm, Amelia and David La Piana. *Strategic Restructuring for Nonprofit Organizations: Mergers, Integrations, and Alliances*. Westport, CT. Praeger, 2003. p. 48-49.

A modified case study method is employed to elucidate issues common to synagogue mergers in different locales and historical eras. The case study methodology was originally developed by business researchers (e.g. Harvard Business School) in order to train executives to make strategic decisions under conditions of great complexity and uncertainty. Case researchers provide data (internal conditions such as financial strength and product offerings; external conditions such as the economy) for target company A – then compare the target company's attributes to actual and potential competitors (B, C, and D). Small student teams analyze the data, and create a strategic plan to address the competitive situation. One advantage of the case study method is that it allows the student teams to imagine themselves "inside" the minds of the actual decision-makers. Another advantage derives from the simulation of competitive forces; for example, leaders at company B are always anticipating the competitive maneuvers of target company A (our student-led organization). The case study method is well-suited to the topic of synagogue mergers - because synagogue leaders often faced competitive decisions that entailed risk and uncertainty.

This paper's methodology modifies the case study approach by emphasizing historical context. National trends (e.g. voluntary synagogue membership, suburbanization, the synagogue-center movement) are treated at length – prior to embarking on the individual case studies. The primary case studies are grouped into two historical eras (1920s through the Great Depression, and the suburban migration after World War II) for comparative analysis. The combination of contextual background, detailed historical case studies, and analytical comparisons illuminates the ways in which synagogue mergers evolved, functioned, and influenced the nature of their respective Jewish communities. Finally, Appendix A gives the reader a primer on the pitfalls of non-profit resource allocation processes. This issue arose in several merger case studies.

Scope:

The cases studies incorporate events from nine total mergers, amalgamations, and failed transactions. We also referenced a previous merger study --Boston's Mishkan Tefila --

which helps to explicate the phenomenon of Jewish neighborhood change. The scope of this paper is limited to the events that precipitated a merger event; the paper also provides general information regarding the aftermath of certain mergers.

The analytical comparison section focuses on the core cases from two important eras in American Jewish history. First we examine three cases from the 1920s.

a) Chicago's Isaiah Israel was the product of two South Side pioneers Isaiah Temple and Temple Israel. They came together in 1924 amidst the construction of a monumental synagogue in Hyde Park.
b) After experiencing years of internal divisions, Cincinnati's Reading Road Temple merged into the historic Plum Street Temple (today Isaac M. Wise Temple) in 1931.
c) Milwaukee's B'ne Jeshurun avoided the headaches of construction by merging with Temple Emanu-El in 1927.

These three primary case studies help to elucidate the issues of neighborhood change and synagogue competition that influenced communal leaders during this period.

The second cluster of case studies is comprised of post-World War II mergers. The 1971 pairing of Kehilath Anshe Maariv (KAM) with Isaiah Israel provides detailed insights into issues of power sharing between senior rabbis. The 1975 amalgamation of Temple Beth Am with Temple Sholom demonstrated how difficult it is to find merger partners with similar cultures. Both mergers were a response to accelerated neighborhood change that occurred in the wake of urban transformation during the 1960s.

II. HISTORICAL TRENDS AFFECTING SYNAGOGUE MERGERS

Congregational Life (1800-1873):

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the historical trends that most influenced synagogue mergers. We will review key factors - such as the voluntary nature of American synagogue membership, synagogue competition, and neighborhood change – that influenced the decisions of synagogue leaders in their time.

The American Jewish population grew and expanded geographically during the mid-nineteenth century. Despite the hardships of the Civil War, congregations accumulated enough resources to undertake synagogue construction projects. "The highest percentage growth took place in Illinois, where the value of synagogue property increased from $3000 in 1860 to $271,000 in 1870."[5] This figure includes the Chicago case study pioneers KAM and Bnai Sholom. Thanks to the vision and energy of Isaac Mayer Wise, the Cincinnati case provides a vivid example of the construction phenomenon:

> The original expenditure for the building and the ground was to have been $72,000; when it was dedicated in 1866, its cost was calculated at $263,525...This spectacular architectural specimen, later called the Alhambra style...still stands on Plum Street in Cincinnati, a monument to the penchant for display which characterized the nouveau riche of America and American Jewry in the gilded age.[6]

Jews who migrated to small towns constructed more modest synagogues, but large-scale projects continued in cities. "By 1880, most congregations had built or were in the process of building grand and opulent edifices whose size and style reflected the tastes of prosperous, upwardly mobile burghers."[7] Unlike their European predecessors, American synagogues were most frequently built in

---

[5] Jick, Leon. *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820 – 1870.* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1976). P. 179.
[6] Ibid. P. 180-181.
[7] Jick, Leon. The Reform Synagogue, in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995) P. 89.

places of high visibility on main streets or next to prominent churches. America's Jews were signaling a new confidence in this land of the free.[8]

Voluntary Judaism (1873 – 1900):

Waves of European immigrants began to arrive during the final two decades of the nineteenth century, and the number of Jews quadrupled in just 20 years (rising from approximately 250,000 in 1880 to 937,000 in 1897).[9] The dramatic population increase helped to drive the construction of synagogues and the establishment of local Jewish service institutions such as hospitals. National Jewish organizations soon emerged to organize the growing constellation of synagogues and communal organizations that had taken root across the nation. Isaac Mayer Wise was the primary proponent for a 'union' of American Jewish institutions to support youth education. He was especially concerned about the need for native rabbis. These efforts would require a college and broad financial support from lay leaders. The initial Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) constitution focused on organizational issues; no ideological platform was proposed at the founding in 1873.[10] The pragmatic Wise sought to bind disparate factions, but the newly formed Union came under immediate attack from major Jewish publications, and rabbinic leaders ranging from the radical reformer David Einhorn to the more conservative Marcus Jastrow.[11] Wise's quest for unity prevailed for only a short time.

The UAHC's 1878 census "Statistics of the Jews in the United States" revealed that most of the well-established synagogues had undertaken modest ritual reforms, however nearly all were still nominally 'orthodox' in practice.[12] By the end of the nineteenth century, local synagogues increasingly defined themselves by differences in ritual, ideology, and

---

[8] Raphael, Marc Lee. *Judaism in America*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). P. 128.
[9] Jick, Leon. The Reform Synagogue, in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995) P. 93.
[10] Ibid. P. 91.
[11] Fox, Stephen A. On the Road to Unity: The UAHC and American Jewry, in *The American Jewish Archives Journal* #32. P. 152.
[12] Jick, Leon. The Reform Synagogue, in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995) P. 89.

region-of-origin.[13] Centrists such as Isaac Mayer Wise found themselves facing increased opposition from opponents on the left and right. A uniquely American style of denominational Judaism emerged during the last quarter of the 19th century. After the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, reform-minded leadership adopted a number of progressive ideas that precipitated a schism with the more 'conservative' Jews. By the turn of the twentieth century, the Reform movement coalesced around a set of ideas that eventually became known as 'Classical Reform' – a religious ideology that embraced universalism, social justice, and ritual reforms (mixed sex seating, praying without heads covered, organ music, mixed choirs, minimal Hebrew in prayer service, Friday night Shabbat services, etc.). Isaac Mayer Wise's vision of a unified American Judaism fell apart when Conservative leaders established the Jewish Theological Seminary (1887), and the Orthodox Jewish Congregational Union of America established an umbrella organization in 1898.[14]

The reformers' divorce from more traditional practices also meant that they could no longer enforce communal regulations with the same authority as the traditional European *kehilla.*[15] Synagogue membership was voluntary, and this would impact the internal relationships between rabbis and laypeople, as well as external ties to local and national organizations. Historian Leon Jick explains this important divergence from tradition:

> In one significant respect all of these [Reform] synagogues were different from their European antecedents. All were voluntary membership organizations unrelated to any communal structure or authority and were dependent upon and responsive to those individuals who freely chose to affiliate with them.[16]

The voluntary nature of Reform institutions may have slowed efforts to expand the UAHC's scope – as congregations expressed concerns about central authority and

---

[13] Elazar, Daniel J. The Development of the American Synagogue, in *American Synagogue History: A Bibliography and State-of-the-Field Survey.* (New York, 1988). P. 32.
[14] Fox, Stephen A. On the Road to Unity: The UAHC and American Jewry, in *The American Jewish Archives Journal* #32. P. 173.
[15] See chapter III on Resource Allocation.
[16] Jick, Leon. The Reform Synagogue, in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995) P. 87.

reluctance to pay Union dues (initially $1 per member).[17] Synagogue membership in the nascent UAHC slowly grew to 115 congregations and 55,880 members by 1903 –only 6% of American Jewry. The Reform movement had clearly failed to capture 'market share'[18] among the rapidly expanding East European immigration population. Historians explain that upper middle class German reformers were ambivalent about the social class of East European immigrants; Reform leaders funded aid societies but did little to recruit the arrivees into their synagogues - many immigrants ended up in Conservative institutions.[19] Another reason for slow Reform growth was the climate of religious apathy that permeated America Jewry at the turn of the twentieth century. Jonathan Sarna notes the effects on East European immigrants:

> The upshot was the collapse among immigrants of spiritual life...Jews could practice their faith or not, as they saw fit, without rabbinic intrusion. The best evidence of this collapse may be seen in the astonishing number of immigrant Jews who failed to attend synagogue. Numerous surveys between 1900 and 1917 found that the number of 'unsynagogued' Jews exceeded the number of 'synagogued' ones by a wide margin...[In 1916], the census counted membership figures, and listed 357,125 synagogue members, including women – no more than 12% of America's by then 3 million Jews.[20]

Recruitment Centers?:

Historian David Kaufman, author of *The 'Synagogue-Center' in American Jewish History*, provides a concise description of a turn of the century response to apathetic American Jewry:

> The response of the late nineteenth-century leadership to the perceived inadequacies of the earlier phase of American Reform Judaism...called for religious revitalization – the Reform movement introduced a new type of rabbi in the 1880s and 1890s; subsequently, by the turn of the century, the new rabbis proposed the creation of a new type of synagogue – the

---

[17] Fox, Stephen A. "On the Road to Unity: The UAHC and American Jewry." In *The American Jewish Archives Journal* #32. P. 192.
[18] Definition: **Market share** is the percentage of a potential population (market) that purchases a product.
[19] Jick, Leon. The Reform Synagogue, in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995) P. 93.
[20] Sarna, Jonathan. *American Judaism*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) P. 161.

> Classical Reform synagogue-center...a 'temple.'[21] The term reflected a new understanding of the institution as a sacred hall of worship, a house of God, and a Jewish church. Expressing the change both inside and out, the ritual pattern of the temple was Protestantized and its architecture became grandly impressive, or 'cathedralized.'[22]

Kaufman also debunks the common understanding that synagogue centers were an innovation of Mordecai Kaplan and the Conservative movement – which later staged a broad implementation of synagogue-centers. "An early version of the synagogue-center – in both theory and practice – had surfaced in the Reform movement before Mordecai Kaplan ever conceived the idea. Kaplan himself admitted this...the creation of so-called *open temples* by classical Reform rabbis.[23]

Late nineteenth century Chicago was a premier hotbed of Classical Reform ideals, as prominent rabbis such as Emil G. Hirsch used their charisma and drive to further their visions. The roots of religious reform in Chicago may be traced back to 1861, when reform-minded members left KAM to form Temple Sinai. By the time that Hirsch arrived to lead Temple Sinai in 1880, KAM had also begun to adopt reforming practices. Temple Sinai's Hirsch offered to merge the two synagogues in 1883, but KAM refused to accept the idea of a Sunday worship service - even with guarantees of regular Saturday service.[24] Emil Hirsch emphasized the importance of social justice and education in his vision of reforms, and he advanced interfaith relations by developing close ties to liberal Protestants. In 1892 Hirsch, borrowing a Unitarian idea to make the church the center of people's lives, called for an 'open temple' that discounted social status and ability to pay. The open temple would not sell pews and charge for High Holy Day services like many American synagogues. David Kaufman remarks that, "the agenda of the Reform congregation was thus liberalized and secularized, that is, *Americanized*."[25]

---

[21] The 'temple' usually referred to a magnificent worship sanctuary. The 'synagogue-center' was an attached or separate building housing an auditorium, classrooms, and social hall. The more elaborate synagogue-centers also added recreational facilities – similar to modern day Jewish Community Centers (JCCs).

[22] Kaufman, David. *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History.* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999). P. 12-13.

[23] Ibid. P. 10-11.

[24] *The Occident* - Vol. XI, No.6. May 25, 1883. p.4.

[25] Kaufman, David. *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History.* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999). P. 18-19.

Other Chicago rabbis of the era promulgated the ideal of an 'open temple.' Rabbi Isaac S. Moses left KAM to found Temple Israel in 1896, with the intention of building an egalitarian community with low annual dues ($12) and pulpit independence for the rabbi. His old congregation, KAM, seeded the project with $6000 - a full year's salary at the time.[26] Temple Israel built a temple and school annex in 1898 at the corner of St. Lawrence and 44th Street (at that time, the farthest southern boundary for Jewish neighborhoods). Dues were set too low to cover both construction costs and staff, so Temple Israel resorted to the common practice of selling pews. Rabbi Moses failed in his endeavor and resigned in 1900, leaving a leadership void for 5 years.[27]

Rabbi Joseph Stolz founded Isaiah Temple in1895 as another version of the 'open temple' concept. Isaac Mayer Wise presided over the 1898 cornerstone ceremony for a temple and synagogue-center at Vincennes Avenue and 45th Street.[28] Built at a cost of $50,000, Isaiah Temple was, by their own account, the first in Chicago with a separate annex for its synagogue-center.[29] Its synagogue-center would become a magnet for educational programming and civic events.

It is interesting to note that these two congregations, Isaiah Temple and Temple Israel, both built temple/synagogue-centers within blocks of each other in 1898. Their decisions to locate on the southern frontier of Chicago's Jewish neighborhoods were a natural outgrowth of the reformers' competitive drive to attract Jews. Both temples needed to compete with wealthy, established congregations like Temple Sinai – which was then still located in a near South location at Indiana Avenue and 21st Street. Isaiah Temple and Temple Israel chose to compete on two fronts – real estate (location and architecture) and educational programming. Historian David Kaufman explains how the egalitarian 'open synagogue' concept began to change around the turn of the twentieth century:

---

[26] *The Reform Advocate* – XI No. 17. June 13, 1896. p. 345.
[27] Ibid. XX No. 16. December 8, 1900. p. 407.
[28] Meites, Hyman, ed. *History of the Jews of Chicago.* (Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, edition 1990) P. 519.
[29] Kaufman, David. *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History.* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999). P. 36.

> After the turn of the century, the new generation of classical Reform rabbis evolved a common ideology and the program was informally institutionalized in many leading Reform congregations around the country. The synagogue-center idea garnered support from both the rabbinate and laity and became a bona fide movement. The main circumstances giving rise to a movement...were demographic growth, a consequent boom in new synagogue construction, and a simultaneous generational shift within the Reform rabbinate. The confluence of such changes around 1900 sparked the emergence of a Reform synagogue-center movement in the early years of this [20th] century...second and third-generation German Jews reached a peak of affluence and acculturation. They moved 'uptown,' bringing their established congregations with them; and, as the visible symbol of their newfound status, they would inevitably build a monumental temple edifice in the new neighborhood...More often than not, the new buildings followed soon on the heels of a new rabbi- invariably an American-born Hebrew Union College activist of the Classical Reform stamp...Either the rabbi himself militated for a building to house the new activities, or alternatively, the success of the new program itself made construction a necessity.[30]

The idealistic early Chicago efforts to establish 'open synagogues' had evolved into a related phenomenon - the combination temple/synagogue-center. This new configuration, in part, sparked a competitive race southward that was exemplified by Temple Sinai's 1911 construction of an opulent temple and synagogue-center at Grand Boulevard and 46th Street. The two buildings cost approximately $900,000 [roughly $17 million in 2005 dollars], and the synagogue-center alone attracted 7,500 members by 1916![31] Sinai's dynamic rabbi Emil G. Hirsch hit upon the right formula for attracting the growing Jewish population on Chicago's South Side. People wanted to be members of his influential community, and competing congregations wanted to respond. The trend toward construction of temple/synagogue-centers would accelerate during the economic boom known as the 'Roaring Twenties."

<u>The Roaring Twenties – A Decade of Speculative Construction</u>:

---

[30] Kaufman, David. *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History.* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999). P. 34-35.
[31] Meites, Hyman, ed. *History of the Jews of Chicago.* (Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, edition 1990). P. 513.

The Roaring Twenties was a high-water mark for the construction of Reform Judaism's monumental synagogues. Congregations felt the need to compete against other Reform groups in their area, as well as with the Conservative synagogues - the other major liberal stream of American Judaism. As a movement, Conservative Judaism had been consistently outpacing the growth of Reform by appealing to the more traditional and often-lower socio-economic class of immigrants that arrived in droves from 1880 until World War I. Synagogue-centers proved a natural fit with the Conservative movement's emphasis on education and cultural identity. As Jack Wertheimer of the Jewish Theological Seminary noted:

> Conservative congregations embarked on a frenzied building program during the 1920s. New congregations founded in second and third areas of settlement hastily drafted ambitious plans for mammoth edifices to house a panoply of recreational and social programs, while existing congregations, under pressure to compete, poured considerable resources into programs for expansion. [32]

> By the late 1920s, when construction was in full swing, over thirty new structures were dedicated [nationwide] in a one-year period (most were Conservative)...with the average synagogue shouldering costs of nearly a quarter of a million dollars...Much of this construction was undertaken in the anticipation of expanded membership, but, whereas some congregations in fact grew within a few years...others struggled under staggering mortgage debts when their optimistic expectations of increased membership proved erroneous.[33]

It seems clear that the 1920s increase in synagogue-center construction was partially a response to competitive pressures. In some cases, synagogue leaders voted to bet *future* resources (e.g. mortgage and/or pledge bond debt – see Resource Allocation chapter) on their magnificent projects. Synagogue leaders may have justified these expenditures with an eye toward competitive pressures, but it also appears that speculative fevers swept through the boardroom. A Conservative rabbi from the 1920s remarked, "Some of the worst real estate speculations have been in connection with the erection of synagogues. Even conservative business men who would not venture such risks in their personal

---

[32] Wertheimer, Jack. The Conservative Synagogue, in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995) P. 122.
[33] Ibid. P. 122.

business, have built synagogue edifices with lavish reckless hands, pausing not to consider the aftermath – mortgage interests, amortization, and other maintenance expenses."[34] Once the building was complete, leaders had no choice but to try as best they could to fill the new capacity with members and programming:

> Once a new structure was decided upon and a mortgage undertaken...attracting new members became a priority; thus strategies for outreach – such as the offering of manifold services and activities...Often, therefore, rather than the new rabbi and his programmatic ambitions preceding the new facility, the temple structure itself and the financial burdens it imposed served as impetus for the expansion of the program.[35]

The notion that improved quality and frequency of programming would draw more congregants into the synagogue was not a new one. We already have seen that the early Classical Reform 'open-synagogue' concept relied on progressive educational and cultural programming. Many of these 'open-synagogue' efforts failed to attract sufficient membership. Perhaps the rabbis of these congregations didn't have the charisma or the support resources necessary to carry off diverse programs. By contrast, Temple Sinai's Emil G. Hirsch certainly did possess the personality and drive required to attract droves of Chicago Jews, and the financial support that came along with them. Many liberal Jewish leaders pursued an optimistic 1920s version of the famous line from the movie *Field of Dreams*: "If you build it...they will come." The rabbis and professional staff of Reform and Conservative congregations that had erected massive facilities now needed to fill them with programming and activity.

<u>UAHC Attempts to Fill the Programming Void</u>:

One reason that Reform leaders were so confident in the idea that programming would attract the masses was Hebrew Union College's output of young rabbis who had been influenced by the ideas of Rabbi George Zepin and Dr. Emanuel Gamoran. The 1903

---

[34] Gamm, Gerald. *Urban Exodus. Why Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). P. 152.
[35] Kaufman, David. *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History.* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999). P. 35-36.

appointment of Rabbi George Zepin to the new position of UAHC field secretary marked a critical moment in the history of this organization. Zepin traveled the country to gather information and spread Reform ideas and practices. He became director of the UAHC's Department of Synagogue and School Extension (DSSE) in 1905, and later ascended to UAHC Secretary in 1917. This period marked a rapid expansion of DSSE's scope of activities. The DSSE sought to address two strategic objectives: programs to reach underserved Jews via 'circuit' rabbis, and Jewish education initiatives.

In 1924, The Union and Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) established a Joint Commission on Jewish Education to develop curriculum and textbooks for a wide range of subjects. Dr. Emanuel Gamoran promoted a comprehensive vision for the role of Jewish education in the synagogue. It would provide not only for worship, but also, and to a great extent, for study. "It would provide for recreation. It would provide a school for the children, and a library for children, young people, and adults...It would offer an organization through which to conduct philanthropic, social, educational, cultural, and national activities of its membership."[36] The rabbi would hence be primarily a teacher who would direct a revamped curriculum that consumed 60% of the synagogue's budget.[37] "Then every synagogue will become transformed into a family school."[38] Gamoran's words were emblematic of the 1920s synagogue-center movement that his HUC protégés sought to spread.

The first task for HUC and the Union was to train professionals. They also needed to develop texts, study tools, and programming to help those busy professionals implement their vision. The relative success or failure of early DSSE initiatives is difficult to assess for a number of reasons. Many temple/synagogue-center construction projects ran aground amidst financial storms caused by their own extravagance and the disastrous effects of the Great Depression. The predictable result was reduced resources available for professional staff and programming. Another problem involved ongoing tensions over the perceived interference of the UAHC in local synagogue affairs. The Union's

[36] UAHC: Memo: Department of Synagogue and School Extension. 1934. P.2.
[37] Ibid. p. 4.
[38] Ibid. p. 4.

revised 1946 constitution contains language roughly comparable to the 1873 version, but one notes several specific additions underlined in the following text:

> Nothing contained in this Constitution or the By-laws shall be construed as to interfere in any manner whatsoever with the mode of worship, the school, the freedom of expression and opinion, or any of the other congregational activities of the constituent congregations of the Union.[39]

The exclusion of matters of worship, education, and communications indicates that some member congregations were determined to ensure that the Union did not encroach upon their independence.

'Religious Depression':

In 1919, only 23% of America's 3.3 million Jews were synagogue members.[40] Therefore, opportunities to grow membership were abundant. Despite the efforts of energetic rabbis and a laity enthused by the synagogue-center movement, as well as the UAHC's attempts to provide trained leaders and programmatic content, Reform Judaism still had not attracted sufficient members by 1935. What were the reasons for lack of affiliation with Reform congregations? Some commentators attributed this to the religious mood of America in general. According to Historian Jonathan Sarna, "the period from 1925-35 was an era of 'religious depression' in America, marked by declining church attendance, as well as a deepening 'secular' interest in universalism and the 'cosmopolitan spirit.'"[41]

We can also hypothesize, based on case study results, that more insidious effects overtook many Reform congregations during the Great Depression. Many of the upper middle class Jews dropped down a notch in socio-economic status; others went bankrupt all together. Reform membership roles plunged (along with UAHC revenues), as families could no longer afford synagogue dues. And leaders couldn't reasonably decide to *raise* dues to cover the dropouts. To make matters much worse, those congregations

---

[39] Meyer, Michael, and Gunther Plaut. *The Reform Judaism Reader.* (New York: UAHC Press, 2001) P. 23.
[40] Sarna, Jonathan. *American Judaism.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) P. 224.
[41] Ibid. P. 226.

that had funded lavish construction projects with debt found themselves unable to recruit new members: Who would join knowing that they had to pay off such huge commitments? The fate of the middle class was one factor in synagogue difficulties, but that raises another issue: What happened to the big money donors who largely underwrote the construction projects in the first place? Naturally, some of those donors lost fortunes in the stock market crash and subsequent liquidity crisis that enveloped the nation (bank runs were common as people became desperate for cash). More importantly, large donors shifted their remaining scarce resources to the Jewish communal agencies providing direct social services to the poor. Jonathan Sarna noted:

> The 1929 stock market crash, which had affected the wealthiest segments of the Jewish community, signaled for Jews the onset of the Great Depression. Beginning in 1930, according to the American Jewish Yearbook, "every Jewish social service organization in the country" saw its facilities and services "in demand as never before, and yet, at the same time, their resources were drastically reduced."[42]

In short, synagogue membership became even less common after 1929. Many of the recently constructed synagogue-centers were destined to become empty palaces as a result of insufficient funding for the staff and programs intended to meet the competition. Conservative congregations were not immune to these same financial problems plaguing their competitors. "Most Conservative congregations struggled to provide services while paying off their enormous mortgage debts. Not surprisingly, synagogues cut their programs, and when that failed, they released their personnel."[43]

Professionalizing Synagogue Operations:

The liberal movements slowly began to consolidate and reconfigure their resources in the aftermath of the Great Depression. The growing complexity of synagogue operations required dedicated focus within the UAHC's Department of Synagogue and School

---

[42] Sarna, Jonathan. *American Judaism.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) P. 255.
[43] Wertheimer, Jack. The Conservative Synagogue, in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995). P. 123.

Extension. The department began planning for a "Bureau of Synagogue Activities" (BSA) in February 1932, when Rabbi Jacob D. Schwarz[44] made an all-inclusive proposal:

> Everything may be conceivably included that has to do in any way with the synagogue, including plant, ways and means of maintenance, and aims and activities in every phase of development...with its relations to the Jewish and general philanthropic, social and other constructive institutions and agencies in the community.[45]

A comprehensive list of seventeen internal and external activities covered the gamut of synagogue operations - except synagogue ritual practices.[46] The bureau would conduct extensive studies using surveys, and case studies of particular communities. Rabbi Schwarz further proposed studying churches and other Jewish denominations in an effort to understand their administrative practices.[47] Special attention was paid to financial issues in the aftermath of the Great Depression. The commission's findings would be distilled into a set of best practices, and disseminated via manuals and publications such as *The Synagogue Service Bulletin* and *The Synagogue.*[48]

In the context of post-Depression financial distress, and subsequent loss of synagogue membership, Rabbis Zepin and Schwartz had more in mind than simply assisting congregations. They were attempting to enhance the *perceived value* of the UAHC in general. Schwarz proposed that his BSA would "bring the Union into closer direct contact with the individual congregation and its welfare than heretofore...by making possible the rendering of direct service to congregations...putting the individual congregation admittedly in the place of 'receiver' as well as of 'giver.'"[49] The theme of 'closer contact' recurs frequently in DSSE documents from this era. BSA efforts to build infrastructure would eventually bear fruit starting in the 1950s, when the Reform movement underwent a sustained expansion.

---

[44] Rabbi Jacob D. Schwarz: (1883-1962). Ordained HUC. Director Bureau of Synagogue Activities - UAHC.
[45] UAHC: Memo: Department of Synagogue and School Extension. 2/17/1932. p. 1.
[46] Ibid. 2/17/1932. p.2.
[47] Ibid. 2/17/1932. p.5.
[48] UAHC: Minutes: Commission on Synagogue Activities. 4/11/1934. Appendix p. 2.
[49] Memo: Department of Synagogue and School Extension. 2/17/1932. p.4.

Neighborhood Change and Disintermediation:

Neighborhood change was one of the primary influences overlaying twentieth century synagogue life. The specifics vary by city and synagogue, but we can generalize around a few trends. The first quarter century marked the arrival of a prosperous Jewish middle class that branched out from inner city neighborhoods. They 'moved uptown' and transplanted their institutions along the way. In some cases (e.g. Chicago), changes in the racial composition of surrounding neighborhoods accelerated the movement of Jews to new areas. A different wave of neighborhood change swept the country from the mid-1940s through the 1970s; suburbanization was aided by extensions to mass transit systems and highway projects built for increasingly affordable automobiles.

The specific impact of early twentieth century neighborhood change is examined at length in the forthcoming merger case studies. A typical 1950s suburbanization scenario is found in Paula Hyman's case study, *From City to Suburb: Temple Mishkan Tefila of Boston*. The Conservative Temple Mishkan Tefila built a new synagogue in middle class Roxbury in 1925, and grew to 700 families by 1946.[50] After World War II and a change in rabbinic leadership, half the membership had moved to the suburbs (they commuted back to the synagogue), leaving behind a less affluent Jewish population that experienced rapid neighborhood change.[51] In 1950, Rabbi Israel Kazis advocated on behalf of a new synagogue-center and Hebrew school facility in suburban Newton. One of the three conservative synagogues already located near the planned site offered to merge, but negotiations broke down.[52] This provoked protests to the Jewish Theological Seminar (JTS) that Mishkan Tefila was "violating the principle of *hasagat gvul*

[50] Wertheimer, Jack. The Conservative Synagogue, in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995). P. 186.
[51] Hyman, Paula. From City to Suburb: Temple Mishkan Tefila of Boston, in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995). P. 189.
[52] Ibid. P. 189.

(encroachment)."[53] JTS ruled in Mishkan Tefila's favor, and the synagogue board proceeded with plans to relocate the entire operation (including the sanctuary).

Mishkan Tefila initially raised $695,000 –just 65 members pledged 60% of this.[54] The Roxbury remainder threatened legal action, but the suburban Newton community – which included most board members - sold the old site out from underneath its Roxbury members and embarked on a campaign to build the new facility in Newton. They scaled down the plans after failing to raise adequate funds for the $1.5 million facility [$11 million in 2005 dollars.]. Eventually the board approved a mortgage to facilitate construction. Mishkan Tefila's Roxbury residents were left without a synagogue.[55]

Historians have proposed a number of explanations for the Jews' rapid flight to the suburbs after 1950. Gerald Gamm debunks the idea that lender redlining,[56] or real estate agents promoting panic selling, were responsible for the mass exodus. More interesting is Gamm's comparison of Roxbury's Jewish community (a high percentage of renters) to Jews in cities with higher homeownership rates. "Though Jews in these cities [e.g. Buffalo] were as likely as Catholics to be homeowners, they otherwise acted like Jews in other cities. High levels of home-ownership did not frustrate or slow the Jewish flight from urban neighborhoods."[57] In fact, Jewish homeowners led the waves of relocation to suburban areas. And in the case of many urban synagogues like Mishkan Tefila, the more affluent *leadership* was at the front of the checkout line!

> The influx of blacks into Roxbury...as well as the upward social mobility of the area's second-generation Jews and their desire to realize the American dream of owning a single-family home were the primary causes of the geographic mobility of the area's Jewish population. Yet Mishkan

---

[53] Hyman, Paula. From City to Suburb: Temple Mishkan Tefila of Boston, in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995). P. 190.
[54] Ibid. P. 192.
[55] Ibid. P. 194.
[56] Definition: **Redlining** is the practice of approving mortgage loans only for homes within predefined geographical boundaries – regardless of the borrower's creditworthiness. This practice was outlawed in the 1980s, and today large banks must provide funds in low-income neighborhoods – even if they do not have a physical branch in the area.
[57] Gamm, Gerald. *Urban Exodus. Why Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). P. 52-53.

> Tefila's *decision* to relocate in the suburbs seems to have occurred *before* the mass exodus of Jews from Roxbury. Not only did the temple's removal deprive Roxbury's [Conservative] Jews of their...synagogue...but it may have signaled to many Jews...that the time to move was imminent.[58]

The idea that homeowners led the charge makes sense because homeowners have a substantial investment at risk if neighborhood property devalues. Still, Gamm directs our attention to the fact that other white ethnic groups did not immediately flee Roxbury. This led him to examine the underlying differences between Roxbury's Jews and Catholics:

> Because the rules of Catholic institutional life – membership boundaries, rooted churches and parishes, and hierarchical authority – constitute the foundation of Catholic neighborhood attachments, the church buildings and parish boundaries *themselves* explain differences in Catholic residential behavior...[59]

> If the guarantee of exclusive [parish] jurisdiction explains this cooperative network of territorial monopolies, then the absence of comparable jurisdiction in Jewish rules contributes to the fierce competitiveness among Jewish institutions...To exist, Jewish institutions have traditionally competed for members, for funds, and for prestige...[60]

> The inability of Jewish institutions to define and anchor neighborhoods is based, above all, in the rules that...make synagogues portable, and rules that locate institutional authority in the congregational membership.[61]

Here we find, in a concise comparison with Catholics,[62] a recap of the themes that consistently challenged liberal Judaism in the twentieth century. The voluntary nature of membership resulted in creative competition on a number of fronts (e.g. worship reform, education, social activities, and localized bursts of real estate speculation). Liberal synagogues, Reform in particular, considered themselves proudly independent of their central governing institutions – which were viewed as remote service providers

---

[58] Hyman, Paula. From City to Suburb: Temple Mishkan Tefila of Boston, in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995). P. 201.
[59] Gamm, Gerald. *Urban Exodus. Why Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). P. 58.
[60] Ibid. P. 123.
[61] Ibid. P. 93.
[62] Many liberal Protestants were also busy fleeing to the suburbs beginning in the 1950s.

responsible for training professionals and the production of educational programming materials. Urban social services, for the most part, became the responsibility of Jewish Federations or government agencies – neither of which was likely to engender loyalty to liberal synagogues. Catholics, by contrast, were bound to their neighborhood church and its communitarian ideals for the provision of social services.[63]

Suburban Life:

The 1950s marked the prosperous start of the Baby Boom era that bolstered the Reform movement. The decade after World War II saw rapid growth in the number of liberal synagogues, especially in suburbs. The UAHC alone added 150 new congregations during this period. Previous liberal denominations' class distinctions between German and East European Jews had become increasingly irrelevant. Now the only barrier to affiliation was the ability to afford a suburban home. American synagogue affiliation peaked at nearly 60%, as more that 500,000 children attended religious schools in 1958 – double the number of only a decade earlier. According to Jonathan Sarna, mass migration sparked "the greatest synagogue-building boom in all of American Jewish history. Between 1945 and 1965, well over one thousand synagogues and temples were built or rebuilt, most of them in suburbia...The myriad details connected with these vast projects – planning, designing, fundraising, and furnishing – consumed vast quantities of time, energy, and money, and constituted the "central religious activity" of many

---

[63] Sociologist Christopher Duncan describes the gradual trend away from Catholic communitarianism. Changing American attitudes toward communal service, exacerbated by dispersion to the suburbs, may form the basis for what Duncan calls a "post-Christian 'American' religion...that better fits our national temperament."[63] One result is that a significant number of American Jews and Protestants have minimal direct contact with the poor. Duncan implies that many Catholics also strayed away from hands-on service as they adopted the values of our success-driven society. In effect, American liberal congregations have outsourced to communal agencies (Jewish Federations), and the government, much of the direct service that religious organizations formerly provided within their neighborhoods.
Traditional European Jewish communities were governed by a *kehilla* (literally "gathering") that collected taxes and made decisions for disbursing funds to the poor. Some urban American Jewish communities founded institutions to support needy Jews in the communitarian model, and these required a significant amount of direct volunteer service. Many of these organizations (hospitals, nursing homes) have evolved to serve the general population as social barriers fell and Jews moved to the suburbs. As Jews staked new lives outside the cities, many adopted attitudes that bring to mind the Sociologist Sylvia Barack Fishman's concept of a 'coalescence' process whereby Western secular values (free choice, universalism, etc.) supplant traditional Jewish communal values, allowing Americanized Jews to maintain emotional bonds to their heritage even as they pursue secular goals.

American Jews."[64] Jack Wertheimer pointed out how the suburban exodus forced many Conservative urban congregations to make difficult choices:

> This movement profoundly affected the fortunes of existing urban synagogues, which were forced to choose between staying put (and thereby risking eventual abandonment) and transplanting themselves in the suburbs and leaving behind the huge physical facilities they had struggled so hard to build. Congregations that waited too long to decide frequently found their membership base eroded by the inexorable movement of congregants to the new suburban area.[65]

The related effects of suburban flight and inter-urban migration (e.g. Chicago), hastened by neighborhood change, would conspire to force the merger, amalgamation, or outright liquidation of many urban synagogues.

Competitive Disputes and Mediations:

Prior to the 1950s, the UAHC offered minimal guidance for newly formed congregations (many resulting from schisms, or outright relocations). Rapid suburban growth created friction in areas where multiple Reform congregations coexisted: In order to deal with such growing tensions, the UAHC Executive Board recommended the 1951 establishment of a Committee on Congregational Relationships (CCR).[66] Later that year, the CCR recommended that the Union defer to the regional Reform Federation where such an organization existed. The committee further recommended the general policy that the Union should attempt to "compose the differences and that we should help the new congregation, without prejudice. If a group secedes from a congregation, we should make every effort not to lose them to Judaism. Our inquiry should be based upon the matter of good faith of the applicants."[67] The UAHC's position was later modified to include a consultation with nearby existing Union congregations prior to recommending admission of a new congregation. The committee then proposed a Committee on

---

[64] Sarna, Jonathan. *American Judaism*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) P. 277-279.
[65] Wertheimer, Jack. The Conservative Synagogue, in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995). P. 124.
[66] UAHC Proceedings: Executive Board. 1951. p. 54.
[67] Ibid. p. 75.

Admissions to "set up definite standards and criteria for the admission of new congregations."[68]

Often times, the UAHC was accused of playing favorites in local disputes. In 1952, Temple Emeth Shalom of Margate, NJ, was held back from admission after splitting from Temple Beth Israel of Atlantic City over dealings with its rabbi. Union President Maurice Eisendrath explained, "the new congregation protests that we have not given them enough help, and the older congregation believes that we should not accept the new congregation into membership" [in the UAHC].[69] The Committee on Admissions was given the task of researching the matter further. These examples illustrate the long-standing tensions between central UAHC governance and local synagogue independence.

Synagogue Architecture in America:

Jewish population growth, neighborhood change and synagogue competition constitute three of the driving forces behind American synagogue construction during the past two centuries. These efforts consumed significant amounts of communal effort and monetary resources. It is important to note that the architectural styles of different eras corresponded to changes in the perceived objectives of congregational life. The renowned synagogue architect, Percival Goodman, described the inherent tensions between aesthetic form and social function in the design of a house of worship:

> Any structure dedicated to immediate experience is a community asset...The synagogue is such a structure; for the act of prayer is the highest form of personal experience...But for the Jew the act of prayer is also a social act, involved in a long tradition of customs and folkways...there remains a persistent need and desire to find an outlet for the natural sociality, the inherent religious impulses, and the deep-felt will of a historically-minded people to continue a tradition.[70]

Prior to the twentieth century, American synagogue designs imitated their European counterparts in aesthetics and functionality. These synagogues were typically located in

---

[68] UAHC Proceedings: Executive Board. 1951. p. 110.
[69] Ibid. p. 209.
[70] Percival Goodman. The Character of the Modern Synagogue, in *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow*, edited by Peter Blake (New York: UAHC, 1954). P. 88.

downtown areas on valuable land. Therefore, early American synagogues needed to be compact structures:

> A typical plan of the older American synagogue was to have the worship hall as the major floor area of the structure...Below was a large 'vestry,' used for social occasions, lectures, and the like. Flanking it were permanent or semi-permanent classrooms. The building was designed to serve a well-knit neighborhood, placed on a minimum-sized plot, often surrounded by commercial properties. In the earlier examples, the decoration was 'Moorish'...later, the 'American Colonial' style was used...In such a plan, ritual observance is the major reason for the building.[71]

The first decades of the twentieth century saw a general increase in the prosperity of American Jews; established leaders felt more assured about their place in society, and began to migrate 'uptown' to newer neighborhoods. They built new synagogues to serve these settlements, leading to the establishment of a new class of architects specializing in synagogue construction. These leading architects, in turn, built firms dedicated to particular styles. Among the most famous were Arnold Brunner (Classical, - Shearith Israel, New York), Albert Kahn (Neo-Classical - Temple Israel Meeting House, Brookline, MA), and Alfred Alsculer (Byzantine - Temple Isaiah, Chicago).[72] Some of these grand edifices were so expensive that they resulted in financial stress over a period of decades. Synagogue leaders, in concert with their ambitious architects, had allocated significant sums to 'temple' sanctuaries that were filled to capacity only on the High Holy Days.

The construction boom of the 1920s tapered off during the Great Depression. Building activity would regain momentum after World War II, as Americans focused once again on raising their families. The post-World War II architects began to create flexible designs that allocated more resources toward the school and social areas:

> In 1945 Jewish communities still clung tenaciously to the traditional styles. Erich Mendelsohn, with courageous simplicity, set out to reverse this attitude. His basic plan for Bnai Amoona synagogue (St. Louis) takes

[71] Percival Goodman. The Character of the Modern Synagogue, in *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow*, edited by Peter Blake (New York: UAHC, 1954). P. 89.
[72] De Breffny, Brian. *The Synagogue.* (New York: Macmillan, 1978). Pp. 186-190.

> into account the differing spatial requirements of the normal Sabbath worshippers and the enormously increased congregations on high holidays. His solution, which he employed in one form or another in all his synagogues, was to design movable partitions.[73]

Americans flocked to the suburbs after World War II, taking advantage of less expensive land. This meant that architects could design new synagogues with a more horizontal layout, and ample parking for automobiles. 1950s suburban synagogues tended to de-emphasize the 'temple' sanctuary, and devote even more resources towards 'synagogue-center' functionality:

> Jewish education, now almost completely divorced from the home, becomes a paramount function of the synagogue. Stylistically, the result is that the building takes on a secular appearance. It is a community center, a club, and a school, set out in ample grounds.[74]

This suburban emphasis of function over form led some critics to note that the neglect of sanctuary aesthetics was a detriment to spiritual fulfillment:

> Many do fail to express immediately the function of the building, or to reflect the uplift associated with a house of worship. Sometimes, in reaction against the undue ornamentation of older synagogues...this led to a complete and unfortunate abandonment of symbols.[75]

Thus we learn that American synagogue design has varied greatly during the past two hundred years. The structures of the nineteenth century primarily served to enhance the worship experience. Early twentieth century leaders built grand structures that announced their arrival in American society. And post-World War II suburban synagogues often emphasized functionality over aesthetics. Several of the forthcoming merger case studies illustrate how synagogue architecture, and the resource allocation decisions inherent in major building projects, reflected the perceived needs of congregations at the time. These decisions had real consequences for the success of the congregation, and occasionally led to mergers.

---

[73] De Breffny, Brian. *The Synagogue.* (New York: Macmillan, 1978). Pp. 196.
[74] Percival Goodman. P. 88. The Character of the Modern Synagogue, in *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow*, edited by Peter Blake (New York: UAHC, 1954) P. 91.
[75] Werner, Alfred. *The Synagogue: Studies in Origins, Archaeology, and Architecture.* Ed. Harry Orlinsky. (New York: KTAV, 1975). P. 256.

Summary:

The voluntary nature of American Judaism meant that nearby synagogues competed for financial and human resources. This competition engendered a number of creative responses, including Classical Reform and synagogue-centers. American Judaism's resistance to central control over resource allocations and religious/educational priorities meant that the synagogue itself was portable. Thus a significant proportion of communal resources poured into construction projects – driven by competition, neighborhood change (including suburbanization), and the motivations of strong-willed leaders. Those leaders often faced decisions that could spell success or doom for their congregations; a small percentage of those decisions ended in mergers. The forthcoming chapter on merger case studies examines such decisions in detail to understand the underlying influences, alternatives, and decision-making processes of mergers better.

III. RESOURCE ALLOCATION IN JEWISH COMMUNAL LIFE

Introduction:

In any organization, there are always differences of opinion regarding the best way to prioritize needs and allocate scarce resources. American synagogues rely on voluntary members to provide resources, but those *same* members are also consumers of the synagogue's services. Consensus tends to break down as various constituencies (elders, adults, young adults, pre-school, etc.) seek the available time of professionals and volunteers, and the financial resources necessary to facilitate their favorite programs. Less popular needs such as synagogue maintenance require periodic expenditures as buildings age. Each congregation will, over time, prioritize programs according to its perceived needs and available resources; despite all the 'conventional wisdom,' *no standard process* exists for allocating scarce resources in an effective manner. The reasons for this lack of consistency are rooted in several interrelated American historical trends, including the voluntary nature of synagogue membership - and competition for resources among the multitude of Jewish communal institutions.[76]

The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate some of the difficulties that synagogue leaders encounter when making resource allocation decisions. The distribution of resources matters to this study because the forthcoming merger case studies reveal that one of the most important factors triggering synagogue mergers is the financial distress incurred through major construction projects. While it is fair to say that case study synagogue leaders were engaged in the building of infrastructure necessary to sustain a rapidly growing Jewish population, our Roaring Twenties case studies (e.g. Chicago's Isaiah Israel and Temple Sholom, and Milwaukee's Emanu-El) demonstrate that leaders' ambitions often exceeded synagogue financial resources by vast margins. This finding calls into question the *resource allocation* process of the particular synagogue.

---

[76] Jick, Leon. The Reform Synagogue, in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995) P. 87.

The current chapter on resource allocation provides a historical context for some of the reasons why synagogue leaders felt free (or compelled) to expend vast sums on construction – relative to available resources. In order to distinguish motivations from matters of process, we also examined current ideas from non-profit leaders and consultants. The resulting conceptual framework provides readers with a baseline understanding of the allocation issues that permeate the subsequent chapter on merger case studies.

America – Land of Scarce Resources?:

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century expansion in the number of American synagogues[77] was accompanied by difficult new challenges in terms of allocating communal resources. On the one hand, American Jews achieved increasing levels of material wealth and acceptance in society. This trend naturally led to an abundance of financial and human resources available to meet Jewish communal needs – which expanded in proportion to the waves of mostly poor immigrants that arrived before and after the turn of the twentieth century. Multiple Jewish institutions (local, national, international) sprouted to serve every conceivable cause. This meant that synagogues, in many cities, competed against other Jewish institutions for a share of the resource pie. Jewish Historian Daniel Elazar notes:

> The American synagogue is...a unique response to the particular American environment...The source of its uniqueness lies in the fact that the American synagogue has, from the first, existed as a voluntary religious association, rather than as a community in the traditional sense, limited in the scope of activities by the open and increasingly secular character of American society, on the one hand, and by the existence of other institutions designed to serve the needs of Jews, on the other.[78]

Elazar and historian Leon Jick point out that late 19th century American synagogues differed from their European predecessors in that they were *voluntary* organizations with

---

[77] See chapter II on *Historical Trends Affecting Synagogue Mergers*.
[78] Elazar, Daniel J. The Development of the American Synagogue, in *American Synagogue History: A Bibliography and State-of-the-Field Survey*. (New York, 1988). P. 23.

no authority over the lives of individual members.[79] This lack of central authority was a distinct departure from the previous model of what historian Jonathan Sarna termed the 'synagogue-community' model that Jews had imported from Europe. Early American synagogues operated much like the old European *kehillah*, whereby the congregation collected funds and dispersed them according to Jewish traditions. Dr. Sarna described how the early American synagogue-community operated:

> [The synagogue-community] assumed responsibility for all aspects of Jewish religious life: communal worship, dietary laws, life-cycle events, education, philanthropy, ties to Jews around the world, oversight of the cemetery and the ritual bath...it acted in the name of all area Jews...The advantages of this all-encompassing institution were, from a Jewish point of view, considerable; the synagogue-community proved an efficient means of meeting the needs of an outpost Jewish community.[80]

The unified synagogue-community model began to change in the nineteenth century as early reformers strove to adapt worship customs, and some eventually broke off to found competing congregations in the same city (e.g. Charleston, New York). Further divisions arose when Sepharidic and Ashkenaz Jews began to form separate synagogues to practice their rites. Sarna described the cumulative effect of these changes:

> The result is nothing less than a new American Judaism – a Judaism that was diverse and pluralistic...more than anybody realized at the time, synagogue pluralism changed the balance of power between the synagogue and its members...Congregations became much more concerned with attracting congregants than with keeping them in line. Finally, synagogue pluralism brought to an end the intimate coupling of synagogue and community...with the breakdown of the synagogue-community there was no incentive for anyone to pay...To bind the Jewish community together and carry out functions that the now privatized and functionally delimited synagogues could no longer handle required community-wide organizations capable of transcending religious

---

[79] Jick, Leon. The Reform Synagogue, in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995) P. 87
[80] Sarna. P. 13.

differences. Charitable organizations...and fraternal organizations like B'nai B'rith (founded 1843) soon moved in to fill the void."[81]

Thus late nineteenth century synagogues needed to compete not only with other nearby synagogues for *members*, but also with other Jewish charitable organizations that sought volunteer and financial *resources* for their independent operations. Furthermore, the main pool of financial resources was often concentrated in the same wealthy hands. The richest synagogue members, who might be expected to pledge large sums for a synagogue construction project, were also approached for large donations by various communal organizations (e.g. hospitals, poverty relief).

The trend towards fragmentation of financial and volunteer resources accelerated in the twentieth century as regional Jewish federations and organizations to support Zionism and foreign Jewry expanded in number and scope. The ongoing competition for communal resources and resulting squabbles over control of those resources eventually led to the controversial merger of multiple organizations into the United Jewish Communities (UJC) in 1999. An intensive study of that merger is captured in *From Predictability to Chaos? How the Jewish Leaders Reinvented their National Communal System*, by Gerald Bubis and Steven Windmueller. The authors interviewed 88 participants in the merger process, and identified the following *perceived* goals for this complex merger: [82]

1. Bringing cost-saving measures and efficiencies to the operation of the national system
2. Securing control of the national system by the federations
3. Establishing a baseline of support for overseas allocations
4. Creating a new national American Jewish voice
5. Addressing the governance issues associated with both the United Israel Appeal and United Jewish Appeal

[81] [Sarna]. P. 60.
[82] Bubis, Gerald and Steven Windmueller. *From Predictability to Chaos? How the Jewish Leaders Reinvented their National Communal System.* (Baltimore: Center for Jewish Community Studies, 2005). P. 55.

According to Bubis and Windmeuller, gaining control over *existing* resources was a major impetus behind the UJC merger. The authors also indicated that one of the unstated drivers was the perception of current and future *competition* over a shrinking national pool of financial resources from major donors. This finding is roughly parallel to this study's *Historical Trends Affecting Synagogue Mergers* chapter, which notes how competition for resources is a major impetus for synagogue mergers.

In summary, American synagogues needed to adapt in order to compete for resources in the twentieth century. Synagogues often faced competition for members from nearby congregations, and they needed to attract their share of resources from wealthy synagogue members who also supported the growing constellation of Jewish communal organizations.

Moreover, it is likely that certain synagogue leaders of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries decided to allocate resources, consciously or unconsciously, toward conspicuously grand building projects that would attract the attention of large donors (the so-called 'edifice complex'). This raises the possibility that some resources were allocated wisely, while others were not. In order to analyze the primary source documents for evidence of such inherently murky decisions, we need to understand the common pitfalls of the non-profit resource allocation process better. These process pitfalls are treated in Appendix A: *Non-profit Resource Allocation Issues.*

Risky Decisions:

Leaders must consider the element of risk when allocating scarce resources. The decision to undertake a large construction project is inherently risky – in terms of timing, cost estimation, and allocation of precious financial resources. All of this is not to say that congregations should never consider construction projects. Religious communities generally need a home where they can worship, learn, and celebrate together. And circumstances such as neighborhood change, growth or decline in membership, or the bequest of a wealthy donor, can impel a congregation to consider risky options such as

new construction. The strategic question is as follows: What is the level of risk that leaders can reasonably assume, given the *available resources* and *alternatives* facing a particular congregation? Peter Drucker illustrates the potential dilemma with the example of a Brooklyn hospital that experienced neighborhood change in the 1960s – when many doctors and its patient base left. The most obvious solution was to close down the hospital. Instead of giving up, the community decided to raise funds to keep the hospital open for 5 years until the patient base stabilized. Drucker summarizes his approach to risk as follows:

> One starts out with the *opportunity*, not with the risk: If this works, what will it do for us? Then look at the risks. And there are three kinds of risks: There is the risk we can afford to take...Then there is the irreversible decision, when failure may do serious harm. Finally, there is the decision where the risk is great but one cannot afford *not* to take it.[83]

As we transition to the chapter on merger case studies, the reader should keep these three categories of risk decisions in mind. We shall encounter cases where synagogue leaders made decisions that appear – in retrospect – to have been risky or unsound; yet those leaders were responding to perceived risks within the context of their immediate conditions.

[83] Drucker, Peter F. *Managing the Non-Profit Organization*. (New York: HarperBusiness, 1990). P. 123.

IV. MERGER CASE STUDIES

Chapter Overview:

The purpose of this chapter is to detail the historical events in a select group of synagogue mergers. These events were concentrated in two major eras of merger activity; the 1920s economic boom and subsequent Great Depression, and post-World War II - when many Jewish neighborhoods experienced demographic changes. We will analyze the leaders' stated motivations, and speculate about some hidden concerns that may have influenced their decisions. External trends, such as neighborhood change and synagogue competition, will be applied to each case merger in order to add context to the historical analysis.

A. Chicago Case Study

Introduction:

Chicago was first settled during the 1820's, and became an incorporated city in 1837. Anecdotal records indicate that Chicago's first Jewish settler arrived the following year.[84] The Jewish population grew slowly at first; by 1850, only a few hundred Jews inhabited a city that had expanded to nearly 28,000 persons.[85] Chicago's first *minyanim* met in places of business, and some congregations rented churches for High Holy Day services.

In 1847, Kehilath Anshe Maariv (KAM) was founded as Chicago's first congregation, meeting in a building on Clark Street. Six years later, the congregation built the first synagogue at Adams and Wells. KAM's mostly German membership practiced *Minhag Ashkenaz*, and the congregation soon split into factions based on ethnicity and ritual practices. Orthodox members who favored *Minhag Poland* formed Bnai Sholom in 1852.[86] Reformers of German ancestry sought changes that eventually resulted in the 1861 schism of Temple Sinai from KAM. The burgeoning congregations quickly

[84] Exact numbers are not available, as official Jewish records were destroyed in the Great Fire of 1871.
[85] Meites, Hyman, ed. *History of the Jews of Chicago.* (Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, edition 1990). P. 54-56. [Note: Meites' book is a general reference tool that relied on secondary sources. Some articles were provided by the congregations in question].
[86] Ibid. P. 505.

outgrew their original facilities, and constructed still more expansive synagogues within the downtown area. Their original sites were most often sold to fledgling Jewish congregations, but there were recorded instances of sales to churches. During a synagogue's construction phase, congregations held temporary services in other synagogues, churches, and various community centers.[87]

Prior to the Great Fire of 1871, Chicago consisted of a central business district interspersed with residential neighborhoods (mass transit trains did not yet exist). This urban pattern of mixed business and residential was a good fit for the early orthodox Jewish settlers, who required a nearby *shul* for their daily worship services. By 1880, Chicago's Jewish population had grown to 10,000.[88]

After Jewish population growth, rapid neighborhood change ranked as the second most important factor driving synagogue construction in Chicago. Most of the early Chicago synagogues were destroyed or damaged in the wind-driven fires of 1871 and 1874. These disasters nearly leveled the central business/residential district - initiating an era of unprecedented residential construction in the immediately surrounding areas. Many Jews resettled in West Chicago neighborhoods and joined synagogues aligned with their country of origin. German Jews began migrating to the newer neighborhoods of the near South Side before the turn of the twentieth century.

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, successive waves of European immigrant Jews migrated west to Chicago in search of new opportunities. America's fastest growing city was already a manufacturing and transportation hub - ideally located at the intersection of the Great Lakes and railroad lines. By 1900, Chicago's Jewish population had grown to 75,000, and the growing community had established over 50

---

[87] Chicago Jewish Historical Society. "*Synagogues of Chicago: A Historic Survey 1839 – 1992.*" (Chicago, 1992).
[88] *Encyclopedia Judaica.* Electronic Ver. 7.0 (Tel Aviv: Keter, 1997).

synagogues.[89] The number of Chicago Jews tripled to 225,000 within 20 years, as East European immigrants ultimately constituted 85% of the city's total Jewish population.[90]

The Chicago case study presents selected events from a 90-year span leading to the 1971 merger of two historic congregations (KAM and Isaiah Israel), and the 1975 amalgamation of Temple Beth Am with Temple Sholom.[91] These mergers resulted from and involved intensive synagogue competition and neighborhood change that impacted leaders' decisions.

Cumulative Effects of Neighborhood Change:

The first two decades of the twentieth century saw a proliferation of new synagogue construction as near South Side neighborhoods experienced a change in racial composition.[92] Many Jews moved even farther south to neighborhoods such as Hyde Park, Kenwood, and South Shore.[93] By 1930, the various South Side communities housed a total of 28,000 Jews (10% of Chicago's Jewish population).[94]

Chicago's synagogue leaders commissioned magnificent construction projects for a complex variety of reasons, including rapid population growth, volatile neighborhood change, and competitive communal pressures such as the nascent synagogue center movement.[95] Overlaying various justifications for new construction was the optimistic national mood of post-World War I America: Americans began to feel increasingly confident and affluent – culminating in an economic boom cycle known as the Roaring Twenties. Chicago's Jewish leaders responded with large donations to such Jewish charities as Michael Reese Hospital, and secular institutions including Northwestern

---

[89] Meites, Hyman, ed. *History of the Jews of Chicago.* (Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, edition 1990). p. 201.
[90] *Encyclopedia Judaica.* Electronic Ver. 7.0 (Tel Aviv: Keter, 1997).
[91] For general information on the founding dates and merger partners of Chicago area synagogues, see *Faith & Form: Synagogue Architechture in Illinois.* (Chicago: Spertus Museum, 1976).
[92] Large numbers of African Americans, searching for manufacturing jobs, migrated to northern cities after the Civil War.
[93] Jones, Peter, and Holli, Melvin ed. *Ethnic Chicago.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981). P. 60.
[94] Ibid. P. 60.
[95] See Chapter II *Historical Trends Affecting Synagogue Mergers.*

University.[96] In 1923, Jewish communal leaders pushed for a merger of competing Jewish welfare institutions into the Jewish Charities of Chicago. "The only conditions imposed were that all institutions enter the union debt-free, conform to approved methods of raising funds, and adhere to their budgets."[97] Jewish Charities of Chicago immediately launched a successful fund drive that raised $2,750,000 [$31 million in 2005 dollars]. Clearly, Chicago's Jewish leaders, many of whom were members of the upwardly mobile middle class, were able to commit significant sums to a wide range of communal causes – in addition to funding their synagogues.

Synagogue construction projects of the era were similarly ambitious. Some documents reveal a grandiose Roaring Twenties version of what former Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan once termed "irrational exuberance." Synagogue leaders confidently assumed that they could raise the funds necessary for their magnificent edifices – if not immediately, then later. Construction budgets overran their initial estimates, and boards routinely voted to boost spending. Banks lent money freely to non-profit organizations such as synagogues and churches. The unpredictable interactions of neighborhood change, competitive communal pressures, and Roaring Twenties optimism led to decisions that - sooner or later - mired our Chicago case study synagogues in financial distress.

The cumulative impact of natural disasters, population growth, and volatile neighborhood change is evident in the site location histories of our oldest Chicago case study synagogues (KAM, Bnai Sholom, Temple Sholom). Each of these three synagogues inhabited not less than 6 sites prior to their final merger.[98]

---

[96] Meites, Hyman, ed. *History of the Jews of Chicago.* (Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, edition 1990). P. 334-335.
[97] Ibid. P. 336.
[98] Chicago Jewish Historical Society. "*Synagogues of Chicago: A Historic Survey 1839 -- 1992.*" (Chicago, 1992).

Site Location Histories

Original Congregation	Date Founded	Date Final Merger	# Years	# Sites Before Latest Merger
KAM	1847	1971	124	7
Bnai Sholom	1856	1906	50	6
Temple Sholom	1867	1975	108	6

Setting aside the impact of a merger on an *individual* congregation, one might expect that the cumulative effects of serial synagogue relocations would alter the composition and cohesion of the greater religious community. The sheer magnitude of resources (money and effort) involved in planning and executing the relocation of an institution meant that some resources were less available to address synagogue programming needs and charitable works.

Sociologist Charles Jaret's 1977 Ph.D. dissertation, "Residential Mobility and Local Jewish Community Organization in Chicago," sheds light on the effects of rapid neighborhood change. Using an intensive study of census data and reverse zip code directories, he traced Chicago Jewry's net migration patterns from 1967 to 1974 – a period of unprecedented social upheaval for Chicago and other major American cities. Jaret found that the high degree of Jewish mobility was disruptive to Jewish institutions and communal life in the areas that experienced large net out-migration.[99] This effect was more pronounced for Reform and unaffiliated Jews. Those Jews who chose to remain in their neighborhoods experienced a dwindling pool of Jewish resources and familiar neighbors. The Jews who moved to different neighborhoods or to the suburbs of Chicago "felt less strongly attached to the local Jewish community in their new area than they were to their previous area, and they also rated their new Jewish local communities as less satisfactory in meeting their Jewish needs than their old area."[100]

[99] Jaret, Charles. "Residential Mobility and Local Jewish Community Organization in Chicago." (PhD thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1977). P. 299.
[100] Ibid. P. 302.

In summary, constant neighborhood migration during the twentieth century prompted waves of synagogue construction - at greater distances from Chicago's central business district. The forthcoming case studies shall indicate that 'early mover' congregations left behind weakened Jewish neighborhoods - containing synagogues and temples that eventually had no choice but to relocate or disband. The cumulative effects of synagogue construction and active neighborhood transformation would ultimately force a number of Chicago's Jewish congregations to merge with one another.

Chicago Mergers and Amalgamations:

Bnai Sholom Temple Israel

Even prior to the twentieth century, neighborhood change had occurred in Chicago's Jewish communities. One example of this phenomenon was Bnai Sholom (founded 1852). Bnai Sholom's original synagogue was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1871. Its members rebuilt their home at a cost of $23,000[101], but the congregation continued to encounter the financial pressure of a $10,000 mortgage. The mostly East European membership slowly declined due to tensions between young reformers and their more traditionally inclined elders – a trend encouraged by *The Occident* (a prominent Jewish periodical of the era), which frequently urged reformers to leave Bnai Sholom and join Chicago's nascent Reform temples.[102] Membership further deteriorated as congregants began moving to the newer near-South residential neighborhoods.

Leaders finally responded to neighborhood change by selling their property in 1889, and purchasing KAM's near south site at Indiana Avenue and 26th Street [KAM had already decided to move even farther south].[103] Bnai Sholom slowly migrated from a traditional Orthodox *minhag* to slightly more 'conservative' practices, but this move to the religious center proved difficult given the undercurrents of change affecting Chicago Jewry.

---

[101], Hyman, ed. *History of the Jews of Chicago.* (Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, edition 1990). p. 129.

[102] *The Occident* - Vol. XI, No.52. April 11, 1883. p.4.

[103] Meites, Hyman, ed. *History of the Jews of Chicago.* (Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, edition 1990). P. 171. KAM built a new synagogue in 1891 for $110,000 at Indiana Avenue and 33rd Street. With 200 members, they were debt free and had cash reserves. That same year, Temple Sinai decided to remain in their existing site and remodel for $60,000.

Although American 'conservative' Judaism was beginning to emerge as an alternative to orthodox and reform practices[104], Chicago was a major center of 'Classical Reform' innovations. Bnai Sholom's moderate reforms would not go far enough for some second generation Chicago Jews who desired greater acceptance in general society. Bnai Sholom struggled to maintain its membership base during the following decade as younger members flocked to Reform synagogues.

At the turn of the twentieth century, a number of synagogues already had built new synagogues farther south. Bnai Sholom leaders realized that they too should relocate, but the lagging effects of financial obligations may have impeded their ability to make strategic real estate decisions in Chicago Jewry's race southward. The board did not act until Rabbi Aaron Messing[105] fell ill in 1905, leaving the community leaderless.[106] Meanwhile, Temple Israel had recently constructed a new synagogue further south at 44th and Lawrence.[107] The two congregations entered into preliminary merger negotiations, and Bnai Sholom shifted its Shabbat service to Temple Israel's sanctuary by March 1906. The actual merger of Bnai Sholom and Temple Israel occurred in April 1906 - one of the briefest merger transactions found in researching this topic.[108]

The rapid pace of neighborhood change continued[109], and the merged congregation, "Bnai Sholom Temple Israel," built a new synagogue and community center further south at Michigan and 53rd Street in 1913.[110] [The significance of "synagogue-centers" is treated in-depth in the Historical Background chapter]. These improvements were required to complete with nearby Temple Sinai – which had recently built a lavish 7,500

---

[104] See *Historical Trends Affecting Synagogue Mergers* chapter.
[105] Rabbi Aaron Messing PhD: (1840 – 1916). Born in Germany. Wrote textbooks and served multiple congregations. Marcus, Jacob R., Ed. *The Concise Dictionary of American Jewish Biography.*
[106] Berman, Morton. "Our First Century 1852-1952. Temple Isaiah Israel." (Chicago: 1952). Courtesy of Chicago Jewish Archives. P. 23.
[107] Ibid. P.23.
[108] Minimal primary documentation exists to explain the issues behind this merger. Future historians may find secondary evidence in periodicals and biographies.
[109] Meites, Hyman, ed. *History of the Jews of Chicago.* (Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, edition 1990). P. 512. In 1911, Temple Sinai built a grand 'temple' and adjoining synagogue-center at Grand Boulevard and 46th Street for approximately $900,000 [$17 million in 2005 dollars]. The architect was Alfred Alschuler, who would also design the similarly grand Isaiah Temple – completed 1924.
[110] Berman, Morton. "Our First Century 1852-1952. Temple Isaiah Israel." (Chicago: 1952). Courtesy of Chicago Jewish Archives. P. 27.

member synagogue-center that "could not content itself with service local to the immediacies of the Temple [Sinai] and its membership. And so it has become an institution to an all-inclusive degree, where activities of every sort are conducted."[111] Bnai Sholom Temple Israel's 1913 site proved short-lived as neighborhood change and financial difficulties forced the board to consider other options in the early 1920s. The leaders of Bnai Sholom Temple Israel never quite caught up with their competitors in the race southward; this problem was finally resolved when Bnai Sholom Temple Israel merged with Hyde Park's Isaiah Temple in 1924.

Temple Isaiah Israel

Isaiah Temple was founded in 1895 as a Reform spin-off from the West Side's Zion Congregation. The German members of Zion Congregation were migrating south, and moving towards reform practices.[112] Isaiah Temple joined the UAHC in 1896 with 145 members,[113] and built their first synagogue at Vincennes and 45th Street in 1899 at a cost of $70,000. According to their own claims, this site also housed Chicago's first special-purpose religious school and community house.[114] By 1908, Isaiah Temple's fiscal condition appeared sound and membership had grown to 270 members.[115]

In 1920, Isaiah Temple contracted to sell its existing site to a church.[116] The primary sources do not provide much detail on the reasons for this decision, but Isaiah Temple's rapid growth to approximately 500 members may have forced the board to construct a larger facility. There was also indirect evidence of neighborhood change around 45th street. Isaiah Temple purchased Hyde Park property and raised startup 'subscriptions'[117]

---

[111] Meites, Hyman, ed. *History of the Jews of Chicago.* (Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, edition 1990). P. 513.
[112] Ibid. P. 188.
[113] *The Reform Advocate* – XVI No. 5. September 17, 1898. p. 73.
[114] Meites, Hyman, ed. *History of the Jews of Chicago.* (Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, edition 1990). P. 519.
[115] Minutes of Isaiah Temple. (11/2/1908).
[116] Berman, Morton. "Our First Century 1852-1952. Temple Isaiah Israel." (Chicago: Temple Isaiah-Israel, 1952). Courtesy of Chicago Jewish Archives. P. 32.
[117] Definition: **Subscriptions** are personal pledges to a charitable fund.

of $125,750[118] for a magnificent new synagogue at Hyde Park Boulevard and Greenwood Avenue. Taking into account national construction trends, leaders also intended to build a new community center on the site. The total estimated cost of land and construction was initially estimated at $250,000[119] ($2.8 million in 2005 dollars).[120]

The congregation ran a small operating budget surplus for the fiscal year 1922 on estimated expenses of $18,053. [121] If one just looked at the 1922 financial reports, we might conclude that Isaiah Temple's finances were healthy; however, upon closer inspection the operating 'surplus' was misleading. One ominous sign was the existence of a *separate* real estate budget that included $2107.50 for interest expense on loans for purchase of the Hyde Park site.[122] This eliminated the 1922 operating "surplus." The existence of a separate real estate budget was not, by itself, a matter of immediate concern. Board members most likely considered the real estate portion of their balance sheet a matter for separate consideration. Nevertheless, the congregation's records reveal how Isaiah Temple's decision to segregate short-term real estate operating expenses from the regular operating budget was part and parcel of a larger context of lax financial controls – a business process flaw that nearly led to the bankruptcy of this historic congregation.

Isaiah Temple's board was certainly aware of its financial challenges during the construction phase. In 1923, the board raised dues in anticipation of higher operating expenses, and made concerted efforts to collect $3548 in back dues.[123] Leaders began to recruit new members to help shoulder the costs, but this effort required new members willing to make construction pledges in *addition* to dues. The recruitment effort would also face formidable competition from other Reform synagogues located in the same vicinity (Temple Sinai was already firmly established on the South Side, and KAM was

---

[118] Berman, Morton. *The History of Temple Isaiah-Israel Chicago 1852-1952.* (Chicago, Temple Isaiah-Israel, 1952). P.27.
[119] Meites, Hyman, ed. *History of the Jews of Chicago.* (Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, edition 1990). p. 521.
[120] United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.org). 1925 dollars adjusted for inflation.
[121] Definition: **Operating surplus** is an excess of cash receipts over cash expenditures
[122] Minutes of Isaiah Temple, (9/1/1922).
[123] Ibid. (9/1/1923).

planning its own synagogue nearby). Despite good efforts, total collections were not nearly enough to cover anticipated construction costs. A trigger event occurred when the board finally accepted a $60,000 offer for their previous site from the Bethesda Baptist Church in January 1923.[124] Now the board proceeded with its full construction plans.

The onset of construction likely focused the minds of Isaiah Temple's board members. Concurrent with their collection efforts, leaders began to consider the financial benefits of a merger. The most likely partner was KAM, which had also purchased Hyde Park property at Drexel Boulevard and 50th Street - less than a mile from the future site of Isaiah Temple. The Isaiah Temple board gathered in February 1923 to discuss a meeting "held in an unofficial capacity" with KAM leaders. Although construction had not yet commenced, Isaiah's leaders felt they had already taken "definite action" on their own new site, so they made no formal response at that time.[125] In March the KAM board forwarded a proposal stating that they "hope you [Isaiah Temple] will give us a favorable reply before our building proceeds to such a point that it will be too late to make the necessary changes to house both congregations without too great expense."[126] Isaiah's board replied that they were not interested and thanked them for "friendly sentiments." Isaiah's leaders felt that their location was superior, due to its close proximity to the burgeoning University of Chicago.[127] We may also speculate that Isaiah's leaders were caught up in the excitement of building a monument. Here we see a pattern similar to the other merger case studies; initial attempts to discuss a merger are dismissed due to intransigence – the need to continue along an existing path – even when viable alternatives emerge. Isaiah's failure to even agree to meet was, in retrospect, a missed opportunity with ramifications that spanned decades. KAM went on to consider other

[124] Minutes of Isaiah Temple, (1/26/1923).
[125] Ibid. (2/11/1923).
[126] Ibid. (3/8/1923).
[127] Ibid. (2/11/1923).

merger partners[128], including Bnai Sholom Temple Israel, but ultimately decided to complete construction on their own.[129]

Since Isaiah's membership contributions were apparently insufficient to meet the needs of the synagogue's construction project, the board needed an infusion of capital in order to begin building. The board negotiated with Chicago Title for a $250,000 mortgage secured by land and bond subscriptions. Soon the board voted to increase total construction expense to "approximately" $350,000.[130] Board minutes suggest that motions to increase construction expenditures were routine events - devoid of much board discussion. There were other clues that the synagogue suffered from lax financial controls. After its bookkeeper died, the board engaged a Certified Public Accountant to audit the books. The auditors found that the bookkeeper had "deposited collections to his personal bank account, and paid synagogue expenses out of his personal funds, later reimbursing himself." The auditors determined that the synagogue owed his estate $1063, so there was no indication of fraud.[131] Nevertheless, we can understand the potential risks of simultaneously running a synagogue and a very large construction project practically out of a shoebox.

Isaiah Temple moved forward with construction plans, taking advantage of Temple Sinai's gracious offer to host worship services until construction was complete. The building fund had nearly achieved the *original* goal of $221,000 ($60,000 net from sale of old synagogue, $100,000 collected pledges, $57,000 uncollected pledges).[132] This original scenario would have been manageable for Isaiah Temple's approximately 500 members, but multiple design changes and cost overruns drove the total expense of the new building up. The balance sheet listed the total costs of the new synagogue alone at

[128] The primary source documents do not explain why KAM was so eager to merge. One may postulate that KAM leaders, after so many relocations (see chart Site Location Histories above), wished to share the burden of construction costs with a financially secure partner.
[129] Berman, Morton. "Our First Century 1852-1952. Temple Isaiah Israel." (Chicago: 1952). Courtesy of Chicago Jewish Archives. P. 28.
[130] Minutes of Isaiah Temple, (5/6/1923).
[131] Ibid. (6/1/1923).
[132] Minutes of Isaiah Temple, (8/24/1924).

$414,000, plus $10,800 in improvements to the existing community house[133] ($4.8 million in 2005 dollars)[134]. The final cost, including the planned new community house and furnishings, would approach $600,000.[135] This is roughly equivalent to $13,000 per member (family unit) in an era when most single income families earned modest wages.

The cost overruns began to make lenders nervous. Chicago Title refused to advance any part of the $250,000 financing "until such time as certificates from the architect were presented showing that that sum would be sufficient to complete the building free and clear of all [other] liens."[136] Nevertheless, construction surged toward completion, and Temple Isaiah leaders searched for a way out of its financial dilemma.

On August 17, 1924 -- barely one week prior to the completion of the main sanctuary -- financial constraints precipitated a special board meeting to consider merger with Bnai Sholom Temple Israel. Neighborhood changes around Bnai Sholom Temple Israel's site at Michigan and 53rd Street, along with financial difficulties, prompted them to consider merger after only 11 years. Negotiations progressed rapidly, and the two boards announced intentions to name their merged entity "The Temple" with *Isaiah-Israel* appearing only on the stationery.[137] A joint committee voted one week later to merge "The Temple Isaiah and Israel."[138]

Very little due diligence was performed by either merger partner. One indication of the relative haste of this transaction was the lack of consensus on such basic issues as the choice of a prayer book. In an effort to placate respective parties, the boards voted to convene both Saturday and Sunday services, and they retained both experienced rabbis Gerson Levi[139] (Temple Bnai Sholom Temple Israel) and Joseph Stolz[140] (Isaiah

---

[133] Minutes of Isaiah Temple, (8/31/1924).
[134] United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.org). 1925 dollars adjusted for inflation.
[135] Berman, Morton. "Our First Century 1852-1952. Temple Isaiah Israel." (Chicago: Temple Isaiah-Israel, 1952). Courtesy of Chicago Jewish Archives. P. 27.
[136] Minutes of Isaiah Temple, (8/17/1924).
[137] Berman, Morton. *The History of Temple Isaiah-Israel Chicago 1852-1952.* (Chicago, Temple Isaiah-Israel, 1952). P.20.
[138] Minutes of Isaiah Temple, 8/24/1924.
[139] Rabbi Gerson Levi PhD: (1878-1939). Ordained JTS. Board CCAR, JIR. Editor *Reform Advocate.* Marcus, Jacob R. ed. *The Concise Dictionary of American Jewish Biography.*

Temple). Jacob Schnadig of Isaiah Temple was elected president of the congregation.[141] Construction of the main sanctuary was completed on August 21, 1924 – followed by festive dedication ceremonies held September 12th through 14th. At the time, Temple Isaiah Israel's seating capacity of 1,600 was the largest in North America. The building immediately became a famous local landmark.

Unfortunately, the monumental achievement masked an ongoing financial crisis – made worse by the hasty merger. Records indicate no significant transfer of financial assets from Bnai Sholom Temple Israel. Such a transfer (e.g. from sale of the former site) would have reduced the need for additional capital to fund furnishings and the construction of a new community house. Nor did the additional membership - now totaling 694 - resolve operating deficits[142], since only 145 members actually transferred from Bnai Sholom Temple Israel.[143] The approximately 200 missing former members represented $12,000 in projected dues. The primary sources do not document the reasons for so many defectors.[144]

Audited financial statements for the next fiscal year (ending September 30, 1925) indicate a nerve-wracking 34% operating deficit ($22,700) against a combined operating budget of $67,000.[145] This figure did not even include UAHC dues or maintenance for the new synagogue and existing community house. Presumably, those costs were tracked

---

[140] Rabbi Joseph Stolz. (1861-1941). President CCAR, Board UAHC. Known as "Dean of Reform Rabbinate in US." Marcus, Jacob R. ed. *The Concise Dictionary of American Jewish Biography.*

[141] Berman, Morton. "Our First Century 1852-1952. Temple Isaiah Israel." (Chicago: Temple Isaiah-Israel, 1952). Courtesy of Chicago Jewish Archives. P. 28.

[142] Definition: An **operating deficit** occurs when cash payments exceed cash receipts for a given reporting period. Not every monthly operating deficit is an ominous sign of financial distress - a synagogue's cash flow tends to fluctuate seasonally with the collection of dues. Synagogue leaders facing extended operating deficits need to respond with increased income and/or lower costs. Leaders may find such measures too difficult to contemplate, so instead of cutting costs they take the easy path of raiding endowment funds (balance sheet assets) to balance the operating budget.

[143] Berman, Morton. "Our First Century 1852-1952. Temple Isaiah Israel." (Chicago: 1952). Courtesy of Chicago Jewish Archives. P. 28.

[144] This matter of retaining existing members would make a good topic for future historians. The 1970s merger discussions of KAM, Isaiah Israel, and Beth Am allude to the issue of retention. In neighborhoods with a high degree of synagogue competition, some people decided to switch affiliation rather than move. We may also speculate that some disgruntled members stayed behind in synagogues that experienced factional strife.

[145] Minutes of Isaiah Temple, (12/9/1924).

in separate accounts. One notes that even a forementioned $12,000 of missing projected dues would not have been nearly enough to cover the combined operating deficit for fiscal year 1924/1925. Merger efforts in general, and membership increases in specific, do not guarantee the return of fiscal health: Concurrent efforts must be instituted to reduce or eliminate redundant expenses. This fiduciary duty can be among the most painful for board members of a non-profit organization, since it usually involves reducing staff. [146]

The merged congregation's financial situation continued to deteriorate even prior to the Great Depression. Temple Isaiah Israel owed a total of $325,000 ($4 million in 2005 dollars) to lenders and vendors in February 1925.[147] Beginning in 1926, semi-annual interest payments of $7500 ($170,000 annually in 2005 dollars) to Chicago Title came due.[148] The debt service continued to be tracked in a separate operating budget, as evidenced by the 1928 board resolution for the $7500 semi-annual interest payment to "be collected from individual members by voluntary donation."[149]

For some reason, the board did not appear willing to directly confront the fiscal crisis. The mystery surrounding Isaiah Israel's dual set of operating budgets was finally unveiled in a January1929[150] meeting, when the board resolved "that the problem of equalizing the budget and raising funds for the New Community House are interdependent and should be met as one problem and not as separate items."[151] The board would proceed with the community house only if successful in raising $100,000 upfront. Thus we learn that efforts to raise *new* construction funds had been in direct competition with efforts to curb the cumulative post-merger operating deficit of $34,000 (fiscal years 1926 to 1928).[152] This phenomenon should be familiar to today's non-profit leaders. Major donors prefer funding new construction projects and other high-visibility

---

[146] Definition: **Fiduciary** is a trustee of the organization bound by law to ensure its proper operation
[147] Minutes of Isaiah Temple, (2/21/1925).
[148] Ibid. (12/30/1925.
[149] Ibid. (5/2/1928).
[150] Before the stock market crashed, signaling the Great Depression.
[151] Minutes of Isaiah Temple, (1/31/1929).
[152] Ibid. (8/31/1929).

achievements...to the more mundane concerns of maintenance and operating deficits that may be properly considered communal responsibilities.

Later in 1929, we find evidence that leaders continued their efforts to recruit new members, but they lamented - "our greatest difficulty is the loss of membership and our seeming inability, up to now to add to our numbers sufficiently to guarantee an adequate income."[153] These concerns were true enough, yet board records *still* did not indicate any concerted effort to cut operating costs or redirect major donations to pay down debt. Instead, we learn that leaders were still pushing to complete the new community house. Only $36,000 had been collected for that purpose, but leaders complained "now it is up to the membership to be sufficiently interested to see that this undertaking is carried to completion."[154]

The onset of the Great Depression finally forced Isaiah Israel's leadership to recognize the magnitude of its problems. During the early 1930s, synagogue finances and membership deteriorated at alarming rates. By 1932, Isaiah Israel's post-merger membership had declined 50% to just 348 paying members. Interest accrued[155] on $225,000 of remaining debt, and the board reduced staff and programming costs.[156] Chicago Title and Trust threatened foreclosure in 1934, unless the congregation made the token payment of just $250 per month.[157] The severely weakened community continued to decline in the years after the Great Depression.

The cumulative impact of Isaiah Israel's deferred response to fiscal reality ultimately surfaced in 1937. Funds had not been set aside to care for the rabbis in their retirement. Now both of Isaiah Israel's rabbis were pensioned, leaving the once proud synagogue leaderless and short of funds to hire a new rabbi. The board contemplated mergers with Temple Sinai and KAM that year. Both potential partners refused outright merger due to

---

[153] Minutes of Isaiah Temple, (10/14/1929).
[154] Ibid. (10/27/1929).
[155] Definition: **Accrued interest**: Interest is added to the principle balance of the loan.
[156] Berman, Morton. *The History of Temple Isaiah-Israel Chicago 1852-1952.* (Chicago, Temple Isaiah-Israel, 1952). P.31.
[157] Ibid. P.31.

the liabilities of Isaiah Israel's mortgage and pension obligations. Temple Sinai counter-offered to amalgamate[158] the remaining 200 paying members and assume responsibility for the two rabbis' pensions.[159] This was not an offer to merge; rather, Isaiah Israel's board would first sell the historic site to pay off the mortgage – then they would dissolve the congregation's legal charter. Instead Isaiah Israel chose to immediately raise $20,000 to hire Rabbi Morton Berman[160] for two years. Berman brought a strong reputation as assistant to the renowned Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, formerly of New York's Free Synagogue and founding President of the Jewish Institute of Religion. He succeeded in doubling membership to 522 in only two years.[161] This bold move bought Isaiah Israel some time to recover financially.

Isaiah Israel finally began to recover during World War II, when Chicago Title offered to write down the remaining mortgage balance to $100,000 in return for immediate payments. The board voted to sell subscription bonds[162] that, in effect, transferred the reduced debt to the members.[163] The synagogue's financial position recovered after World War II, and Rabbi Berman presided over the burning of the mortgage at the 1952 Centennial banquet.[164] Isaiah Israel was finally on firm ground for the first time since undertaking construction in 1923. The congregation would prosper for a decade until yet another wave of neighborhood change altered the Chicago landscape.

---

[158] Definition: **Amalgamate**: No merger vote is required. The corporation is dissolved and remaining assets distributed to the members.

[159] Berman, Morton. *The History of Temple Isaiah-Israel Chicago 1852-1952.* (Chicago, Temple Isaiah-Israel, 1952). P.32.

[160] Rabbi Morton Berman: (1899-1986). BA Yale. Ordained JIR. Zionist Organization of America, American Jewish Congress. Marcus, Jacob R., Ed. *The Concise Dictionary of American Jewish Biography.*

[161] Berman, Morton. *The History of Temple Isaiah-Israel Chicago 1852-1952.* (Chicago, Temple Isaiah-Israel, 1952). P.36.

[162] Definition: **Subscriber bonds**: A creative finance technique that pledges income from future synagogue dues and donations to repay the principal of the bond, plus interest. Subscriber bonds were commonly used to induce congregants to invest larger sums in a project than they might provide as a straight gift. This technique, like conventional mortgage financing, stretches out the large upfront costs of a project over time. The main difference is that congregations owed their fellow congregants (bond purchasers) the future payments, instead of a third party like a bank. The terms of subscriber bonds may have been less restrictive than conventional bank financing.

[163] Berman, Morton. *The History of Temple Isaiah-Israel Chicago 1852-1952.* (Chicago, Temple Isaiah-Israel, 1952). P.39.

[164] Temple Isaiah Israel. Centennial Banquet Program. (5/11/1952). 1.

It is worthwhile at this point to engage in a bit of informed conjecture about the leadership mentality that led to such wrenching financial troubles. Business startups commonly accrue large debts in the early years of their existence (and the majority go bankrupt!), but we seldom find a non-profit religious organization assuming such relatively large obligations without a serious plan to raise funds. Therefore some board members must have been comfortable with taking bold risks. The construction of such a magnificent edifice made a statement to Jewish and Christian neighbors alike; Isaiah Israel was a monumental religious force on the South Side. Ironically, we note that the sheer magnitude of the project placed the community in a position of financial weakness for decades. The board compounded this problem by merging with another weak congregation (Bnai Sholom Temple Israel) during the midst of the financial crisis. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully investigate such matters, the nature of Isaiah Israel's board personalities and decision-making processes might help future historians analyze how this crisis unfolded. This study returns to the travails of Isaiah Israel in the forthcoming discussion of its 1971 merger with KAM.

Temple Sholom

Chicago's history of neighborhood change and synagogue competition provides another example of a building project that engendered financial distress. Temple Sholom was an established Reform presence on the Near North side. The Conservative synagogue Anshe Emet made a cash offer for Temple Sholom's site in 1926, prompting a search for a new location. Temple Sholom's board first proposed a merger with Temple Sinai (Sinai was an early-mover to the South Side, and was already looking to establish a presence on the city's growing North Side). This match seemed likely because the two congregations had similar socio-economic backgrounds and Classical Reform practices. Board minutes of Oct 15, 1927, indicate that the congregations considered building a central city synagogue costing $3.5 million, plus north and south community centers costing $500,000 each.[165] This grandiose project would have cost an astonishing $54

[165] Lefkovitz, Elliot. "Temple Sholom: 125 Years of Living Judaism." (Chicago, 1993). P. 27.

million dollars in 2005![166] No merger resulted from the discussions, and the parties proceeded with separate plans.[167]

Temple Sholom set out to build a monumental structure of its own at the present Near North location on Lake Shore Drive. Members laid the cornerstone on November 4, 1928 – one year before the Great Depression.[168] The $700,000 mortgage ($8 million in 2005 dollars) caused financial distress that forced the board to strengthen dues collection efforts and implement staff salary cuts in 1931.[169] Making matters worse, the effects of the Great Depression caused a loss of 200 members by 1932.[170] In 1935, the Board voted to explore a merger with Anshe Emet, but the negotiation failed – and matters became desperate.

The financial troubles finally resulted in a coup, when Temple Sholom replaced Rabbi Abraham Hirschberg after 38 years service; Hirschberg's supporter President Benjamin Englehard resigned his membership. Temple Sholom attempted to boost membership by hiring the charismatic Rabbi Louis Binstock in 1936. He succeeded in gradually reestablishing Temple Sholom's prominent role in the Chicago Reform community.[171] Leaders endeavored to ease the financial distress in 1941, when their lender offered to reduce the mortgage interest rate to 3% if they could pay down $100,000 of principle balance immediately. A banquet held at the Standard Club successfully raised the target amount - marking the start of a long financial recovery.[172]

Temple Sholom's membership declined by the early 1970s. At that time, Temple Sholom explored mergers with other area synagogues (South Shore Temple and Temple Sinai)[173] before deciding to amalgamate the failing Temple Beth Am.

---

[166] United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.org). 1930 dollars adjusted for inflation.
[167] Lefkovitz, Elliot. "Temple Sholom: 125 Years of Living Judaism." (Chicago, 1993). P. 27-28.
[168] Ibid. P. 33.
[169] United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.org). 1930 dollars adjusted for inflation.
[170] Lefkovitz, Elliot. "Temple Sholom: 125 Years of Living Judaism." (Chicago, 1993). P. 39-41.
[171] Ibid. p. 41-42.
[172] Ibid. p. 49.
[173] Ibid. p. 87.

Temple Beth Am

The brief history of Temple Beth Am begins with a schism from KAM. Rabbi Jacob Weinstein became KAM's rabbi in 1939 and embarked on a 10 year egalitarian 'experiment' to involve lay people in study, worship participation, and open debate over the issues of the day. Female congregants were especially eager to participate. Social action leaders trained to organize the surrounding community, and KAM members were at the forefront of integration efforts in Hyde Park. KAM announced a 1946 expansion of Rabbi Weinstein's vision with a newsletter that notes: "Lay Program Planned: Nationally known for the magnitude of its splendid lay activities, KAM Temple plans a Centenary program that will be primarily noted for its member participation." Unfortunately, KAM's expanding lineup of programs also took a toll on synagogue staff. The back page of this same newsletter contains a Help Wanted ad stating, "KAM Temple is understaffed and has desperate need of experienced clerical help. In the face of an ever-expanding program of lay activities...the office is unable to keep pace with the mounting administrative and clerical work."[174]

Tensions between expansive lay-led programs, overtaxed synagogue staff, and rabbinic boundaries resulted in the 1948 schism. "Incidents multiplied, revealing a serious difference between the senior rabbi, and the president of the congregation."[175] Records indicate that Rabbi Weinstein decided that the egalitarian experiment had gone too far. He began to reassert control by cautioning lay leaders about the need for professional teaching and the authority of trained staff. Part of the problem was Weinstein's disdain for administrative matters. According to KAM's 1967 retrospective, "techniques, empirically developed, must be employed and guidelines established to afford a proper balance between the spiritual and the administrative...It was an imbalance here that gave rise to the schism of 1948."[176]

---

[174] *KAM News*: Vol 13, #3. September 24, 1946, 1-4.
[175] Kehilath Anshe Maariv. "120 Years: A History of KAM Temple 1847-1967." P. 28.
[176] Ibid. P. 6.

Those opposed to Rabbi Weinstein's reassertion of authority included KAM President Max Schreyer and his allies, who "believed that the rabbis stood in the same relation to the Congregational Board as did any paid executive to the legally constituted management of a corporation and that the rabbis should, therefore, take their orders from the executive lay leadership...a series of dramatic board meetings failed to bring the opposing groups together."[177] Approximately 7/8ths of the congregation sided with Rabbi Weinstein – while the splinter group formed Temple Beth Am under Mr. Schreyer and former Assistant Rabbi Friedland (who reportedly did nothing to undermine Rabbi Weinstein).[178]

Temple Beth Am inhabited two South Side locations during the coming decades – the second location being on the far edge of Jewish neigborhoods. Although Beth Am didn't appear to experience a fiscal crisis, it eventually had to consider merger (first with Temple Sinai) due to neighborhood dislocations that accelerated in the 1960s. Its location on the periphery raised the prospect of slowly declining membership and resources. An early hint of partnership occurred in March 1974, when the temple bulletin announced, "Rabbi Schwartz of Temple Sholom will speak on his various programs at Friday services."[179] A fall bulletin mentioned that the Long Range Planning Committee had met to discuss "disposing of our physical plant. Also presented was a review of several merger discussions, none of which are presently viable."[180]

The following May, congregants received a rather poignant letter from Rabbi Friedland:

> The years have dealt kindly with our Temple structure...The entire enterprise was a minor miracle. And, that we managed to survive a changing and changed community, added to the wonder of it all. Others were discouraged or dropped from sight long ago. We struggled to maintain our identity and, continue to, until this day. And yet, in the last analysis, the existence of a congregation is more than identification with a facility of bricks and mortar...What shall we dedicate in the future? I am

[177] Kehilath Anshe Maariv. "120 Years: A History of KAM Temple 1847-1967." P. 28.
[178] Norman Schwartz (Director, Chicago Jewish Historical Society, and member Temple Sholom), in discussion with the author, August 2005.
[179] Beth Am Reporter. Courtesy of Chicago Jewish Archives. (March, 1974).
[180] Ibid. (September 1974).

> not sure that the real dedication will be a building; we did that once. The real dedication will be of ourselves...Let us hope we will move into the next phase of our congregational life with enthusiasm and hope for new opportunities.[181]

This solemn admission of the inevitable was followed by communal parlor discussions and a June 1975 board decision to amalgamate, with Temple Sholom. Amalgamation is normally used to shut down a failed organization, but some synagogue boards used amalgamation to circumvent Illinois laws requiring a 2/3rd majority vote of the *entire* congregation to merge (avoiding the potential for divisive debates). The records state: "Since the action was an amalgamation rather than a proposed merger, as was the case with Sinai, approval from the entire membership was not required."[182] The final Beth Am newsletter of August 22, 1975, simply states: "Shalom Beth Am, Shalom Temple Sholom...As everyone knows, the Hebrew word Shalom means Peace, Hello, and Goodbye."[183] Members of the disbanded synagogue held a somber ceremony to dismantle their ark, and they carried the Torah scrolls north to their new home at Temple Sholom.[184]

Post-merger cooperation between rabbis Schwartz and Friedland appeared to be positive, mainly because Schwartz had encouraged a team structure based on trust.[185] We can speculate that the amalgamated group from Beth Am found this style a good fit for their founding principles of egalitarianism.

Beth Am's decision simply to close down and amalgamate with a Near North synagogue illustrates the severity of the neighborhood changes then occurring on the South Side. Many Jews fled to Chicago's northern suburbs. But this only tells part of the Chicago story. Dr. Jaret's study notes that the proportion of Jews living in the suburbs was approximately 40% in the early 1960s, increasing to 50% by 1980.[186] In addition to the

---

[181] Ibid. (May 1975).
[182] Lefkovitz, Elliot. "Temple Sholom: 125 Years of Living Judaism." (Chicago, 1993), 88.
[183] Beth Am Reporter. Courtesy of Chicago Jewish Archives., (August 1975).
[184] Norman Schwartz (Director, Chicago Jewish Historical Society, and member Temple Sholom), in discussion with the author, August 2005.
[185] Lefkovitz, Elliot. "Temple Sholom: 125 Years of Living Judaism." (Chicago, 1993), 89.
[186] Jones, Peter, and Holli, Melvin ed. *Ethnic Chicago.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981). P. 75.

general suburbanization trend sweeping American cities since 1950, Chicago experienced a large Jewish migration *within* the city limits. Thus city neighborhoods such as West Rogers Park and Temple Sholom's Near North location along Lake Michigan experienced growth in the Jewish population, even as the Westside and Hyde Park-South Shore areas rapidly lost Jews. Dr. Jaret noted that "the most frequent type of move made by Jewish households remained an intra-city move, the next most frequent move was a city to suburb move."[187]

KAM Isaiah Israel

The neighborhood changes and social upheaval began to peak in 1967, first affecting South Shore Temple, located on the far southern edge of Jewish settlements. The first hint of a potential merger surfaced when Isaiah Israel offered assistance in a "particularly dramatic example of the creative and constructive value of the cooperative programming we have been doing in many areas with our good friends and neighbors at South Shore Temple." The synagogues held a joint confirmation class trip to HUC and a joint Sisterhood Sabbath.[188] Isaiah Israel's President Milton Altbach wrote to his congregation about a December board resolution to define a blueprint for formal merger with South Shore Temple by September 1, 1968. "I know that there have been countless rumors and discussions concerning the proposed merger; but, until definite action had been taken it was pointless for me to give you a progress report."[189] Already the two synagogues had over 100 people working on the merger integration, and they held joint religious school, adult education, and summer services.[190]

In retrospect, we may deduce that problems surfaced with the preliminary integration of the South Shore Temple and Isaiah Israel operations. That same month, Isaiah Israel's Rabbi Hayim Perlmutter wrote: "We know full well that just as the most dismal part of

---

[187] Jaret, Charles. "Residential Mobility and Local Jewish Community Organization in Chicago." (PhD thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1977). P. 128.
[188] Isaiah Israel Tidings (2/21/1967). Courtesy of Chicago Jewish Archives. (Collection 65, Box 1, Folder 8).
[189] Isaiah Israel. Memo to congregation. (12/5/1967). Courtesy Chicago Jewish Archives: (Collection 65, Box 1, Folder 5).
[190] Ibid. (12/5/1967).

the Hanukah story is for the struggle between Jew and Jew, between Judaist and Hellenist within the community, so the most glorious pages of Jewish history have been written by Jews who work together to achieve a finer, more united community." Perlmutter goes on to urge continued cooperation with the integration efforts.[191]

A different indication of internal frustrations surfaced in June 1968, when the Isaiah Israel newsletter published an angry letter from a college student rebuking the rabbi for not supporting college student protests.

> No, Rabbi, the problem lies not with the American campus. Rather it lies with those...that laugh when Richard Daley's officers of the law behave like storm troopers [1968 Democratic Convention]...those that do nothing when South Shore tries to stabilize itself and when the Bowen community faces the same racial crisis South Shore faced eight years ago.[192]

There was little further mention of the South Shore Temple in Isaiah Israel's minutes, but the fall 1968 brotherhood newsletter contains a front-page article about the need for cooperation and compromise.[193] Although the two synagogues continued to hold joint services in 1969, Isaiah Israel began to consider other merger partners.[194]

Meanwhile Isaiah Israel faced yet another existential crisis. President Milton Altbach notified the community about raising dues from $198 to $220. "Our Temple, like all others, must face and overcome the problem of rising costs and shifting population." Altbach stepped down the following month.[195] The general feeling of despair was captured in the spring 1969 Isaiah Israel Brotherhood newsletter article poignantly titled "Isaiah Israel Brotherhood in 1980?" The author writes:

> We started out living in beautiful apartments in Hyde Park and South Shore...With the advent of a large city expansion, civil rights, a high economic living level, and a Negro population explosion, we are now

[191] Isaiah Israel Tidings. (9/27/1967). Courtesy of Chicago Jewish Archives (Collection 65, Box 1, Folder 8).
[192] Ibid. (6/5/1968).
[193] Ibid. (2/28/1968).
[194] Ibid. (2/6/1969).
[195] Ibid. (5/21/1969).

> faced with the problem of integration...We are faced with the decision of either moving farther away from central Chicago, or moving into the luxurious High Rise apartments scattered along the lakefront.[196]

This article appears to depict the fears of the times accurately. Many Jews were torn between calls for social justice and the economic realities of neighborhood change. Others were simply biased, or feared living side-by-side with African Americans in an increasingly volatile era of changing social norms, war protests, and racial violence. Within this context, we can attempt to understand the difficult personal decisions facing Chicago's South Side Jewish population.[197]

Most members of Isaiah Israel chose to stand their ground. The December 1969 newsletter announced "An Important Decision" to return the communal religious school to Hyde Park, with bussing inbound from the Jewish communities in the Southwest suburbs and South Shore.[198] Among potential Reform merger partners, nearby KAM appeared to be the most solid candidate, especially given that KAM's neighborhood situation was deteriorating more rapidly than Isaiah Israel's. In a November 1970 correspondence, KAM's Rabbi Simeon Maslin outlined the potential benefits of a merger:

> There is a considerable difference between a senior rabbi/assistant (congregation) rabbi in which congregants must often settle for the assistant, and a co-rabbinate congregation such as is here projected in which one of the two co-rabbis of the congregation will always be available to officiate...The raising and expenditure of over 1/2 million dollars annually by the three Hyde Park Reform congregations is an illegitimate use of money in a critical period...The approach to Judaism at Isaiah Israel is considerably closer to that of KAM than is Sinai's to KAM. Vestiges of 'classical reform' still cling to Sinai. Fewer will disaffiliate in such a merger.[199]

Merger negotiations proceeded rapidly as word began to spread around the Hyde Park Jewish communities. An April 1971 KAM letter from Rabbi Maslin begins:

---

[196] Isaiah Israel. *Male Call*. Spring 1969. Courtesy of Chicago Jewish Archives.
[197] See section on neighborhood change in *Historical Trends Affecting Synagogue Mergers* chapter.
[198] Isaiah Israel Tidings. Courtesy of Chicago Jewish Archives. (12/31,1969).
[199] Minutes of Isaiah Temple, (11/11/1970).

> You may have heard rumors about a merger between our congregation [KAM] and Temple Isaiah Israel. We are writing to you now to tell you that these rumors are well founded...The main purpose of the proposed merger, as stated in the resolution adopted by the Board in April, is 'to serve the membership of KAM Temple more effectively in the future, and to provide the best possible religious, educational and social program for the Jewish community of Chicago's Southside.'[200]

Soon after Rabbi Maslin explained the painful realities to his congregation. Maslin claimed, "the primary motivation of this merger is not the saving of money but the increase of program." KAM had considered a merger invitation from Sinai, but "delicate issues were involved, issues of considerably more importance...than location" (possibly a reference to Sinai's Classical Reform tendencies). KAM had even studied the option of independently moving north in 1969, but over 70% of members still lived in Hyde Park. Finally Maslin made the case for why KAM should give up its own site in the merger. KAM's building was old, difficult to maintain, and the Isaiah Israel site would have "secure, well-lit, off-street parking." In addition, Isaiah Israel was a landmark and had good school facilities. The merged congregations could afford to build a new community house "without a major fund campaign...This new building, together with its increased contiguous off-street parking, will say more about our confidence in the future of Chicago and Hyde Park as a place to live and raise children than a thousand platitudinous statements."[201]

The official June 13, 1971, merger agreement states that Rabbis Perlmutter and Maslin would become "co-rabbis of the Congregation with equal status and responsibility." An independent CPA audited the respective synagogues' books. All members of the respective boards were retained, and leaders immediately embarked on "a program of new building and rehabilitation of the sanctuary and its adjoining Community House."

---

[200] KAM Newsletter, (4/20,1971).
[201] Ibid. (5/4/1971).

The joint leadership stipulated, "there will be free seating of members and no permanent 'seat owners'[202] in the Congregation. The Congregation will give recognition to persons who were seat owners of either party by suitable plaque or other testimonial."[203] The old KAM building was eventually sold to The Reverend Jesse Jackson's Operation PUSH.[204]

The two congregations independently ratified the merger by the 2/3rd majority required by the State of Illinois, and held united services at "The Temple" (formerly Isaiah Israel) on June 25, 1971.[205] The August 3rd joint newsletter was printed under the letterhead "KAM Isaiah Israel Congregation: 1847 Illinois' First Congregation." Technically, this was true; however we note early signs of KAM dominance over the relative historical importance of the two communities. Divided loyalties began to surface immediately as the complicated interactions of a co-rabbinate organization began to surface. Rabbi Maslin noted that "our union is now a month old and the congregational pot is bubbling...Has our merger created problems? Yes - including the issue of rabbis officiating at funerals during the summer of congregants from the opposite congregation." The July 14 newsletter admitted to an obvious issue – there were not enough seats for 800 families at High Holy Day services, so they opted for consecutive services.[206]

The short-term effect of the KAM Isaiah Israel merger was to stem the bleeding from neighborhood change. Reform Jews who wished to remain in the South Side now had a viable alternative to relocation. Together the communities collected enough member dues to pay their combined staff. The operating budget was balanced and the synagogue maintained an $11,000 cash reserve.

---

[202] American synagogues often 'sold' assigned pews to raise funds for construction or other needs. The most expensive pews were also the best seats in the sanctuary (e.g. closest to the pulpit). This non-egalitarian method of seating was sometimes a source of friction, especially when later generations inherited their forbears' pews. In Isaiah Israel's case, proud pew owners would need to give up their preferred status in order to facilitate the integration of KAM members.
[203] Merger Argreement: KAM Isaiah Israel., (6/13/1971).
[204] Operation PUSH still occupies the former site of KAM.
[205] Merger Argreement: KAM Isaiah Israel., (4/20/1971).
[206] Correspondence: KAM Isaiah Israel. Courtesy of Chicago Jewish Archives, (8/23/1971).

Tensions percolated to the surface by 1977 as vestiges of the former Isaiah Israel's financial practices began to effect current board decisions. The old Isaiah board had not set aside enough money for Rabbi Perlmutter's retirement, sparking disputes over the best course of action. Even though divided congregant loyalties were already manifest due to the co-rabbinate structure, the combined KAM Isaiah Israel board voted to *extend* Perlmutter's contract 2 years past age 65 - then he would become emeritus with a $5000 annual pension. This action would indefinitely extend growing tensions between two strong rabbinic personalities – who once engaged in a shoving match on the pulpit during religious services.[207] To make matters worse, a board motion to pay for Perlmutter's pension by reducing Maslin's salary by $5000 was only defeated 18-14, clearly reflecting the congregation's divided loyalties. Later in that same board meeting, there were proposals to draw down principle[208] from the KAM-Isaiah Israel Foundation to pay for current repairs.[209] This signaled the continuation of a long battle with high maintenance costs for a magnificent sanctuary - that is seldom used for religious services.

The KAM Isaiah Israel merger was problematic from the start; observers suggest that factionalism continued for several decades.[210] Today KAM Isaiah Israel is a stable Reform presence in Hyde Park; however, the congregation still struggles with the high maintenance costs they inherited from decisions made more than 80 years ago.[211]

Chicago Summary and Analysis:

All of the Chicago synagogue mergers examined in this case, at some level, were byproducts of real estate decisions. Synagogue leaders, responding to neighborhood change and synagogue competition, repeatedly decided to replant their congregations in a new location. Eventually, some congregations merged or amalgamated due to a constellation of direct and indirect pressures. The sheer number and velocity of

---

[207] (Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf, Emeritus KAM Isaiah Israel), in discussion with the author, August, 2005.
[208] Foundations generally invest the 'principle,' and disburse only the investment income generated over time.
[209] Minutes of Isaiah Temple. (5/4/1977)
[210] (Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf, Emeritus KAM Isaiah Israel), in discussion with the author, August, 2005.
[211] The magnificent main sanctuary is used infrequently, but maintenance and heat bills remain high.

synagogue location changes raise the critical question: Why were the leaders of these Chicago synagogues inclined to move their congregations during the Roaring Twenties and post-World War II eras?

This phenomenon of constant construction and relocation – at first inspection - appears to be driven primarily by external factors, including natural disasters, rapid Jewish population growth, and neighborhood change. These externalities were aided by the construction of public transportation that facilitated access to center city jobs. But external drivers do not, by themselves, explain the number and velocity of synagogue relocations in the decades after the 1880s. With regards to population growth, one could just as easily make the case for leaving the old congregation in place - and starting a brand new synagogue elsewhere (this phenomenon did occur with regularity, including Isaiah Temple's 1895 spin-off from the Zion Congregation).[212] During the Roaring Twenties, economic decisions to take advantage of emerging real estate opportunities appear to have influenced these Chicago synagogue leaders as much as neighborhood change.

By contrast, neighborhood change does appear to have been the primary driver in the post-World War II case studies herein examined; but this does not explain all of the leaders' decisions. Indeed, KAM Isaiah Israel leaders chose to remain in Hyde Park – even as thousands of South Side Jews fled to other city neighborhoods and the suburbs. If Jewish population growth and neighborhood change do not fully explain the frequent relocations, other potential motivations for this phenomenon need to be found.

Good old-fashioned competitive spirit may partially explain the internal motivations of Chicago's Jewish leaders. Clearly, turn of the century Chicago was a hotbed of architectural competition and grand construction projects. And the new synagogue designs often exceeded the congregation's resources by a wide margin. Whether a particular project was the result of ego aggrandizement, a statement of arrival to Christian

[212] Meites, Hyman, ed. *History of the Jews of Chicago.* (Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, edition 1990). P. 518.

neighbors, or simply a matter of 'keeping up with the Weinsteins' - is a matter of investigation for future historians. Another competitive issue, first noted in the *Historical Trends Affecting Synagogue Mergers* chapter, was the national trend toward Reform synagogue-centers that began in the 1890s.[213] Chicago's Reform rabbis were at the forefront of this movement to make education and social activities the center of Jewish life. Reform congregations that found themselves without a synagogue-center after 1900 may have been at a disadvantage in terms of recruiting members and their resources. It is distinctly possible that leaders used the perceived need for a synagogue-center to justify the construction of both a 'temple' and synagogue-center on a completely new site – especially when the existing site contained no room for a contiguous center.[214] The competitive spirits of Chicago's Jewish leaders helped to determine the scale of new synagogue construction, but we still have not fully answered the critical question: Why were Chicago's Jewish leaders so obsessed with moving their congregations again and again?

It is tempting to speculate that Chicago's Jewish leaders made the most of opportunities afforded by a rapidly growing Jewish population, and the ever-expanding rings of residential construction that occurred after the Chicago fires of the 1870s. In this scenario, the 'early-movers'[215] (e.g. Isaiah Temple's 1899 relocation to 45th Street) were intelligent real estate speculators who anticipated urban growth - and the subsequent resettlement of their congregants into the newer, more affluent neighborhoods south of the central business district. The early purchase of less expensive land and construction of a synagogue, may have acted as a magnet to draw Jews into a new neighborhood.[216] The subsequent influx of Jews may have driven property values higher, allowing the early-movers to sell their synagogues at a profit to late-comer congregations (e.g. KAM's 1889 sale to Bnai Sholom at 26th Street) and move further south – ahead of the pack. An abundant supply of mortgage debt as a source of construction capital (pre-Depression)

---

[213] See *Historical Trends Affecting Synagogue Mergers* chapter.
[214] This also is a good topic for further investigation.
[215] Definition: **Early Mover** is a term borrowed from corporate strategic planners to describe the advantages that accrue to the first participants in a new market. The advantages may include low cost of entry, high brand recognition, and the ability to exit that market once competition drives down profits.
[216] Research for this detail was beyond the scope of this paper. See footnote below on Greenebaum family.

allowed the speculation to continue unabated – even when synagogue leaders could not find a latecomer synagogue to purchase their abandoned property (e.g. Isaiah Temple, which arranged a mortgage for the Bethesda Baptist Church).[217] The Great Depression put the brakes on the most rampant speculation, as mortgage lenders clamped down on non-profit institutions like synagogues. Those synagogues that found themselves mired in debt struggled to survive – many were eventually forced to merge or amalgamate.

All in all, Chicago's historical phenomenon of synagogue relocations was a vibrant creative force - one that ultimately divided scarce communal resources to the point where many congregations' finances collapsed. One could posit that neighborhood change was the proximate cause for relocation (or merger) in most cases; but that explanation fails to take into account the competitive pressures, early-mover benefits, and sheer excitement of building lasting monuments - that likely influenced leaders to recommend relocation on such a frequent basis. Unfortunately, most of their final relocations into the arms of a merger partner were initially difficult and unhappy affairs. Many of the abandoned synagogue buildings still stand today (most are now churches) – monuments to the ambitions of an earlier generation of American Jewry.

B. Cincinnati Case Study

Introduction:

Cincinnati was a frontier river town when the first white settlers arrived in 1788. By 1817, individual Jews began to inhabit the bustling trading and manufacturing town.[218] The Jewish community grew from 1,000 persons in 1840 to over 16,000 by the turn of

[217] This would make a good topic of investigation for future historians, specifically, the role of Henry Greenebaum. Their family mortgage bank was praised for Chicago reconstruction efforts after the fire of 1871. Greenebaums were co-founders of KAM, Bnai Sholom, and Temple Isaiah. The Greenebaum Trust Company provided the funds for the Bethesda Baptist Church purchase of the former Temple Isaiah.
[218] Sarna, Jonathan. *The Jews of Cincinnati.* (Cincinnati: Center for the Study of the American Jewish Experience, 1989). P 1.

the twentieth century.[219] During the Civil War, Cincinnati possessed the third largest Jewish population (over 7,000) in the United States.[220]

During the final decades of the nineteenth century, famed leaders such as Isaac Mayer Wise founded national Jewish communal institutions (Hebrew Union College and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations), and a number of synagogues arose to support the growing population. Historian Jonathan Sarna describes the Jewish community's self-image of the times: "Symbolically speaking, the community had come to represent a vision of the future, a Jewish version of the American dream, a "sort of paradise" not yet fully realized, but surely moving in the right direction."[221]

This case study traces key developments leading to the 1931 merger of Reading Road Temple and Plum Street Temple (later named Isaac M. Wise Temple). We shall encounter the familiar themes of neighborhood change and synagogue competition. Additionally, the socio-religious factors of communications and clergy-lay leader friction that often impact a merger decision are examined in detail.

Ahavath Achim – Sherith Israel

The 1906 merger of Cincinnati congregations Ahavath Achim and Sherith Israel provides insights into turn-of-the-century struggles between orthodox Jews and reformers. The issues manifested themselves in ongoing tensions about rituals and clergy authority over a 40-year period. Tensions between clergy and lay leaders were also a major source of negotiations intrigue. Once both congregations employed reform-minded clergy, final negotiations resulted in a 'conservative' congregation still split among factions. We now outline a case study of Ahavath Achim – Sherith Israel (commonly known as 'Reading Road Temple') with special attention to leadership issues.

---

[219] Sarna, Jonathan. *The Jews of Cincinnati.* (Cincinnati: Center for the Study of the American Jewish Experience, 1989). P. 181.
[220] Marcus, Jacob R. *To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585-1984.* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1989). P. 172.
[221] Ibid. P 1.

The orthodox congregation Ahavath Achim incorporated in 1848, and built its first synagogue on downtown Cincinnati's Race Street in 1850. This congregation grew quickly and raised funds to construct the 'John Street Temple' in 1864.[222] The building cost $47,000 (plus land), burdening the congregation with a mortgage that it struggled to pay off by 1898.[223] Ahavath Achim experimented with various reforms, including Isaac Mayer Wise's *Minhag America* siddur that "aroused a storm, some deeming this prayer book too orthodox, and others not orthodox enough."[224] Many members moved to the near suburbs, prompting Ahavath Achim to sell its John Street site and establish temporary quarters in Walnut Hills in 1903.

Another orthodox congregation, Sherith Israel, formed in 1856 in response to the liturgical reforms instituted by Rabbi Max Lilienthal at K.K. Bene Israel (later known as Rockdale Avenue Temple).[225] The splinter group worshiped for 9 years with a cantor until hiring Rabbi Bernard Illowy - "one of the ablest champions of orthodoxy in his day."[226] Sherith Israel joined the nascent UAHC in 1873 alongside other prominent Cincinnati congregations.[227] At that time, Isaac Mayer Wise and other UAHC founders intended for the umbrella organization to be non-denominational. Sherith Israel's leaders were exposed to the growing tensions between reformers and more traditional practices that eventually resulted in denominational schism. Sherith Israel appears to have adopted some reform practices in the following decades, including the use of an organ starting in 1894.[228] Membership began to decline as Jews moved to the near suburbs and reformers gained prominence in Cincinnati. In 1905, the congregation sold its building and moved to temporary June Street quarters in 1905.[229]

---

[222] Krantz, Philip. "An Account of Congregation Ahabath Achim - Sherith Israel, Cincinnati, OH 1906-1931." Unpublished. American Jewish Archives, 1969. p. 1.
[223] Heller, James. *As Yesterday When It Is Past: A History of the Isaac M. Wise Temple K.K. B'nai Jeshurun 1842-1942.* (Cincinnati: Isaac M. Wise Temple, 1942). P. 199.
[224] Sherith Israel-Ahabath Achim. Souvenir program given at Fair, 1906. American Jewish Archive. p. 7.
[225] Rabbi Max Lillienthal: (1815-1882). PhD University of Munich. Arrived U.S. 1844. Faculty HUC.
[226] Sherith Israel-Ahabath Achim. Souvenir program given at Fair, 1906. American Jewish Archive. p. 3.
[227] Krantz, Philip. "An Account of Congregation Ahabath Achim - Sherith Israel, Cincinnati, OH 1906-1931." Unpublished. American Jewish Archives, 1969. p. 2.
[228] Sherith Israel-Ahabath Achim. Souvenir program given at Fair, 1906. American Jewish Archive. p. 5.
[229] Krantz, Philip. "An Account of Congregation Ahabath Achim - Sherith Israel, Cincinnati, OH 1906-1931." Unpublished. American Jewish Archives, 1969. p.3.

The migration of Jews to newer neighborhoods was a 'trigger event' that set many mergers in motion during the first decades of the 20th century.[230] In this case, we have two nominally 'orthodox' groups inhabiting temporary sites. Both groups had experienced a decline in membership and adopted certain reformist practices. The similarities of worship style and timing of their respective real estate transactions led them to form Congregation Ahavath Achim – Sherith Israel in 1906 under the leadership of Rabbi Jacob Mielziner (Ahavath Achim) and Cantor Aaron Grodsky (Sherith Israel).[231] In 1906, members constructed a new synagogue on Reading Road near Ridgeway Avenue – hence their common name 'Reading Road Temple.'

Worship rituals were a source of contention in this merger from the start. The new synagogue's *Articles of Incorporation II* state: "The principles thereof shall be those of a conservative congregation, and to promote Judaism in all that word implies."[232] The board stipulated that ritual changes would be frozen for one year, and any subsequent changes must pass by a 2/3rd majority of the congregation. This appears to be a reasonable compromise that allowed the respective communities to integrate gradually, but one problematic practice carried over from previous years: clergy were not considered members, nor were they allowed to participate in board meetings.[233] The clergy appeared to be caught in a crossfire, as reform-minded members gravitated toward Rabbi Mielziner, and more traditional congregants preferred Cantor Grodsky. Divisions over allocation of resources and worship rituals surfaced when the rabbi was formally reprimanded in 1913 for sermonizing on the importance of religious school funding at Rosh Hashana. The board further resolved that Meilziner's "addresses in the future must be in conformity with the policy of our Congregation, which is conservative."[234] Then the board refused to renew Rabbi Meilziner's contract unless he would "agree to abide by our constitution and bylaws and live up to our ritual."[235] In 1915, Meilziner expressed

---

[230] See Historical Trends Affecting Synagogue Mergers chapter II.
[231] Krantz, Philip. "An Account of Congregation Ahabath Achim - Sherith Israel, Cincinnati, OH 1906-1931." Unpublished. American Jewish Archives, 1969. p.4.
[232] K.K. Ahavath Achim - Sherith Israel. Articles of Incorporation. American Jewish Archives, Small Collection. pp. 1-3
[233] Ibid. pp. 1-3.
[234] Minutes of Ahabath Achim - Sherith Israel. p. 133.
[235] Ibid. p. 137.

more frustration over lack of school funding, and vacated the pulpit.[236] The change of clergy would do nothing to resolve underlying tensions.

Rabbi Jacob Kaplan assumed the pulpit in 1915 and immediately began to sermonize about poor attendance.[237] Internal friction between clergy and lay leaders continued as the board resolved that the rabbi "should not invite any outside speaker to talk on Zionism."[238] The gradual adoption of reforms surfaced again in the 1916 vote to change the bylaws to allow members to uncover their heads during worship services.[239] Reading Road Temple then voted to use the reformist Union Prayer Book in 1917.[240] By 1920, Reading Road Temple was home to 210 members, of which approximately half were considered 'conservative.'[241] This type of long-term 50-50 division over a congregation's goals and structure proved difficult to maintain, inflicting stress on the clergy, lay leaders, and factions involved. Financial problems would provoke additional stress in the congregation, inducing leaders to consider yet another merger after only 14 years of independent existence.

K.K. Bene Yeshurun and Reading Road Temple

Tentative merger discussions between Reading Road Temple and K.K. Bene Yeshurun (commonly known as Plum Street Temple and later renamed Isaac M. Wise Temple) began in February 1920, when both synagogues formed merger committees. From the start, Reading Road Temple insisted that conservative services (run by Cantor Grodsky) must continue at Wise Center[242] (a nearby synagogue-center) or the existing Reading Road Temple site.[243] The fate of Rabbi Kaplan was immediately an issue of contention. Reading Road Temple's board requested that he receive a one-year term as associate

---

[236] Krantz, Philip. "An Account of Congregation Ahabath Achim - Sherith Israel, Cincinnati, OH 1906-1931." Unpublished. American Jewish Archives, 1969. p.8.
[237] Ibid. p.9.
[238] Minutes of Ahabath Achim - Sherith Israel. p. 110.
[239] Ibid. p. 169.
[240] Krantz, Philip. "An Account of Congregation Ahabath Achim - Sherith Israel, Cincinnati, OH 1906-1931." Unpublished. American Jewish Archives, 1969. p. 12.
[241] Minutes of Plum Street Temple, (2/22/20).
[242] The original Wise Center. A new Wise center was built in 1927.
[243] Minutes of Plum Street Temple, (2/22/20).

rabbi in the combined organization,[244] but Plum Street's leaders rejected his hiring and negotiations broke down by May.[245] The minutes and correspondence reviewed to date are not clear on the reasons for Plum Street's resistance to Rabbi Kaplan; however, the congregation was already in the midst of a hiring process that installed James Heller as Associate Rabbi.

Rabbi Kaplan's difficulties with Reading Road Temple lay leaders continued for six more years. This partly stems from his ongoing efforts to allocate more resources to education programs in order to compete with area synagogues. Board minutes from June 18, 1922, recap the synagogue's ongoing financial problems and issues with school. Rabbi Kaplan dejectedly offered to reduce school activities and teach certain classes himself. He stated:

> In a large city the interests of men and women are so many fold...thus often congregations suffer spiritual pain and disorder...When I came to this city, I suggested a plan for congregational life which was not adopted by our congregation, but was adopted by another congregation. Since then I outlined another plan which also was not adopted by our congregation, but which I am told will be adopted by another congregation in the city.[246]

Apparently, Reading Road Temple was falling behind its Cincinnati competitors in the race to expand education and ancillary programs. The lack of sufficient facilities for such programs would figure prominently in the sequence of events that led to merger.

Merger discussions took place in 1923, with no formal results.[247] The first indication of serious merger considerations occurred on December 21, 1925, when both synagogues' minutes mentioned mergers for different reasons. Plum Street Temple President A.W. Goldsmith reported that Sidney Weil of Reading Road Temple made an informal overture that must be kept "confidential."[248] Reading Road's board minutes from the same date mention a "letter" from Mr. Goldsmith suggesting a merger, but this was not read into the

---

[244] Minutes of Plum Street Temple, (3/17/20).
[245] Minutes of Ahabath Achim - Sherith Israel. p. 242.
[246] Ibid. p. 289.
[247] Minutes of Plum Street Temple, (9/23/33).
[248] Ibid. (12/21/25).

minutes.[249] As we shall see, conflicting reports regarding the proposal's origin became a source of contention between the two parties.

Negotiations continued until April 1926, when Plum Street Temple "offers a merger on condition, first that Dr. Kaplan will not be acceptable as an associate Rabbi on the terms proposed by Reading Road Temple." Although Plum Street Temple offered one year's severance pay, Reading Road's board rejected the proposal unless Dr. Kaplan "accepts a suitable call from another pulpit satisfactory to him before amalgamation."[250] At this point, Rabbi Kaplan appeared to be undermined from within his own board – they had tacitly agreed that he must step aside. Kaplan resigned immediately for a pulpit in Miami. The resignation was acrimonious, and Rabbi Kaplan received only $3000 severance (less than ½ year's salary) for his long term of service.[251] Apparently, one point of contention was eliminated.

As so frequently happens in difficult negotiations, leaders tackle the most obvious impediment, and more menacing issues immediately take its place. The overall conduct of the merger negotiations led to the spread of rumors and accusations – probably the result of Kaplan's sudden resignation.[252] Given that the Reading Road congregation was already factionalized, it can be inferred that some members were upset with Kaplan's forced exit, while others supported the measure. Apparently, some of the rumors were aimed at the leaders of Plum Street Temple. Plum Street's board minutes of June 6, 1926, mention "statements which are being circulated reflecting upon the Rabbi and board of Trustees and the members of K.K.B.Y. in connection with the offer for amalgamation *initiated by and for* (author's emphasis) the Trustees of the Reading Road Temple." They demanded a joint meeting wherein Reading Road officials would issue a statement of "actual facts and various steps taken by the Joint Committee as shown by the minutes and the correspondence on file; That in the event they failed to do so, that this board take such steps as they deem advisable to protect the fair name and honor of our

[249] Minutes of Ahabath Avchim - Sherith Israel, (12/21/25).
[250] Ibid. (4/5/26).
[251] Ibid. (4/17/26).
[252] See David Phillipson comments below.

congregation and officers." Apparently, both parties did not do enough to communicate the substance and timing of merger negotiations – especially the financially weaker and internally fractured Reading Road Temple.

Reading Road Temple leaders took the matter seriously: they "expressed their sincere regret at the unfounded rumor which had been circulating, reflecting upon the Committee of the K.K.B.Y. The President of the Reading Road Temple, on behalf of his committee, as well as on behalf of himself, voiced sentiments in complete refutation of the foresaid rumors, and drew up a set of resolutions expressive of those sentiments." Then Reading Road's leaders produced the following statement on June 17. "This board believes that all deliberations of said Committees were honorable and intended for the best interests of Cincinnati."[253] This communication was clear and offered the hope of continued negotiations between parties that otherwise might have completely lost trust in each other's intentions at a critical juncture. The question remains: what was the nature of the "foresaid rumors?"

To date, there are no minutes or correspondence available to explain Plum Street Temple's objections to Rabbi Kaplan, nor do they mention the exact content of the subsequent rumors. Circumstantial evidence [Plum Street's board minutes of Dec 21, 1925, and June 6, 1926] seems to favor Plum Street's version of events in the sense that Reading Road officials initiated the December 1925 discussions. Otherwise, one would expect that Reading Road's mention of a 'letter' from Plum Street's Mr. Goldsmith would have been read into the minutes, or at least stored on file and available to refute counterclaims. We might further speculate that some members of Reading Road Temple would concoct reasons to blame Plum Street leaders for Rabbi Kaplan's expulsion (Kaplan's detractors deflecting their own complicity, or his supporters out of anger). Secondary sources also hint that one of Kaplan's colleagues (most likely Cantor

[253] Minutes of Plum Street Temple, (6/28/26).

Grodsky) was involved in a plot to oust him. This inference is supported by the notes of Rockdale Temple's Rabbi David Philipson:[254]

> Jacob Kaplan...called to see me yesterday. He spoke bravely, but my heart bled for him. Forced out of his position here by the machinations of an ambitious, unscrupulous group that desired to increase the membership of their congregation, he has fallen upon unfortunate days...And the man who was perhaps most instrumental in undermining him here is prospering like a green bay tree...[255]
>
> Kaplan left Cincinnati nearly two years ago. He was literally forced out, since no self-respecting man would have wanted to remain after the experience which was his. The cabal had been hatched by a colleague and his henchmen to effect a combination of two congregations...He learned of the scheme and at once took steps to prevent the consummation. In this he proved successful, but he learned of treachery on the part of supposed friends. He felt so hurt that he determined he could not stay and he resigned.[256]

Despite the conciliatory tone of Reading Road's response to the rumor issue, cumulative miscommunications negated the existing merger effort. Reading Road Temple instituted an unsuccessful replacement search, and "some members of the congregation were in favor of bringing back Dr. Kaplan."[257] Reading Road experienced attrition during the aftermath – even venturing to send a letter of concern to Plum Street's board about alleged recruitment of members. Plum Street Temple's board responded: It is "not the policy of this congregation to solicit members from any other Jewish congregation in this city, and to ask for his facts; stating also that we know of no case where this has been done."[258] Finally, Reading Road hired the recent Hebrew Union College graduate Rabbi Sam Wohl in May 1927; he continued the trend toward ritual and educational reforms. This hiring of an overtly Reform rabbi may have set the stage for renewed negotiations.

---

[254] Rabbi David Philipson: (1862-1949). One of first 4 HUC graduates. Faculty HUC. Served Bene Israel (Rockdale Temple). Pittsburgh Platform and Classical Reform.
[255] Philipson, David. *My Life as An American Jew.* (Cincinnati: John G. Kidd & Son, 1941). Pp.329-330.
[256] Ibid. Pp. 404-405.
[257] Minutes of Ahabath Avchim - Sherith Israel, (2/27/27).
[258] Minutes of Plum Street Temple, (1/31/27).

Meanwhile, Plum Street's board responded to growing religious school enrollments, and local synagogue competition,[259] by building a new Wise Center synagogue-center at a cost in excess of $300,000 ($3.5 million in 2005 dollars).[260] Only $94,000 of pledges had been collected, forcing the board to authorize a $150,000 mortgage.[261] In 1927, the new Wise Center was dedicated at Reading Road and North Crescent.[262] The financial burden of the debt would eventually force Plum Street Temple to reconsider a merger.

The Great Depression took a severe toll on synagogues throughout the country. Financial pressures led to more cooperation in terms of programming, and triggered a wave of mergers when banks refused additional credit to religious institutions. Many members of area synagogues were in arrears on dues, and revoked previous pledges to fund building projects.[263] Even school enrollment deteriorated as families could not afford the extra tuition and books. The presidents of Plum Street Temple, Rockdale Temple, and Reading Road Temple met in June of 1930 to discuss the matter of congregants resigning in arrears to join another local congregation.[264] Meanwhile, financial circumstances at both Reading Road and Plum Street Temple were worsening; the stage was set for serious merger talks.

The first signs of reconciliation appear when Reading Road Temple held joint summer services with Plum Street Temple in 1930.[265] By May of 1931, they entered once again into merger negotiations.[266] Plum Street now carried a bank debt of $92,000 and had exhausted all options for further economies in the operating budget. The congregation was faced with a fateful decision. The U.S. government offered to purchase the historic Plum Street site and demolish the building to make way for a new post office.[267] The board rejected a sale, and the congregation voted on June 2nd to continue merger

---

[259] See *Historical Trends Affecting Synagogue Mergers* chapter.
[260] 1925 dollars inflation adjusted to 2005. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
[261] Minutes of Plum Street Temple, (2/3/1926).
[262] Sarna, Jonathan. *The Jews of Cincinnati.* (Cincinnati: Center for the Study of the American Jewish Experience, 1989). P. 129.
[263] Minutes of Plum Street Temple, (6/23/32).
[264] Ibid. (6/12/30).
[265] Minutes of Ahabath Avchim - Sherith Israel, (6/2/30).
[266] Minutes of Plum Street Temple, (5/3/31).
[267] Ibid. (5/24/31).

negotiations with Reading Road Temple. This time the due diligence and resolutions moved quickly – with both sides approving the merger by June 18th, 1931. The final offer included Rabbi Sam Wohl as associate rabbi, and the assumption of $20,000 of Reading Road's bank debt.[268] Competitive pressures and the Great Depression finally pushed the negotiations to conclusion after 11 years of false starts.

The admission of Rabbi Wohl may have been aided by the deteriorating health of Dr. Heller, who traveled to a European spa later that fall.[269] Nevertheless, Rabbi's Wohl's status as a young HUC graduate would place him in good stead with the reform-minded Plum Street congregation. The combined community now had a total of 908 families (650 Plum Street; 258 Reading Road).[270]

The merged entity continued to experience financial distress during the years immediately following the consolidation. Efforts to further reduce clerical and staff salaries halted when Rabbi Sam Wohl urged the board to engage in systematic collection of past dues and pledges.[271] The economy slowly recovered, and the renamed Isaac M. Wise Temple regained financial viability by 1945.[272] Today, Isaac M. Wise Temple is a thriving congregation in suburban Amberly Village. It continues to support and operate the historic Plum Street synagogue.

C. Milwaukee Case Study

Introduction:

Milwaukee's beginnings may be traced back to an 1830's fur trading post. The frontier village grew rapidly, and the city of Milwaukee incorporated in 1846. By the 1850s, boat traffic from the Great Lakes, and railroad extensions turned Milwaukee into a bustling

---

[268] Minutes of Plum Street Temple, (6/18/31).
[269] Ibid. (10/2/31).
[270] Krantz, Philip. "An Account of Congregation Ahabath Achim - Sherith Israel, Cincinnati, OH 1906-1931." Unpublished. American Jewish Archives, 1969. p. 15.
[271] Minutes of Plum Street Temple, (1/4/34).
[272] Plum Street Temple Annual Income Statement, (10/31/1945). Plum Street ran an $8,300 operating surplus for Fiscal Year 1944-45. The general endowment had been rebuilt to $4600.

commercial center.[273] Approximately 200 Jewish families inhabited the town in 1856.[274] Already, the Jews of Milwaukee had split into three congregations (Anshe Emet, Imanu-Al and Ahabath Emuno), as German Jews clashed with East European immigrants.[275]

In 1856, Milwaukee's first synagogue merger was precipitated by none other than Isaac Mayer Wise - who preached that year at all three fledgling congregations:

> Sunday morning, being the ninth of Ab, I preached again in the other synagogue, and they came not only to listen, but also to act; for, after services were over, a motion was made to appoint committees from the three congregations, and make an attempt to unite them into one.[276]

Two of the congregations, Imanu-Al and Ahabath Emuno, merged later that year into B'ne Jeshurun – a subject of the case study below. In 1859, B'ne Jeshurun built a synagogue for its 70 members.[277] Wise's dedication address, referring to the remaining splinter group Anshe Emet, was a classic example of his preference for a single American *minhag*, and congregational unity wherever possible:

> The union of the congregation in one is sincere and will be lasting. The few hyper-orthodox [Anshe Emet] who are dissatisfied take too much pride in the new temple, which is free of debt, and feel too profoundly the benefit of union, that they should think of separation. Their number is too small to form a congregation, and so they will submit.[278]

Although Anshe Emet never did consent to merge, B'ne Jeshurun grew and prospered during the coming decades, as they slowly adopted ritual reforms. In 1869, a group of 35 wealthy Jews split from B'ne Jeshurun to form Temple Emanu-El, a 'reform'

---

[273] Swichkow, Louis and Gartner, Lloyd. *The History of the Jews of Milwaukee.* (Philadelphia, JPS, 1963). Pp. 7-9.
[274] Ibid. P. 11.
[275] Ibid. P. 35.
[276] *American Israelite*, August 22, 1956, p. 62.
[277] Swichkow, Louis and Gartner, Lloyd. *The History of the Jews of Milwaukee.* (Philadelphia, JPS, 1963). P. 39.
[278] *American Israelite.* September 30, 1859, p. 102.

congregation on the East Side. They modeled their by-laws and rituals after their namesake - Temple Emanu-El of New York.[279]

The events of 1872 provide an interesting insight into the two congregation's relative appetite for risk. After their first synagogue structure deteriorated, B'ne Jeshurun's leaders voted to construct a new building for 400 worshippers on the existing site for $20,000.[280] That same year, Temple Emanu-El built an elaborate structure, with seating for 800 people – far more than their existing membership of 75 families. Emanu-El's new synagogue cost $60,000, financed in part by $14,000 of mortgage debt.[281]

Temple Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun

The 1927 merger of Milwaukee synagogues Temple Emanu-El and B'ne Jeshurun illustrates the potential impact of lay leadership skills on a religious community. Although the Milwaukee merger reveals similar characteristics to other case studies (e.g. financial stress, and clergy opposition),[282] leaders on both sides employed patience and sophisticated communications to overcome these obstacles.

The conditions that prevailed in Milwaukee at the onset of the Roaring Twenties were ripe for a merger. General relations between Temple Emanu-El and B'ne Jeshurun appeared cordial, as evidenced by occasional joint services and educational events.[283] Milwaukee's tradition of Jewish communal cooperation resulted in well-developed service agencies, and leaders often socialized at the downtown athletic club and two Jewish country clubs. The fact that both synagogues had already moved to Classical Reform meant that they shared basic religious values and worship rituals.[284] This history of positive relations was sorely tested during the merger discussions over a 7-year period,

---

[279] Swichkow, Louis and Gartner, Lloyd. *The History of the Jews of Milwaukee.* (Philadelphia, JPS, 1963). Pp. 50-51.
[280] Ibid. P. 172.
[281] Ibid. p.174.
[282] As we shall see, B'ne Jeshurun's rabbi opposed the merger.
[283] Minutes of Temple Emanu-El of Milwaukee (5/2/1909).
[284] Swichkow, Louis and Gartner, Lloyd. *The History of the Jews of Milwaukee.* (Philadelphia, JPS, 1963). P. 203-205.

but records indicate that the favorable starting conditions helped leaders to avoid outright confrontation.

B'ne Jeshurun was a financially stable organization after World War I; however its leaders experienced their share of organizational challenges. B'ne Jeshurun's board argued over a proposed raise of Rabbi Charles Levi's[285] salary to $5500 in 1918.[286] This matter was resolved only two years later when his salary rose to $6600.[287] Although B'ne Jeshurun's synagogue was in good repair, the school facilities and communal meeting areas had become outdated.[288] Meanwhile, Milwaukee Jewry began migrating to upscale neighborhoods on the East Side of town – many joined Temple Emanu-El.[289] This movement created transportation problems, and synagogue leaders began to consider new construction as the solution.

Temple Emanu-El, established in 1869, was an early Jewish presence on the wealthier East Side. Membership growth prompted the congregation to consider building a larger structure. It received an offer of $35,000 for their existing property in 1910.[290] This amount was not enough to cover the cost of new construction. The board acted cautiously by calling for a subscription drive, but 7 months later the offer had dropped to $25,000 and only $10,150 had been raised by subscription.[291] The board became more aggressive and purchased land on Hackett Avenue in February 1913.[292] By May, members had pledged $42,100 against a goal of $100,000, and the property offer for the old site returned to $35,000. It would appear that Emanu-El was ready to move forward with construction, but financial resources were constrained during World War I, delaying the onset of construction.

---

[285] Charles Levi (1868 – 1939). AB Univ. of Cincinnati, ordained HUC. Served pulpits in Cincinnati, Peoria, Milwaukee. Faculty of HUC. Editor of CCAR publications. From *American Jewish Biography*, ed. J.R. Marcus. (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1994). P. 370.
[286] Minutes of B'ne Jeshurun of Milwaukee (10/29/1918).
[287] Ibid. (9/1/1920).
[288] Ibid. (10/14/1919). The national trend was to construct temple/ synagogue centers.
[289] Swichkow, Louis and Gartner, Lloyd. *The History of the Jews of Milwaukee.* (Philadelphia, JPS, 1963). P. 205.
[290] Minutes of Temple Emanu-El of Milwaukee (5/7/1911).
[291] Ibid. (2/18/1912).
[292] Ibid. (2/16/1913).

The difficulty of collecting on subscriptions was evident in 1918, when only $22,476 in pledges were actually on-hand against a subscription goal of $57,929.[293] As economic conditions improved, Emanu-El's leadership took note of construction trends elsewhere, and decided to sell the Hackett site at cost in favor of a property with room for a synagogue-center on Kenwood Avenue.[294] By December 1919, Emanu-El's leadership recommended construction of an elaborate $250,000 facility funded by member pledges and bank debt.[295] They held a festive banquet that raised pledges to only $79,500[296] – still far short of the estimated total cost of land and construction. Temple Emanu-El had only 257 paying members in 1920, so the board resorted to non-standard financing. Although source documents are not clear, it appears that Emanu-El had difficulty obtaining a standard mortgage in the amount necessary to complete construction. Instead, the congregation issued interest-bearing bonds to subscribers, using a $125,000 mortgage as collateral[297] for the subscriber bonds.[298] In effect, members who purchased these bonds expected repayment of their initial 'investment' – plus interest. The financial and construction decisions appear to have been something of a risk at the time, based on the size of Emanu-El's membership and the records that detail the congregation's financial resources.

Temple Emanu-El also experienced tensions in non-financial matters. During a 1919 board meeting, Simon and Nathan Heller motioned for a secret ballot on clergy compensation. This measure failed, but another motion carried to discuss lack of interest

---

[293] Ibid. (3/1/1918).
[294] Ibid. (6/11/1919).
[295] Ibid. (12/13/1919).
[296] Ibid. (12/1/1919).
[297] Definition: **Collateral** is an asset that provides security to the purchaser of a debt instrument (bond). The bank lends the synagogue (a legal corporate entity) a mortgage using the underlying property as collateral. In the event of non-payment, the bank could foreclose and sell the underlying property to pay off the mortgage. In this case, it appears that potential subscribers were unwilling to purchase bond obligations of the synagogue without some assurance of receiving their money back (presumably from future dues income and/or capital donations to the synagogue). So B'ne Jeshurun's mortgage was pledged as collateral for the subscriber bonds (most likely the funds were placed in a restricted escrow account). The financial benefits of such a strategy are unclear, since the underlying mortgage would eventually be repaid out of the same dues/donations income stream needed to pay off the subscriber bonds. It can only be concluded that this strategy encouraged members to fund the construction project at levels greater than the $79,000 raised at their 1919 banquet.
[298] Minutes of Temple Emanu-El of Milwaukee (5/17/1922).

in religious services. President Saltzstein then offered to resign his position due to low attendance and general indifference.[299] The minutes appear to indicate a factional board dispute over support for the rabbi. In the end, board members prevailed upon Saltzstein to remain at his post, but it seems that he was protecting the rabbi from criticism. The evidence of board fissures adds further insights into the reasons why Temple Emanu-El had so much trouble raising donations for the planned construction project: A secret ballot indicates a lack of trust among board members, and discussions about apathy reveal that members were not wholly satisfied with the direction of their community. Therefore, one can understand why some members were reluctant to fund a major project without the reassurance of collateral. Temple Emanu-El's risky decision to build on the East Side also presented a competitive dilemma for their Reform counterparts at B'ne Jeshurun.

B'ne Jeshurun was financially solvent in 1914, but lay leaders did not immediately resort to the new construction option - despite a substantial membership base of 285 families.[300] Subsequent migration of their membership base drained B'ne Jeshurun of resources over time as some members did not wish to commute to worship services and Sunday School. B'ne Jeshurun began to experience financial constraints during World War I; it borrowed $2000 to cover operating deficits in 1917.[301] As economic conditions improved, the board continued to pursue a conservative fiscal strategy by raising subscriptions to pay off the $10,000 mortgage in 1919.[302] B'ne Jeshurun was now debt-free, but they still faced the challenge of Jewish migration; "Its backbone of prosperous members was leaving the West Side for Emanu-El's East Side."[303]

The leadership of each Reform congregation considered the alternatives, and initiated informal merger discussions by late December 1919 (according to Emanu-El's records,

---

[299] Minutes of Temple Emanu-El of Milwaukee (12/30/1919).
[300] Swichkow, Louis and Gartner, Lloyd. *The History of the Jews of Milwaukee.* (Philadelphia, 1963). 203.
[301] Minutes of B'ne Jeshurun of Milwaukee (9/2/1917).
[302] Minutes of B'ne Jeshurun of Milwaukee (11/2/1919).
[303] Swichkow, Louis and Gartner, Lloyd. *The History of the Jews of Milwaukee.* (Philadelphia, JPS, 1963) p. 205.

B'ne Jeshurun took the initiative).[304] B'ne Jeshurun's Max Breslauer suggested that the two full boards meet. Instead, Emanu-El countered with an offer to appoint a joint exploratory committee. The minutes of B'ne Jeshurun's board meetings suggest that Emanu-El's proposal provoked no official reaction.[305] Years later, B'ne Jeshurun members claimed that Emanu-El wasn't seriously interested in a merger, leaving open the possibility that B'ne Jeshurun leaders considered the counter-offer to form an 'exploratory committee' a snub. This breakdown in communications lasted 5 years, during which time B'ne Jeshurun's leaders continued to consider their alternatives cautiously (reviewed below). As B'ne Jeshurun's membership slowly declined, annual operating deficits rose to $1179 by 1926.[306]

B'ne Jeshurun's interest in relocation to the East Side increased due to concerns that its existing property might be demolished to make room for a government building.[307] Still, synagogue leaders were concerned about taking on large financial commitments without the resources to back them up. The negotiations with Milwaukee County finally resulted in a 1924 offer of $130,000 for the property.[308] Leaders also raised subscriptions of $60,000. B'ne Jeshurun now appeared to have the resources to construct a *basic* synagogue. However, the synagogue's leaders had taken note of national trends in synagogue construction, and made plans to build an additional synagogue-center, raising total cost estimates to $250,000. Despite misgivings about annual operating deficits[309] and the inability to raise significant upfront construction pledges, leaders authorized $60,000 in debt to begin construction.[310] They embarked on a membership drive, but still only had 284 members to carry the costs of construction.

By 1924, Temple Emanu-El had completed its magnificent new building, with sanctuary seating for 1085 (existing membership of 442 families). They also moved forward with

---

[304] Minutes of Temple Emanu-El of Milwaukee (12/30/1919). President Saltzstein of Emanu-El mentions that B'ne Jeshurun's Leo Ullman made inquiries about the possibility of merger.
[305] Minutes of Temple Emanu-El of Milwaukee (10/23/1925).
[306] Minutes of B'ne Jeshurun of Milwaukee (8/15/1926).
[307] Ibid. (10/3/1920).
[308] Ibid. (11/16/24).
[309] Ibid. (8/15/1926).
[310] Ibid. (11/7/1926).

efforts to revitalize worship attendance[311] by hiring a cantor and investing additional resources in education.[312] These measures reflected the intended goals of the Roaring Twenties synagogue-center movement.[313] Unfortunately, construction costs had escalated to $425,000, inclusive of furnishings.[314] The board minutes of the construction period do not reflect much concern over ballooning costs. Instead, we find routine votes of the finance committee to issue $200,000 in subscription bonds and assume additional bank debt.[315] The documentary record does not explain the apparent lack of concern on the part of Emanu-El's leaders. One explanation is that synagogue leaders felt they had no choice but to continue construction. Once the entire facility was finished, members had to pay the full burden of subscription bond interest, *and* raise funds to pay off bank debt of $142,350.[316] Considering the burden, it appears that financial distress was a motivation for renewed merger discussions with B'ne Jeshurun.

By October 1925, Emanu-El leaders learned that B'ne Jeshurun had purchased a lot on the East Side – signifying the arrival of a Reform competitor in the same neighborhood. Emanu-El's board met to consider the merger rumors already spreading rapidly through Milwaukee's tight-knit Jewish community. One of those rumors pertained to the fate of B'ne Jeshurun's Rabbi Charles F. Levi. He had confronted Emanu-El leaders at the athletic club saying: "You are trying to eat us up. You are trying to annihilate me. It is rotten."[317] Since Levi was approaching retirement, it is possible that he opposed the merger over concerns about his financial situation.[318] In addition, a rumor surfaced indicating "that there is considerable talk among the members of Congregation B'ne Jeshurun that the reason they are going to build on the East Side is because Emanu-El

---

[311] Swichkow, Louis and Gartner, Lloyd. *The History of the Jews of Milwaukee.* (Philadelphia, 1963). P. 320.
[312] Minutes of Temple Emanu-El of Milwaukee (6/16/1925).
[313] See Historical Trends Affecting Synagogue Mergers chapter II.
[314] Minutes of Temple Emanu-El of Milwaukee (3/31/1925).
[315] Ibid. (4/15/1921).
[316] Ibid. (5/1/1927).
[317] Ibid. (10/23/1925).
[318] At the time, rabbis' pensions were the responsibility of the employer congregation at the time of retirement. It would have been difficult for Levi to find another congregation at his age, since they would be taking on pension responsibilities in return for a limited number of years service.

was not willing to...consolidate the two congregations."[319] This rumor may indicate that B'ne Jeshurun's membership had perceived the 1919 'exploratory' offer as some type of slight. This time the Emanu-El board issued a *formal* invitation memo to discuss consolidation, and offered to host B'ne Jeshurun in joint services even if they should decide to proceed with competitive construction plans on the East Side. The memo also asked B'ne Jeshurun's board to "contradict the talk among members that members of our board were not willing to effect a consolidation."[320] The conciliatory nature of Emanu-El's communication set the stage for further discussions.

Merger talks continued on an informal basis until Emanu-El's board presented a memo outlining the benefits of consolidation:

> We believe that we would not be faithful to our trust were we not to acquaint you clearly with our idea of the benefits that might be obtained for Congregation Emanu-El, Congregation B'ne Jeshurun, and to Milwaukee Jewry by such a consolidation. In many of the larger cities consolidations have been worked out with a great deal of success and the tendency at the present time is in that direction.[321]

The document listed a number of concrete financial benefits, including the reduction of annual dues spread across a larger combined congregation. Most importantly, Emanu-El's new site already contained space for 1000 members and a fully equipped school.

Primary documents from 1926 indicate that B'ne Jeshurun leaders attempted to keep all options open, while quietly pursuing merger talks. The synagogue had cash from the pending sale of its property, and members undertook a membership drive that raised membership to 284 families in 1926.[322] The problem is that this level of membership was not large enough to support the construction of facilities capable of competing with Emanu-El's new temple/synagogue-center (such large obligations might actually discourage potential members). The records do show that some B'ne Jeshurun members

---

[319] Minutes of Temple Emanu-El of Milwaukee. (10/23/1925).
[320] Ibid. (10/23/1925).
[321] Minutes of B'ne Jeshurun of Milwaukee (1/10/1926).
[322] Ibid. (8/2/1926).

were opposed to consolidation, especially those who chose not to relocate to the East Side.[323] Although the respective board minutes do not clearly identify a clergy issue, it appears that Temple Emanu-El was not willing to accept the aging Rabbi Levi (58 years). Levi actively resisted the merger[324], but finally offered to retire in November 1926 with a terse memo: "I feel that I have reached the limit of my usefulness to B'ne Jeshurun, and that at this transitional period you require the full, flowering vigor of leadership which, unhappily, I can no longer render to the satisfaction of our membership."[325] The board accepted his resignation with unanimous approval. B'ne Jeshurun's leadership, though not forced by financial pressures, conceded to final merger negotiations. As we shall demonstrate below, leaders decided to join forces in the best interests of the greater community.

The executive committees of both congregations met in early March 1927 to effect the consolidation.[326] There were also meetings with subgroups, most notably B'ne Jeshurun's decision to review the merger with the Sisterhood, which held $20,000 in assets.[327] Temple Emanu-El's leaders and community did not appear to have any serious concerns about the merger, since B'ne Jeshurun's dues and free capital from the sale of its property would be additive during a time of financial stress. Therefore the crucial decision would remain within the domain of B'ne Jeshurun's membership.

Verbatim transcriptions of B'ne Jeshurun's March 24, 1927, community meeting provide a unique insight into the communications skills of Chairman Harry Meissner, and the tactical planning that produced this meeting. Mr. Meissner remarks:

> Much to our chagrin we found that the amount pledged by such subscriptions was far below our anticipation and very inadequate to carry out the program of plans which it had been hoped...we could not

---

[323] Minutes of B'ne Jeshurun of Milwaukee. (3/24/1927).
[324] Swichkow, Louis and Gartner, Lloyd. *The History of the Jews of Milwaukee.* (Philadelphia, 1963). 205.
[325] Minutes of B'ne Jeshurun of Milwaukee (11/14/1926).
[326] Ibid. (3/6/1927).
[327] Ibid. (3/14/1927).

> build...what everybody agrees a modern temple must have, namely, a temple, a house of worship, and a community center. [328]

Meissner also notes that membership was declining and some people were retracting pledges. This gradual deterioration in resources was one of the factors that finally pushed B'ne Jeshurun into merger talks.

Synagogue assets were a matter of concern. A certain Mrs. Baum objected: "quite a few West Siders will not go over there." She maintained that all the assets (proceeds from the sale of the old site) should not be transferred since some members had paid dues for over 50 years. This was a very unorthodox claim, since synagogue assets are the property of the community – not individual members. Meissner countered that the synagogue was running an operating deficit of $1200 per year. Then he made an ironic offer to return any original 'pew holder's equity' of $25.92, and dismissed the issue by adding "if we have any such situation that must be met, let us meet it when the time comes and not lose sight of the big proposition by discussing those details this evening."[329] This last exhortation was met with rousing applause.

Mr. Meissner also addressed sentimental concerns, including memorial tablets for the deceased, cemetery plots, and perpetuation of the synagogue name (Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun). Another concern was adequate space in new Emanu-El facility (on High Holy Days). Meissner overcomes these objections by proposing the purchase of upholstered seats for overflow services in the community house.

Until this point, Meissner's address effectively overcame objections by emphasizing the benefits of consolidation, and by soothing some of the congregants' emotional concerns. The question was now how to 'close' the deal. Meissner presents an even more stark portrayal of the situation, while simultaneously minimizing negative feelings about Temple Emanu-El. Meissner states:

---

[328] Minutes of B'ne Jeshurun of Milwaukee (3/24/1927).
[329] Ibid. (3/24/1927).

> I'm not going to consider with you the argument that I have advanced to your meetings before, that it is unwise and uneconomic to have two temples on the East Side. Let's just forget that argument...The option to build without a community center still entails doubling dues and long term debt...fifteen or twenty years of hard financial struggle, and necessarily every undertaking which we attempted would have to be limited by the extent of our finance....Consequently, there would be in the entire Reformed Jewish situation in the city of Milwaukee two congregations, both struggling to meet its obligations....I am absolutely and positively convinced that the one and only thing for this congregation to do, in order to live up to the obligation to itself, the present generation and the future, is to amalgamate with Temple Emanu-El (APPLAUSE)...the money which we will bring into the pool of indebtedness on the East Side temple [Emanu-El] would practically wipe out that debt. "[330]

By appealing to the greater good of the community, Mr. Meissner raised the debate above the level of mere economics, recasting the final decision as a vote for a positive communal future. The B'ne Jeshurun community approved the resolution for merger by 154 to 22. The board immediately decided to cancel and refund all subscriptions for the new construction, and set aside retirement funds for Rabbi Levi.[331] The following day Temple Emanuel held a communal vote to approve the merger.[332] The combined membership at the time of merger would be 900 families.

Summary:

We return now to the question of Emanu-El's decision to build for 1000 members. This appeared to be a significant financial gamble based on its membership base at the time. The anecdotal evidence is not clear on this matter. One possibility is that Temple Emanu-El leaders believed that they would continue to be the only Reform synagogue on the East Side – thereby reaping early-mover[333] advantages. Emanu-El would retain its own membership, and capture other Jews who were gradually migrating to the East Side. Another possibility is that Emanu-El leaders foresaw the possibility of merger all along, and built excess capacity in anticipation of this event. In any case, Emanu-El's 1919

[330] Minutes of B'ne Jeshurun of Milwaukee (3/24/1927).
[331] Ibid. (3/24/1927).
[332] Minutes of Temple Emanu-El of Milwaukee (3/25/1927).
[333] See also Historical Trends Affecting Synagogue Mergers chapter II and the Chicago case study.

decision to build a fully-equipped East Side complex set in motion merger talks that spanned 7 years. The fact that B'ne Jeshurun's leadership was more risk-averse (even going as far back as the1872 effort to rebuild a modest structure) indirectly resulted in the periodic overtures that ended in merger. The Reform Jews of Milwaukee therefore *voluntarily* consolidated before excess capacity or financial distress forced the issue. One imagines that Isaac Mayer Wise would have been pleased to know that, many years later, Milwaukee Jewry had acted in unity.

The timing of the merger was opportune as the Great Depression soon enveloped the nation. Combined Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun's membership would drop to 750 by 1930, and further declined to 599 in 1931 (a 30% loss post-merger). In retrospect, Emanu-El alone could have survived its debt service only with great difficulty, while B'ne Jeshurun on its own would have struggled to complete construction during the depths of the Depression. The timely infusion of B'ne Jeshurun's cash resources meant that the combined organization could weather the Great Depression even with a 30% drop in membership. Milwaukee's merger case demonstrates the positive impact of leadership that overcame early missteps and acted for the greater good of the community.

Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun was the sole Reform congregation in Milwaukee for several decades after the merger. The synagogue endeavored to reinvigorate Jewish life under its primary leader Rabbi Joseph Baron. Membership gradually rose to 1076 families by 1950, making the merged community fiscally stable and capable of projecting a vibrant Reform presence in the Upper Midwest.

V. SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ISSUES IMPACTING SYNAGOGUE MERGERS

Introduction:

Organizational change is one of the most difficult of human endeavors. Nonprofit researcher Ruth Reko has noted:

> A merger is a drastic step because it results in the dissolution of the original entities, obliterating their uniqueness and throwing the members of these organizations, those who are paid staff and those who are volunteers, into a period of considerable change. Before entertaining such an idea the leaders of each organization have usually gone through a period of stress within their own environments...In other words, organizations never enter a merger without a compelling reason or set of reasons. That the end result may be quite positive...is not the issue. Rather the issue is the radical change in lives, jobs, and structures which the members of the organization must endure to achieve the ultimate positive end of the change.[334]

Mergers – whether in the business world or nonprofit sector – provide a dramatic illustration of the leadership challenges that confront an organization in transition. The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate a variety of socio-religious issues that influence synagogue leaders to consider merger. The boundaries of rabbinic authority are an ongoing topic of discussion in most American synagogues, and lay leadership (board members, committees, staff) exists in a wide variety of configurations. The *combination* of rabbinic boundaries and lay leader configurations gives rise to the formal structure of a synagogue's organization, but interpersonal qualities and alliances often determine how effectively an organization accomplishes its mission. Rabbis and lay leaders may differ in their assessment of communal priorities. Therefore, leadership *interactions* between rabbinic and lay leaders are necessarily a significant driver for the success or failure of synagogue mergers as organizational initiatives.

---

[334] Reko, Ruth. *Heritage of Mergers: Trust Always in the Balance. A Study of Nonprofit Organization Merger.* (The Union Institute, 1999). pp. 2-3.

Academic Research on Nonprofit Leadership Issues:

Nonprofit institutions that deliver social services exhibit close analogues to the humane mission of religious congregations. In addition to an intensive focus on human services, researcher Jane Arsenault noted that "nonprofit organizations have large numbers of values-driven staff – individuals who have chosen the work that they do because of very powerful personal value-based choices...Attachment to mission and to a value set relative to the work itself is a strong driving force for both employees and the individuals who manage and govern nonprofits."[335] The similarities between nonprofit social service organizations and religious congregations provide a basis for reviewing selected research on socio-religious issues most heavily impacting synagogue mergers. Even this type of study is difficult to locate. Although the Aspen Institute's survey of nonprofits (1997) indicates that "10% of organizations had plans to reorganize, form a merger, or enter into a new affiliation," few comprehensive studies of the non-profit merger phenomenon exist.[336]

This review of socio-religious organizational literature is segmented into three phases of a merger process:

A. Pre-merger
B. Mid-merger (includes events before, during, and after a merger transaction)
C. Post-merger

A. Pre-Merger Leadership Issues:

Trust: Ruth Reko's Ph.D dissertation *Heritage of Mergers: Trust is Always in the Balance. A Study of a Nonprofit Organization Merger* describes a number of recurring issues regarding the matter of trust. Staff members may be excluded from integration talks, and learn about events only through general communications. "When large scale radical change confronts staff members...the trust and commitments which they have brought into this environment are challenged." Loss of faith in the organization's

[335] Arsenault, Jane. *Forging Nonprofit Alliances*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998). p. 147.
[336] Reko, Ruth. *Heritage of Mergers: Trust Always in the Balance. A Study of Nonprofit Organization Merger*. (The Union Institute, 1999). p. 14.

leaders, suspicion or mistrust of new co-workers, and doubt about the future viability of the organization are aspects of their reactions."[337] The author concludes that "trust among leaders of merging partners, trust between individuals, trustworthiness of merger partners, and trust in the future outcomes of the planning process become important keys to achieving the desired results of the planning."[338]

There is minimal research that directly addresses the issue of trust in synagogue mergers. In the case examples analyzed in this study, we have seen that mistrust is a frequent factor in failed negotiations.[339] Yet mistrust does not necessarily eliminate prospects for a merger. For example, Plum Street Temple could have survived alone, but the Great Depression caused just enough distress for congregants to reconsider a merger with Reading Road Temple – despite previous miscommunications. We also have seen that financial distress may induce a congregation to trust their merger partners *unduly* (e.g. Chicago's Isaiah Temple's failure to perform adequate due diligence on the financial and membership issues at Bnai Sholom Temple Israel).

Partner Readiness: Jane Arsenault details strategies for determining the readiness of a potential merger partner in her book *Forging Nonprofit Alliances.* There are several important warning signs that a potential merger partner is not ready to complete the transaction (stalling via requests for more talks, slow responses to requests for information). Proper interpretation of these warning signs leads to a decision to proceed or withdraw. Arsenault notes that "there are some board members (and some staff) who, when included on negotiating teams, are often the first individuals to read the signs, to draw conclusions about the success of the relationship based on the observed behavior or unspoken messages of the other team."[340]

---

[337] Reko, Ruth. *Heritage of Mergers: Trust Always in the Balance. A Study of Nonprofit Organization Merger.* (The Union Institute, 1999). p. 4.
[338] Reko, Ruth. *Heritage of Mergers: Trust Always in the Balance. A Study of Nonprofit Organization Merger.* (The Union Institute, 1999). p. 18.
[339] Mistrust is sometimes related to miscommunications – see Communcations section below.
[340] Arsenault, Jane. *Forging Nonprofit Alliances.* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998). p. 103.

In this study, we have encountered a number of synagogue merger situations (e.g. Chicago's KAM Isaiah Israel) that were drawn out over a period of years or even decades. Other transactions such as Chicago's attempted merger between South Shore Temple and Isaiah Israel failed during the integration process. Although the reasons for each stalled or failed negotiation are unique, analysis of 'trigger events' (clergy friction, financial distress) helps us understand the readiness of case study merger partners.

Clergy-Lay Leader Friction: Consultant Roy Pneuman highlights a number of issues surrounding the relationship between clergy and lay leaders in his article *Nine Common Sources of Conflict in Congregations.* Churches with structural ambiguity "have no clear guidelines about the roles and responsibilities of clergy, staff, laity, or committees. The lack of clarity is a source of constant conflict."[341] Pneuman suggests that clergy meet with leaders yearly to prioritize clergy activities and division of related duties. "Once the leadership of the congregation and the members themselves had ownership of the decisions about the pastor's role, there was little occasion for conflict over the role or performance of the pastor."[342] Many congregations experience problems with clergy transition. Pneuman explains how -

> Clergy style often becomes the focal point in congregations where the departing pastor had either a highly relational style or a highly task-oriented style and the search committee reacted by trying to find someone just the opposite...This reaction is particularly severe when the new leader follows a long pastorate.[343]

The primary source documents for this paper contained anecdotal evidence regarding clergy - lay leader conflicts (e.g. Cincinnati's Reading Road Temple's restrictions on the rabbi's activities). Our primary sources also indicated that the *position* of the rabbi was a focal point of contention in certain merger negotiations (e.g. Cincinnati's Reading Road Temple, and Milwaukee's B'ne Jeshurun). In such cases, congregational pressures to merge may supercede long-standing relationships with the rabbi. In other cases such as

---

[341] Pneuman, Roy. Nine Common Sources of Conflict in Congregations, in *Conflict Management in Congregations*, edited by David Lott. (Bethesda, The Alban Institute, 2001). p. 46.
[342] Ibid. p. 47.
[343] Ibid. p. 49.

Chicago's KAM Isaiah Israel, pressures to merge induced the leadership to create a co-rabbinate structure that temporarily postponed any contentions.

B. Mid-Merger Leadership Issues:

Goal Ambiguity: Julie Pietroburgo examined the differences between board and staff objectives that play out in a nonprofit merger. Her Ph.D. thesis *Joining Forces, Fortunes, and Futures: Restructuring and Adaptation in Nonprofit Organizations* explores one of the key internal "obstacles to restructuring; the dichotomy between board and executive director decision-making styles in facing restructuring decisions; and the variations in organizational status before and after different forms of restructuring." Executive directors tend to be more adaptive in their decision-making styles.[344]

Roy Pneuman described a situation common to religious life. "Congregants disagree about what the church is and what it ought to be about. This disagreement means that the mission or vision of the church is unclear...If goals have been articulated, we see little action in pursuit of them."[345] Researcher Margaret Harris further explains that the disconnect between stated mission and perceived mission can affect a congregation's operations:

> Dissenters from broad congregational purposes do not usually remain within a congregation. On the other hand, it is not uncommon for both lay and ministerial members of congregations to have strong reservations about lower-level, 'operational' goals and, especially where they occupy key positions in a congregation, such people may constitute obstacles to goal implementation. Perhaps because of religious-based norms about consensus, dissenters often do not make their opposition explicit.[346]

---

[344] Pietroburgo, Julie. "Joining Forces, Fortunes, and Futures: Restructuring, and Adaptation in Nonprofit Organizations." PhD Abstract. (Saint Louis University, 2002). p. 6.
[345] Pneuman, Roy. Nine Common Sources of Conflict in Congregations, in *Conflict Management in Congregations*. edited by David Lott. (Bethesda, The Alban Institute, 2001). p. 45.
[346] Harris, Margaret. *Organizing God's Work: Challenges for Churches and Synagogues*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). p. 87.

Primary research conducted for this paper found numerous instances where rabbis and lay leaders disagreed over basic synagogue objectives. This situation frequently manifested itself in arguments about resource allocation for education, or ongoing battles over liturgical practices (e.g. Reading Road Temple). While it is inevitable that congregations adapt to changing needs, we note that rabbis and certain lay leaders who propose changes can easily become enmeshed in a web of factions that support or oppose new directions (e.g. Temple Beth Am's schism from KAM). This tendency amplifies the need for excellent communication skills on the part of organizational leaders.

Communications: The need for prompt and appropriate communications is universally accepted as a critical success factor for organizations in the midst of change. The most urgent need occurs in large multi-level organizations. The case studies demonstrated instances of both excellent communications (e.g. Milwaukee's B'ne Jeshurun and Emanu-El) that overcame obstacles, and communications problems that destroyed trust and delayed timely mergers (e.g. Cincinnati's Reading Road Temple). The quality of communications depends on the leadership's interpersonal style, and their relative positions in the negotiation and implementation process.

C. Post-Merger Leadership Issues:

Identity Crisis: Researchers Gaertner, Dovidio, and Bachman note that "one of the more persistent problems in the study of social conflict had been the identification of strategies that promote positive inter-group attitudes and behaviors."[347] The authors update the "Contact Hypothesis" by proposing that subgroups can effectively exist within the context of an umbrella organization under certain conditions. This is termed "dual identity," and subgroup cooperation can be measured in terms of "sociability" factors (interpersonal behaviors) and "work-related" factors that value ability to produce. As merged subgroups experience positive "work-related" interactions, inter-group anxiety

[347] Gaertner, Dovidio, Bachman. Revisiting the Contact Hypothesis: The Inductions of a Common Ingroup Identity. in *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. Vol. 20, No. 3/4. 1996. p. 272.

decreases. The reduction of anxiety can lead to more positive "sociability" interactions and eventually subgroups meld into a single entity.[348]

This model has important applications for corporate and non-profit mergers, since one implication is that dual identities of subgroups need not be eliminated immediately when social opportunities are encouraged. The applicability to synagogue mergers is less clear since "work-related" interactions would primarily apply to the boards, clergy, and staff respectively. In this study, the primary research revealed instances of fractious work relationships (e.g. South Shore Temple's failed merger with Isaiah Israel), as well as positive partnerships (e.g. Chicago's Temple Beth Am amalgamation with Temple Sholom).

Summary:

The overlay of complex socio-religious factors upon our case study findings adds depth to our understanding of the motivations behind mergers. Interpretation of these matters naturally tends to be more subjective than the case study review of financial and procedural data found in primary sources. Frequently, we must rely on secondary sources to help place leaders' motivations in context; for reasons of confidentiality and legal probity, board leaders prefer not to have their most vivid personal disagreements captured in detailed meeting minutes. Future researchers may investigate the personal papers of the case study rabbis and synagogue leaders to elucidate their motivations and interpersonal relationships more fully.

[348] Gaertner, Dovidio, Bachman. Revisiting the Contact Hypothesis: The Inductions of a Common Ingroup Identity, in *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. Vol. 20, No. 3/4. 1996. pp. 283-284.

VI. COMPARISON AND ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES

Chapter Overview:

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an analytical comparison of select merger case studies. First, we will review the complex interactions of urban neighborhood change and synagogue competition during the 1920s – phenomena that were influenced by both internal strategic decisions and external events. Second, we analyze mergers that occurred after World War II. Both eras' mergers will demonstrate the positive and negative influences of the 'early-mover'[349] strategy.

A. The Roaring Twenties: Complex Interactions Between Neighborhood Change and Synagogue Competition

Early-Movers and Their Challenges:

The Chicago case study details the most vivid examples of neighborhood change. A relatively new city, driven by the fires of the 1870s, rebuilt residential neighborhoods in concentric rings around the old city core. As the city's immigrant population grew (1880 – 1920), established Jews expanded their enclaves into newer urban neighborhoods at the periphery. This outward expansion sparked fierce competition amongst synagogues seeking to serve the new Jewish communities that evolved in adjacent neighborhoods throughout the period. The velocity of Chicago neighborhood change meant that

[349] Definition: **Early-mover strategy** describes the benefits that accrue to organizations that are first to market a new product or service. As a matter of habit, customers tend to remain loyal to a particular brand – so it often pays to be the first company to offer a product. For example, automobile manufacturers offer graduating college students incentives to buy a starter car - on the premise that these new customers will later purchase a more expensive vehicle from the same company.

Synagogue leaders must first consider the benefits and risks of relocating (or starting a new congregation). Potential benefits include improved facilities, larger capacity for seating and parking, and closer proximity to member's residences. In some cases, the *early-movers* may have attempted to attract new members by being one of the first synagogues in a new Jewish neighborhood. In other cases, we have seen that synagogue leaders anticipated the wholesale migration of their membership to new neighborhoods. Those synagogues that remained behind too long, faced declining membership and resources.

synagogue leaders who fell behind in this race risked facing a decline in membership and the financial difficulties that inevitably ensued.

Chicago's Isaiah Temple is a vivid example of the difficult decisions that synagogue leaders faced. Isaiah was an early pioneer on the southern frontier, building its temple/synagogue-center at 45th Street in 1899. Competitors such as Temple Israel and Temple Sinai were located nearby, but that did not impede Isaiah Temple's growth prospects. On the contrary – Temple Isaiah's membership nearly doubled to 500 in the seventeen-year period prior to constructing a new synagogue in Hyde Park in1924.

While we may infer that Isaiah Temple outgrew its existing facilities, its decision to build such a monumental new structure must be understood within the context of competition with Temple Sinai's highly successful 1911 establishment of a grand temple/synagogue-center. Temple Sinai's choice of monumental architecture for *both* the temple sanctuary and the synagogue-center meant that Isaiah's leaders had to consider options for strengthening their competitive position vis-à-vis the highly visible Temple Sinai.

Isaiah leaders made plans to build their own grand temple/synagogue-center in a newer neighborhood – outside the immediate influence of Temple Sinai. Nevertheless, Isaiah Temple' members failed to raise sufficient funds to pay for construction. Isaiah's leaders also scuttled a potential merger with KAM, thereby allowing a direct competitor to build concurrently in Hyde Park. That decision would effectively eliminate any early-mover advantages. Isaiah's lax financial processes allowed the board to proceed with construction: Cost overruns further added to the debt burden, but leaders felt compelled to proceed with the construction already in progress.

Temple Israel also was an early pioneer on Chicago's southern edge. The record is not clear on its reasons for merging with Isaiah Temple. Since the records of Isaiah Israel, subsequent to the merger, do not indicate any transfer of financial assets (e.g. from sale of Temple Israel's old site), one may speculate that Temple Israel's property was mortgaged, or the synagogue experienced difficulty in finding a financially qualified

buyer (similar to Isaiah Temple's ongoing difficulties with the Bethesda Baptist Church). It is also possible that Temple Israel experienced internal frictions that were reflected in the low number of members that transferred in the 1924 merger.

Isaiah Temple's decision to erect a grand temple sanctuary overwhelmed the implied mission of education because mounting debts prevented them from completing the congregation's synagogue-center. The merger with Temple Israel did nothing to ease its financial difficulties. The merged entity Isaiah Israel experienced difficulty recruiting new members to help shoulder the financial burden, and the subsequent Great Depression left many formerly middle-class Jews unable to pay dues. The result was a 50% decline from post-merger membership roles, and further deterioration in Isaiah Israel's financial condition. The merged Isaiah Israel limped along with two senior rabbis who were nearing retirement.

Chicago's Roaring Twenties race to build architectural monuments meant that, in some cases, over-ambitious synagogues could not afford to offer effective educational and cultural programs. It appears that Chicago's synagogue competition was so fierce and the velocity of neighborhood change so rapid, that the advantages of being an early-mover were neutralized or sometimes negated altogether.

Early-Movers That Survive and Prosper:

The Cincinnati case demonstrates how the early-mover strategy, in some instances, proved to be highly beneficial to a congregation's overall vitality. K.K. Bene Jeshurun's Plum Street Temple (1866) was built well before the synagogue-center movement gained momentum. Jews who originally settled in Cincinnati's urban core began to move to newer neighborhoods before the turn of the twentieth century. Plum Street's leaders left their sanctuary downtown, and constructed a synagogue-center near their residential settlement. Their debt load was relatively small, and they could have outlasted the Great Depression by making further cuts to operating costs.

Reading Road Temple was also an early mover (its location prior to the merger was already in the new Jewish neighborhood), but it possessed inadequate facilities to support educational initiatives. Despite the rabbi's repeated efforts to prompt the Reading Road synagogue to expand its educational program, synagogue leaders were reticent to do so. Unfortunately, Reading Road lost members during the Great Depression, triggering the need to revisit merger talks that had previously failed due to contention over Reading Road's rabbi and poor communications with Plum Street. The merger discussions resurfaced when Reading Road Temple's inability to adjust to the competition, exacerbated by lasting internal divisions between reformers and traditionalists, eventually overwhelmed the potential early-mover advantages it may have hoped to achieve. Ultimately, these circumstances led to its absorption into the stronger Bene Jeshurun.

Late-Mover Rescues the Early-Mover:

Milwaukee's Reform Jews began migrating to new East Side neighborhoods around the turn of the century. Emanu-El's initial land purchase was scuttled after temple leaders noticed the national trend towards synagogue-centers. Instead, they bought land with enough room for a monumental temple/synagogue-center and proceeded with construction – despite not having raised enough funds. The synagogue built for a significantly higher seating capacity than its existing membership required – perhaps in anticipation of reaping first mover advantages as Jews migrated to the East Side. Emanu-El too experienced cost overruns and mounting debts (on par with Chicago's Isaiah Temple). Had this situation continued into the Great Depression – it might have faltered in similar fashion.

B'ne Jeshurun most clearly demonstrates the predicament of synagogues competing with an early-mover. The leaders of B'ne Jeshurun were fiscally conservative, choosing to pay off their mortgage and waiting until they had cash on hand from the sale of their property. They carefully considered the options and their core mission. One option was to stay in place, but that meant gradual attrition because their membership base was already migrating eastward. Another option was to follow their membership to the East

Side and construct a new synagogue. Leaders decided that they could not afford both a temple and synagogue-center (with its attendant programming expenses) without taking on debt. So they carefully pursued merger negotiations with Emanu-El over time. As we have seen, the two congregations shared liturgical practices, so the status of B'ne Jeshurun's rabbi proved to be the only significant obstacle to negotiations. In the end, B'ne Jeshurun's financial strength, resulting from the sale of its property and the subsequent decision not to build anew, allowed synagogue leaders to honor the pension obligations to the rabbi in question.

The merged synagogue Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun was financially secure enough to survive a 30% drop in membership during the Great Depression. B'ne Jeshurun's leaders demonstrated exemplary fiscal management, and possessed the communication skills needed to motivate their congregation to take advantage of the capacious, modern facilities already available at Emanu-El.

B. Post World War II - Fight or Flight?

American Jews of the baby boom generation inherited unprecedented freedom of choice in their lifestyles, religious practices, and place of residence. Many chose to build new lives in the verdant suburbs that sprouted around major cities. In some cases they took their synagogue along with them; other times suburban pioneers simply started their own synagogue in a strategic location. The Jews who remained behind in cities faced an exodus of members and resources. These circumstances frequently presaged merger transactions between congregations that were compelled to adjust quickly to demographic shifts. Neighborhood changes and the racial unrest of the late 1960s accelerated that trend.

Taking the Offensive:

Boston's Mishkan Tefila exemplified the early-mover strategy of relocating the synagogue before it was too late. As authors Paula Hyman and Gerald Gamm demonstrated, this choice was questionable on a number of grounds. The synagogue's decision may have accelerated the flight of Jews from Roxbury – though neighboring Catholics remained behind. And Mishkan Tefila left behind a remnant of members who could not sustain a congregation on their own. On the other hand, one can view the leaders' decision as an early-mover stratagem that enabled their congregation to survive. Mishkan Tefila chose not to pursue merger talks with the other Conservative congregations already established in the nearby suburbs. This obviated the need to consider secondary matters such as rabbinical friction or the transfer of assets.

Making a Stand:

The exodus of congregants from Chicago's South Side neighborhoods overwhelmed Jewish leaders in the 1960s. Leaders were compelled to take drastic steps in order to preserve the viability of their institutions. This sparked a ballroom dance of potential merger partners as the South Side synagogues examined each other's worship practices, educational approach, and strategic location. Synagogue leaders faced decisions that were fraught with risk: some decided to move congregations northward – where the vast majority of Chicago's more than 200,000 Jews were settling,[350] while others chose to make a stand in their neighborhood by merging with another congregation on the South Side. Some leaders waited to act – until it was too late to save the congregation.

The first to succumb were those on the extreme periphery vis-à-vis the Jewish community, such as South Shore Temple, which abandoned an attempt to merge with Isaiah Israel. Then Isaiah Israel chose to merge with nearby KAM. They stood their ground in Hyde Park at a strategic location near the University of Chicago. Their worship styles and programming were similar enough, and leaders felt that a combined KAM Isaiah Israel could afford a new synagogue-center without a building campaign. A

[350] Temple Sinai had the financial resources to move north without merging.

potential impediment to merger was the presence of two senior rabbis, but this issue was brushed aside by an early decision to form a 'co-rabbinate.' Whether this decision was based on mutual feelings of admiration, or simply an expediency designed to move the congregations past the immediate crisis, is not clear from the source documents. In any event, the two rabbis and their respective flocks experienced factional differences that went on for some time. The merger of KAM Isaiah Israel resulted in a relatively stable (though considerably diminished) South Side Jewish presence that continues to this day.

Late-Mover Runs Out of Time:

Beth Am pursued tentative merger talks with several South Side congregations, but none of these appeared to be a good match for their culture. As KAM Isaiah Israel was already busy digesting its 1971 merger, Beth Am ran out of options for remaining in its present location. Unlike the much larger and more established Temple Sinai, Beth Am did not decide to move its entire operation north (possibly for lack of funds to rebuild). Instead, Beth Am's board discussed amalgamation with the North Side's Temple Sholom. Ultimately, this amalgamation was forced upon the congregation, whose members had moved to new residences on the North Side, or fled to other suburbs.

In summary, urban Jews who remained behind during the post-war suburbanization trend faced a number of difficult decisions – exacerbated by the neighborhood change that affected many American cities. Once again, we found evidence of the competitive early-mover phenomenon. Some leaders moved ahead of the trend, and took advantage of the suburban growth. Inveterate city dwellers sometimes chose to make a stand in their neighborhood, resulting in mergers such as KAM Isaiah Israel. Other synagogues such as Beth Am failed to act until all options were exhausted.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Primary Drivers of Synagogue Mergers:

This thesis has documented and analyzed a sample of synagogue mergers in order to understand better the issues that influence merger decisions. The most overwhelming factors that seem to impact the merger case studies examined were neighborhood change and competition for resources. These two primary drivers were embedded in complex socio-religious factors, and historical trends that impacted the eras in question.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, cities with growing Jewish populations experienced a proliferation of synagogues that resulted in competition for the voluntary human and financial resources leaders needed to sustain their congregations. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, many leaders responded by constructing synagogues near the growing edges of new Jewish neighborhoods. Thus, physical location became an important competitive tactic in many cities. Some leaders chose to compete by building a synagogue-center that would attract Jews interested in educational and cultural programming. Location and improved programming appeared to be rational competitive responses during the early twentieth century; however, problems arose when leaders built monumental temple/synagogue-centers that, in retrospect, appear to have been a diversion of scarce communal resources. Those leaders attempted to compete via the inspiring grandeur of a temple's sanctuary – built to handle a maximum seating capacity for the High Holy Days. The subsequent effects on the synagogue's operating budget meant that many of the monumental temple/synagogue-centers could not afford the vibrant programming they needed to compete in the first place. Furthermore, congregations with structural financial problems had difficulty attracting new members. External events such as the Great Depression and neighborhood change often forced financially troubled congregations to consider merger.

Physical location was also an important competitive consideration after World War II, when Jews encountered different types of neighborhood change. Many Baby Boomers

migrated to the suburbs, leaving behind urban congregations that consequently experienced changes in the racial composition of their neighborhoods. As the resource drain intensified, remaining urban congregations had to choose between suburban flight, intra-city moves, or remaining in place. The latter options often resulted in the merger or dissolution of urban congregations. Those leaders who chose the first option (suburban flight) needed to undertake new construction projects. Architectural competition appeared to be less of a factor in the post-World War II era, because leaders often designed their sanctuaries with less grandeur and a more flexible seating capacity (expandable for the High Holy Days) than had been the case during the pre-war era.

Supporting Socio-Religious Factors:

The interactions of neighborhood change and synagogue competition, by themselves, do not account for all of the behaviors exhibited by leaders in our case studies. The case studies revealed that a congregation's socio-religious circumstances could either impede or facilitate a merger transaction. The most relevant socio-religious factors fell into two broad categories: merger partner readiness, and clergy-lay leader relationships.

The readiness of a potential merger partner depended on several variables, the most important of which was timing – that is to say the urgency of both merger partner's competitive situations.[351] Even when a congregation's condition already had deteriorated (causing financial distress), the cases studied demonstrate that leaders of potential merger partners were sometimes reluctant to move forward with talks. One may speculate that some of this reluctance to merge resulted from feelings of loyalty to the congregation and its history.[352] It is not so easy to abandon one's house of worship – that sanctified place filled with memories of life's important events. Whatever the leaders' stated reasons, the case studies suggest that most mergers did not occur until some external event (e.g. Great

[351] See comments by Jane Arsenault regarding partner readiness in *Socio-Religious Issues Impacting Synagogue Mergers* chapter V.
[352] See comments by Jane Arsenault regarding non-profit staff loyalties in *Socio-Religious Issues Impacting Synagogue Merger* chapter V.

Depression, 1960s neighborhood change) forced the issue by magnifying the leaders' sense of urgency.

Another facet of merger partner readiness is the respective culture of each congregation. This matter is subjective, and rather difficult to gauge from primary source documents. In general, potential merger partners with differing worship rituals or educational priorities tended to avoid negotiations, while those with similar attributes found it easier to talk. Social class issues (Germans vs. East Europeans) that predominated during the pre-World War I immigration wave may have become less of a limiting factor during the second half of the twentieth century, when such differences were no longer salient.

Communications played an important role in signaling a potential partner's readiness to merge. The underlying issue was trust[353] - between leaders, and among congregants. The mergers examined in this study demonstrated that leaders who clearly communicated their goals were more successful in moving their congregations to a state of readiness. In some cases, poor communications resulted in rumors and mistrust that delayed the onset of a merger for years.

Clergy-lay leader relations were the second most important socio-religious category affecting mergers.[354] It appears that what is sometimes referred to as goal ambiguity[355] (e.g. disagreements over worship rituals, or the relative importance of educational initiatives) frequently impeded the rabbi's ability to implement competitive measures. Congregations with significant goal ambiguity were likely candidates for a schism or merger. The rabbi's seniority was also a matter of contention in several cases, causing delays in the decision to merge. Some merger partners chose to release one of the senior rabbis – while others maintained a co-rabbinate structure.

---

[353] See comments by Ruth Reko regarding the role of trust in *Socio-Religious Issues Impacting Synagogue Mergers* chapter V.
[354] See comments by Roy Pneuman regarding clergy-lay leader friction in *Socio-Religious Issues Impacting Synagogue Mergers* chapter V.
[355] See comments by Julie Pietroburgo and Roy Pneuman regarding goal ambiguity in *Socio-Religious Issues Impacting Synagogue Mergers* chapter V.

In summary, merger partner readiness and clergy-lay leader relations were key socio-religious factors that either impeded merger discussions, or in some cases paved the road. Together, these socio-religious factors had a significant impact on the choice of merger partners, and the timing of the transaction.

How This Paper Contributes:

This thesis sheds light on some of the factors that led synagogue leaders to consider mergers. The early sections on historical trends and resource allocation provide the reader with the broader context of issues affecting synagogue leaders in their respective eras. The case study method allowed the researcher to compare the experiences of multiple synagogues across different periods. The result is a hybrid of historical narrative and analytical comparisons that allow the reader to evaluate the strategic decisions of years past.

Opportunities For Future Research:

Future researchers may extend this first effort to study the phenomenon of synagogue mergers by pursuing several open issues. An examination of the key rabbinic and lay leaders' personalities would add depth to the socio-religious understanding of any merger transaction. One also might document instances of post-merger successes or failures in integrating two previously distinct organizational cultures. These open issues would enhance our understanding of synagogue mergers and congregational life in general.

VIII. APPENDIX A: Nonprofit Resource Allocation Issues

Synagogues, like non-profits in general, exist to serve human needs that are difficult to measure in financial terms. Therefore, the *process* of defining needs and allocating scarce resources is unique to each institution. In order to best understand the historical decisions embedded in the merger case studies, certain interrelated behaviors and process issues are analyzed and illustrated with hypothetical examples from congregational life. The concepts are further refined into a general process model for allocating scarce non-profit resources.

We previously noted the competition for resources facing modern synagogues, and the potential influence of large donors on resource allocation decisions. These factors are just the most visible elements of a larger constellation of forces that culminate in day-to-day allocation decisions. The potential for misallocating a non-profit's resources is deeply rooted in the motivations of people (professionals and volunteers) who work in a mission-driven enterprise. Such people, by nature, view themselves as fulfilling important human needs; ideally, this tends to engender an atmosphere of devotion to the cause. Thus many non-profits attract highly motivated human resources who may experience conscious or unconscious difficulties in making resource allocation decisions under conditions of scarcity. In his book *Managing the Non-profit Organization*, the well-known management thinker and consultant Peter F. Drucker commented on the key distinctions that non-profit leaders must make when allocating resources:

> The discipline of thinking through what results will be demanded of the non-profit institution can protect it from squandering resources because of confusion between *moral* and *economic* causes. Non-profit institutions generally find it almost impossible to abandon anything. Everything they do is 'the Lord's work' or 'a good cause.' A *moral* cause is an absolute good...The absence of results indicates only that efforts have to be increased...

> In an *economic* cause, one asks: Is this the best application of our scarce resources?...Let's put our resources where the results are. We cannot afford to be righteous and continue this project where we seem to be unable to achieve the results we've set for ourselves. To believe that whatever we do is a moral cause, and should be pursued whether there are results or not, is a perennial temptation for non-profit executives- and even more for their boards.[356]

The crucial distinctions between *moral* causes that directly address the organization's core mission, and *economic* causes that may indirectly support the mission, are indeed difficult to judge - even under the best of circumstances. To illustrate why this distinction is so elusive, we now turn to a hypothetical example facing the synagogue board. Some capital expenditures[357] may be required to support less educational activities - the art instructor's request for a $2,000 ceramics kiln provides a good illustration of this type of expense. These types of projects can be more difficult to justify – so people naturally try to gain an advantage for their favored projects. Finance authors Brealey and Myers explain how the allocation process can be subverted by basic human tendencies – even in the 'bottom line' corporate world: "Many of the problems stem from sponsors' eagerness to obtain approval for their favorite projects. As the proposal process proceeds up the organization, alliances are formed."[358]

Non-profits are not immune to fierce internal competition for funding of favorite projects. Non-profit insiders might prefer to call this competition "consensus building." One can just imagine the hypothetical art instructor lobbying the rabbi, board members, and religious school principal until they understand that ceramics classes are an *indispensable* part of the children's religious education. Eventually, synagogue leaders and staff may form a consensus on the need to fund the kiln project. This leads to another potential pitfall - the non-profit leader's need to build consensus across multiple constituencies. Constant consensus-building efforts can impede progress by slowing the decision-making

---

[356] Drucker, Peter F. *Managing the Non-Profit Organization.* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1990). P. 111-112.

[357] Definition: **Capital expense** is for the purchase of a long-lasting asset

[358] Brealey, Richard and Stewart Myers. *Principles of Corporate Finance*, 3rd Ed. (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1988). P. 259.

process to a crawl. Management consultant Michael Hammer wrote about the social challenges of non-profit change management in his book *The Reengineering Revolution*:

> Answering how well an organization is achieving its mission takes one into dimensions of effectiveness and quality, where quantification is very difficult...While mission-driven organizations' costs are measured in dollars, their benefits are not. What's the *financial* value of a better course on the Bible?"[359] Leaders attempting to change their non-profit institutions will need to find ways of "coping with resisters who, from idealism or cynicism, ground their opposition in the 'higher' purpose of the mission-driven organization.[360]

The non-profit organization's *mission* is the source from which all allocation decisions must flow. So there is nothing unusual or inappropriate with internal resistance from those who believe they are guardians of the mission. The art instructor's insistence that ceramics classes are an *indispensable* part of the children's religious education is grounded in a sincere belief in the moral cause of children's education. The question remains: Is the teacher's request for a ceramics kiln truly a core moral cause? In our hypothetical example, the synagogue school could continue to operate without ceramics classes. Therefore, we should evaluate the kiln request using a separate allocation process designed for supportive economic causes.

In practice, many non-profit allocation processes skip directly from the consensus-building phase to the funding of a particular project – with minimal discussion of the project's future implications. This informal style of resource allocation can lead to a different type of pitfall:

> Another problem is to ensure that the authorization request draws attention to all likely contingent expenditures. Too often, seemingly small and innocuous investments are the first step in a chain of economically dependent investments.[361]

---

[359] Hammer, Michael and Steven Stanton. *The Reengineering Revolution*. (New York: HarperBusiness, 1995). P. 281.
[360] Ibid. P. 289.
[361] Brealey, Richard and Stewart Myers. *Principles of Corporate Finance*, 3rd Ed. (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1988). P. 261.

Here we can imagine that the art instructor neglected to include the $1,200 cost of installing a high-capacity electrical outlet in the art room. Since the ceramics kiln has already been purchased – we have no choice but to proceed with the installation. Next year, and every subsequent year, the $600 annual cost of the ceramics supplies will hit the operating budget.[362] Therefore, the 10-year total cost of the kiln project is $9,200 – nearly 5 times the original $2,000 requested by our eager art instructor. This illustration is meant to be jarring, but the point remains that non-profit leaders need an allocation process that supports the core mission.[363] The allocation process must be able to distinguish between core moral causes and supportive economic causes that may - or may not - warrant the application of scarce resources. The cumulative effects of resource misallocations, even seemingly insignificant initial requests, can result in operating deficits[364] that inflict financial distress upon the organization over time.

We now return to the strategic question raised earlier: What process should non-profit leaders use to make resource allocation decisions that support the mission of their organization? Peter Drucker asks a very pertinent question:

> What is the bottom line when there is no 'bottom line? Non-profit institutions tend not to give priority to performance and results. Yet performance and results are far more important – and far more difficult to measure and control – in the non-profit institution than a business...When non-profit executives face a risk-taking decision, they must first think through the desired results – *before* the means of measuring performance and results can be determined.[365]

Peter Drucker's main message is that the results of all resource allocations should relate directly to the non-profit's mission. Moral causes that align with the mission, by definition, must attract organizational resources to the extent that results are achievable.

---

[362] Definition: **Operating budget** tracks the monthly cash revenues and expenses of the organization

[363] The author believes that art instruction is important.

[364] An **operating deficit** occurs when cash payments exceed cash receipts for a given reporting period. Not every monthly operating deficit is an ominous sign of financial distress - a synagogue's cash flow tends to fluctuate seasonally with the collection of dues. Synagogue leaders facing extended operating deficits need to respond with increased income and/or lower costs. Leaders may find such measures too difficult to contemplate, so instead of cutting costs they take the easy path of raiding endowment funds (balance sheet assets) to balance the operating budget.

[365] Drucker, Peter F. *Managing the Non-Profit Organization.* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1990). P. 107.

Economic causes, on the other hand, require more careful scrutiny to ensure that their performance supports the organization's mission. Leaders must determine what results the economic cause will accomplish, build consensus that the results support the core mission, and rank the economic cause against alternative uses of scarce resources. The preceding review of common allocation process pitfalls suggests the *Sample Mission-Oriented Resource Allocation Model* found at the end of Appendix A. This mission-oriented model does not represent the only path toward effective resource allocation in the non-profit world. The central point of this section is that non-profit leaders must adopt *some* conscious system to help prioritize opportunities - and allocate their scarce resources accordingly. The organization's mission should always be at the core of the selected allocation system.

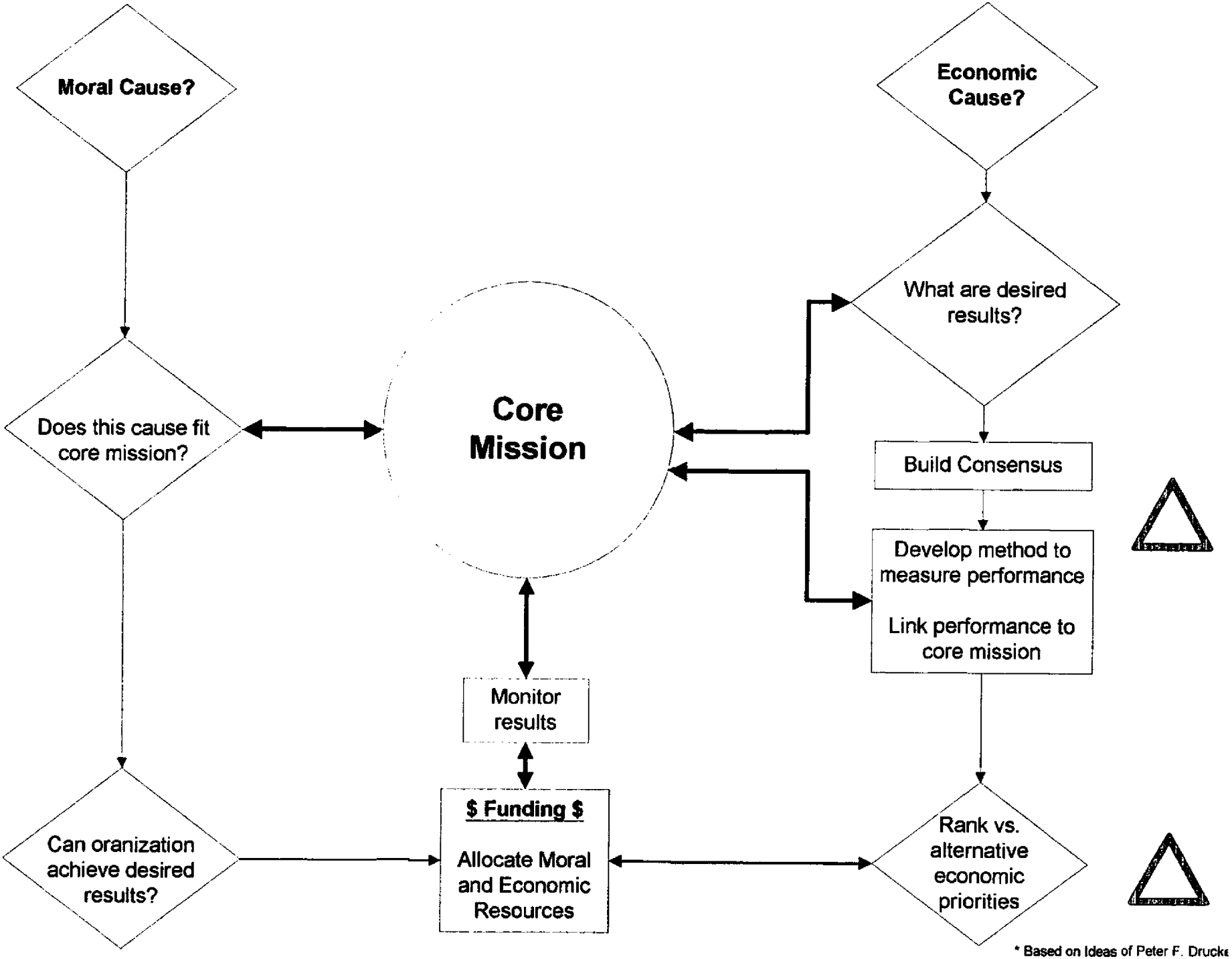
Now a brief note of caution: Mission statements must be simple and well defined. Any organization that publishes a mission statement that reads like a laundry list probably lacks the focus required to make effective resource allocation decisions.

Finally, a number of excellent resources are available for readers interested in developing a more detailed understanding of financial decision-making in religious organizations.[366]

---

[366] Nancy Ammerman's handbook *Studying Congregations* provides a number of useful questionnaires and tools to help congregations analyze their mission, culture, and resources. The book's chapter on 'resources' includes sample financial reports and a discussion of dues and planned giving.[366] Non-profit consultants Amelia Kohm and David La Piana are the authors of *Strategic Restructuring for Non-profit Organizations*.[366] The Union for Reform Judaism, in cooperation with the National Association of Temple Administrators, produces a number of synagogue management resources targeted at small and large congregations. These can be found at www.urj.org/synmgmt/. Another potentially helpful Internet site is the Alban Institute's Congregational Resource Guide located at www.congregationalresources.org/.

Sample Mission-Oriented Resource Allocation Model*



* Based on Ideas of Peter F. Drucke

Bibliography

PRIMARY RESEARCH SOURCES

Beth Am Reporter. Temple Beth Am of Chicago. Chicago Jewish Historical Society.
Isaiah Israel Tidings. Temple Isaiah Israel of Chicago. Chicago Jewish Historical Society.
Male Call. Temple Isaiah Israel of Chicago. Chicago Jewish Historical Society.
K.K. Ahavath Achim - Sherith Israel. Articles of Incorporation. American Jewish Archives, Small Collection.
K.K. Ahavath Achim - Sherith Israel. Souvenir program given at Fair, 1906. American Jewish Archive. Small Collection.
KAM News. Congregation KAM of Chicago. Chicago Jewish Historical Society.
Kehilath Anshe Maariv. "120 Years: A History of KAM Temple 1847-1967."
Merger Argreement: KAM Isaiah Israel of Chicago. KAM Archive
Minutes of Ahabath Achim - Sherith Israel of Cincinnati. American Jewish Archive.
Minutes of B'ne Jeshurun of Milwaukee American Jewish Archive
Minutes of Isaiah Temple of Chicago. KAM Archive.
Minutes of Plum Street Temple of Cincinnati. American Jewish Archive.
Minutes of Temple Emanu-El of Milwaukee American Jewish Archive.
Norman Schwartz (Director, Chicago Jewish Historical Society, and member Temple Sholom), in discussion with the author, August 2005.
Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf (Emeritus KAM Isaiah Israel), in discussion with the author, August, 2005.
Temple Isaiah Israel. Centennial Banquet Program. Temple Isaiah Israel of Chicago. KAM Archive.
UAHC Proceedings: Executive Board. American Jewish Archive.
UAHC: Memo: Department of Synagogue and School Extension. American Jewish Archive.
UAHC: Minutes: Commission on Synagogue Activities. American Jewish Archive.

SUPPLEMENTARY SOURCES

American Israelite.
Arsenault, Jane. *Forging Nonprofit Alliances*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).
Berman, Morton. "Our First Century 1852-1952. Temple Isaiah Israel." (Chicago: 1952).
Berman, Morton. *The History of Temple Isaiah-Israel Chicago 1852-1952*. (Chicago, Temple Isaiah-Israel, 1952).
Brealey, Richard and Myers, Stewart. *Principles of Corporate Finance*, 3rd Ed. (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1988).
Bubis, Gerald and Windmueller, Steven. *From Predictability to Chaos? How the Jewish Leaders Reinvented their National Communal System*. (Baltimore: Center for Jewish Community Studies, 2005).
Chicago Jewish Historical Society. "*Synagogues of Chicago: A Historic Survey 1839 – 1992*." (Chicago, 1992).

Bibliography

Cronbach, Abraham. "American Synagogues: The Lessons of Names." *American Jewish Archives* 16 (1964).

De Breffny, Brian. *The Synagogue.* (New York: Macmillan, 1978).

Drucker, Peter F. *Managing the Non-Profit Organization.* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1990).

Elazar, Daniel J. "The Development of the American Synagogue." In *American Synagogue History: A Bibliography and State-of-the-Field Survey.* New York, 1988.

Elazar, Daniel. *Community and Polity: The Organizational Dynamics of American Jewry.* (Philadelphia, 1976).

Elazar, Daniel. *The Conservative Movement in Judaism: Dilemmas and Opportunities.* (Albany, SUNY Press, 2000).

Encyclopedia Judaica. Electronic Version 7.0 (Tel Aviv: Keter, 1997).

Faith & Form: Synagogue Architechture in Illinois. (Chicago: Spertus Museum, 1976).

Feldman, Abraham. "The Changing Functions of the Synagogue and the Rabbi." *Reform Judaism: Essays by HUC Alumni* (Cincinnati: HUC Press, 1949).

Fox, Stephen A. "On the Road to Unity: The UAHC and American Jewry." In *The American Jewish Archives Journal* #32.

Gaertner, Dovidio, Bachman. "Revisiting the Contact Hypothesis: The Inductions of a Common Ingroup Identity." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations.* Vol. 20, No. 3/4. 1996.

Gamm, Gerald. *Urban Exodus. Why Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Gurock, Jeffrey. *American Jewish Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective.* (Hoboken, KTAV. 1996).

Hammer, Michael and Stanton, Steven. *The Reengineering Revolution.* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1995).

Harris, Margaret. *Organizing God's Work: Challenges for Churches and Synagogues.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

Heller, James. *As Yesterday When It Is Past: A History of the Isaac M. Wise Temple K.K. B'nai Jeshurun 1842-1942.* (Cincinnati: Isaac M. Wise Temple, 1942).

Hyman, Paula. "From City to Suburb: Temple Mishkan Tefila of Boston." In *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed.* Edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995).

Jaret, Charles. "Residential Mobility and Local Jewish Community Organization in Chicago." (PhD Thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1977).

Jick, Leon. "The Reform Synagogue." In *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed.* Edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995).

Jick, Leon. *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820 – 1870.* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1976).

Johnson, George. "Synagogue Survival Strategies in the Rootless Society." In *The Sociology of American Jews: A Critical Anthology.* (Washington: University Press of America, 1980).

Jones, Peter, and Holli, Melvin ed. *Ethnic Chicago.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981).

Karp, Abraham. *Jewish Continuity in America: Creative Survival in a Free Society.* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press. 1998).

Bibliography

Kaufman, David. Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999).

Kohm, Amelia and La Piana, David. *Strategic Restructuring for Nonprofit Organizations: Mergers, Integrations, and Alliances*. Westport, CT. Praeger, 2003.

Krantz, Philip. "An Account of Congregation Ahabath Achim - Sherith Israel, Cincinnati, OH 1906-1931." Unpublished. American Jewish Archives, 1969.

Lefkovitz, Elliot. "Temple Sholom: 125 Years of Living Judaism." (Chicago, 1993).

Marcus, Jacob R. *To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585-1984.* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1989).

Marcus, Jacob R., Ed. *The Concise Dictionary of American Jewish Biography.* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing. 1994).

Marcus, Jacob Rader. *The American Jew, 1585 – 1990.* (Brooklyn: Carlson.1995).

Marcus, Jacob Rader. *United States Jewry, 1776-1985.* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 1989).

Meites, Hyman, ed. History of the Jews of Chicago. (Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, edition 1990).

Meyer, Michael, and Plaut, Gunther. The Reform Judaism Reader. (New York: UAHC Press, 2001).

Meyer, Michael. *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism.* (New York: Oxford University Press. 1988).

Percival Goodman. "The Character of the Modern Synagogue." In An *American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow.* Ed. Peter Blake (New York: UAHC, 1954).

Philipson, David. *My Life as An American Jew.* (Cincinnati: John G. Kidd & Son, 1941).

Pietroburgo, Julie. "Joining Forces, Fortunes, and Futures: Restructuring, and Adaptation in Nonprofit Organizations." PhD Abstract. (Saint Louis University, 2002).

Pneuman, Roy. "Nine Common Sources of Conflict in Congregations." In *Conflict Management in Congregations*. Edited by David Lott. (Bethesda, The Alban Institute, 2001).

Raphael, Marc Lee. Judaism in America. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

Raphael, Marc Lee. *Profiles in American Judaism: The Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist Traditions in Historical Perspective.* (San Francisco: Harper & Row. 1984).

Reko, Ruth. *Heritage of Mergers: Trust Always in the Balance. A Study of Nonprofit Organization Merger.* (The Union Institute, 1999).

Salk, Jane. "Generic and Type-Specific Challenges in the Strategic Legitimation and Implementation of Mergers and Acquisitions." *International Business Review*, Vol. 3, No. 4.

Sarna, Jonathan and Korros, Alexandra. *American Synagogue History: A Bibliography and State-of-the-Field Survey.* New York: 1988.

Sarna, Jonathan. *American Judaism.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

Sarna, Jonathan. *The American Jewish Experience.* (New York: Holmes & Meier. 1997).

Sarna, Jonathan. *The Jews of Cincinnati.* (Cincinnati: Center for the Study of the American Jewish Experience, 1989).

Bibliography

Schulweis, Harold. "Restructuring the Synagogue." *Conservative Judaism* 27 (Summer 1973).
Schwartz, Jacob. *The Synagogue in Modern Jewish Life.* (Cincinnati: UAHC, 1939).
Silverstein, Alan. *Alternatives to Assimilation: The Response of Reform Judaism to American Culture, 1840-1930.* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press. 1994).
Sklare, Marshall. "The Sociology of the American Synagogue." *Social Compass* 18 (1971).
Sussman, Lance. "The Suburbanization of American Judaism as Reflected in Synagogue Building and Architecture, 1945-1975." *American Jewish History* 75 (September 1985).
Swichkow, Louis and Gartner, Lloyd. *The History of the Jews of Milwaukee.* (Philadelphia, JPS, 1963).
The Occident.
The Reform Advocate.
United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.org).
Werner, Alfred. *The Synagogue: Studies in Origins, Archaeology, and Architecture.* Ed. Harry Orlinsky. (New York: KTAV, 1975).
Wertheimer, Jack. "The Conservative Synagogue." In *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed.* Edited by Jack Wertheimer. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995).
Wertheimer, Jack. ed. *The History of the Synagogue in America.* (New York. 1987).
Zuckerman, Phillip. *Strife in the Sanctuary: Religious Schism in a Jewish Community.* (London. Sage Publications, 1999).