

© 2013
Jason Ross Gosnell
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

SYNAGOGUE CONSOLIDATION IN POST-WAR NEW JERSEY

The Case Study of Woodbridge Township

JASON ROSS GOSNELL

A thesis submitted to the
Graduate School-New Brunswick
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts
Graduate Program in Jewish Studies
written under the direction of
Dr. Nancy Sinkoff
and
Dr. Jeffrey Shandler
and approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey
October 2013

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

SYNAGOGUE CONSOLIDATION IN POST-WAR NEW JERSEY

The Case Study of Woodbridge Township

By JASON ROSS GOSNELL

Thesis Directors:

Doctors Nancy Sinkoff and Jeffrey Shandler

The consolidation of synagogues in post-war New Jersey is neither new nor unique. City synagogues country wide with the onset of suburbanization in the 1950s relocated to and/or reorganized in the suburbs. Yet, regardless of the relocations and/or reorganizations of city synagogues, the suburbs witnessed almost two decades of synagogue growth. In the 1970s, however, as the initial reasons for synagogue consolidation changed, net gains in synagogue growth ceased.

Surprisingly, although the number of synagogues has decreased and the rate of synagogue consolidation has increased, there is a lack of academic sources dedicated exclusively to those issues surrounding synagogue consolidation. Indeed, the most notable literature concerning synagogue consolidation is that published by communal leadership. Providing congregations wishing to explore consolidation with insight into the issues that arise during the merger process, these sources are practice guides more than academic works. They do not place these mergers within the historical contexts of American Jewry and Judaism in post-war America nor do they examine the ways in which the details of such mergers are informed by these contexts.

It is thus the goal of this case study to fill in some of the lacunae left by both the academic and communal worlds. In order to do such, this case study will concentrate on five Conservative congregations which were established in Woodbridge Township between 1913 and 1977 and were subsequently absorbed by a congregation outside of the Township in 2003 and 2006. It will examine the information obtained from: the interviews I conducted with clergy and congregants who served as officers and/or board members of the respective synagogues, the Woodbridge Township Library's oral histories, the congregations' archival records, local newspaper articles which discussed the consolidations and various other sources reviewed in order to properly locate Woodbridge Township's Jewish community within a larger historical framework. It will thereafter explore the major issues that each congregation confronted in consolidating; and further discuss the phenomenon of merger in Woodbridge Township and its related issues within the contexts of post-war American Jewry and Judaism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are a number of people I would like to thank. Without their time and assistance this work would never have been completed. I truly appreciate the help provided by the staffs at the Jewish Historical Society of Central New Jersey, the Woodbridge Township Library, the Woodbridge Township Engineering Department and the Rutgers University Special Collections and University Archives. Specifically, I want to express my gratitude to Deborah Cohn, Wendi Rottweiler, Jim Eddington and Ron Becker who went above and beyond their duties in order to provide me with a better understanding of Woodbridge Township and its Jewish community.

It is also necessary to recognize those individuals who allowed me to interview them informally and formally. The reader should know that several individuals who were not interviewed formally provided me with information which was essential to my research. Despite the fact that their names do not appear within the pages of this work does not diminish their contribution. As for those that I did interview formally, I can never thank them enough for sharing their stories.

Additionally, I want to extend my appreciation to my professors in the Jewish Studies department who I have had the pleasure of working with these past two years. Included among this faculty are my advisors Doctors Nancy Sinkoff and Jeffrey Shandler who graciously shared their insight and provided me with guidance throughout this endeavor.

Of course, this acknowledgement would not be complete without thanking my parents Thomas and Margy Gosnell and my wife Victoria Levi. Without my parents' support and encouragement I would not have had the self-confidence to pursue my dreams. As for my wife, it is her that I owe the most. Any description of the help that she provided me would never be adequate. As such, I will simply state in these last few lines that I am eternally grateful to her and

that I realize everyday how very lucky I am to be married to such a loving and understanding woman.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
I. INTRODUCTION	1
A. The Phenomenon of Synagogue Consolidation	1
B. The Choice of a Community	2
C. Methodology	3
II. PROLOGUE.....	4
A. Woodbridge Township’s History	4
B. Woodbridge Township’s Jewish History	8
III. THE EARLY MERGERS.....	11
A. Congregation B’nai Jacob	11
B. Congregation Beth Am	12
C. Merger.....	13
D. Congregation Adath Israel	16
E. Congregation Beth Sholom.....	17
F. Merger.....	18
G. Analysis.....	22
1. Jews in the United States	22
2. Jews in Woodbridge Township.....	23
3. The Practice of Judaism in the United States.....	28
4. The Practice of Judaism in Woodbridge Township	29
5. Implications.....	30
IV. THE LATE MERGERS	36
A. Congregation Ohev Shalom	36
B. Congregation Neve Shalom	37
C. Merger.....	38
D. Congregation Adath Israel	41
E. Congregation Neve Shalom	42
F. Merger.....	42
G. Analysis.....	46

1. Jews in the United States	46
2. Jews in Woodbridge Township.....	47
3. The Practice of Judaism in United States.....	49
4. The Practice of Judaism in Woodbridge Township	50
5. Implications.....	51
V. CONCLUSION.....	56
VI. EPILOGUE.....	57
Appendix I Questionnaire	62
Appendix II Map of Woodbridge Township and Surrounding Areas.....	69
Appendix III Relevant Ohev Shalom-Neve Shalom Merger Agreement Provisions.....	70
Appendix IV Relevant Adath Israel-Neve Shalom Merger Agreement Provisions.....	72
BIBLIOGRAPHY	74

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Phenomenon of Synagogue Consolidation

The consolidation of synagogues in post-war New Jersey is neither new nor unique. City synagogues country wide with the onset of suburbanization in the 1950s relocated to and/or reorganized in the suburbs. Despite decreases in the number of city synagogues, twenty to fifty new Conservative and Reform synagogues were established each year in the suburbs for almost two decades. However, in the 1970s, as the initial reasons for synagogue consolidation changed, net gains in synagogue growth ceased. Yearly additions failed to reach double digits and a growing number of suburban synagogues finalized mergers.¹

One would think that the phenomenon of synagogue consolidation which has been occurring throughout the Jewish community with ever increasing frequency over the last forty years would be thoroughly examined. However, synagogue consolidation has been surprisingly unexplored by Jewish historians. Although the phenomenon of synagogue consolidation has not been completely ignored in historical articles and monographs concerning Jewish communal life, there is a lack of academic sources dedicated exclusively to those issues surrounding synagogue mergers. Indeed, the most notable literature concerning synagogue consolidation is that published by communal leadership. Both *Tzemed Chemed* (a lovely pair) - *Finding the Right Fit On Merging Congregations*, written by Rabbi Paul Drazen, and *Merging Congregations, The Exploration, Facilitation and Execution of a Synagogue Merger, and the Role of the Administrator/Executive Director in the Process* by Harvey Brenner are excellent contributions to the study of synagogue mergers.² Each provides congregations wishing to explore

¹ Myron Schoen. "Suddenly Synagogues are Merging" *Sh'ma a Journal of Jewish Responsibility*. 2/32. 5 May 1972. 89-91.

² Rabbi Paul Drazen. *Tzemed Chemed - Finding the Right Fit On Merging Congregations*. The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. 8 January 2007 and Harvey M. Brenner. *Merging Congregations The Exploration, Facilitation and Execution of a Synagogue Merger, and the Role of the Administrator/Executive Director in the Process*. January 2008.

consolidation with insight into the issues that arise during the merger process. However, these sources are practice guides more than academic works. Therefore, Drazen and Brenner do not place these mergers within the historical contexts of American Jewry and Judaism in post-war America nor do they examine the ways in which the details of such mergers are informed by these contexts.

It is thus the goal of this case study to fill in some of the lacunae left by both the academic and communal worlds in the study of synagogue consolidation and to further encourage additional research on this phenomenon. In order to do such, this work will set forth an historical account of a set of mergers which occurred in Woodbridge Township; examine the major issues that each congregation confronted in consolidating; and discuss the phenomenon of merger and its issues within the contexts of post-war American Jewry and Judaism as well as what was occurring in Woodbridge Township.

B. The Choice of a Community

This case study will concentrate on the five congregations which were established in Woodbridge Township between 1913 and 1977. These congregations are particularly interesting because of the first four congregations that were founded between 1913 and 1958, two, B'nai Jacob and Beth Am merged with one another to create the fifth Ohev Shalom in 1977 and two, Adath Israel and Beth Sholom consolidated in 1980 in an absorption whereby Adath Israel survived. Thereafter, the two consolidated congregations Ohev Shalom and Adath Israel were absorbed by Congregation Neve Shalom in the Borough of Metuchen located outside of Woodbridge Township in 2003 and 2006. Thus, the congregations in Woodbridge Township provide an excellent case study whereby multiple consolidations occurring over a relatively short period of time can be used to better understand the phenomenon of consolidation and its related issues within the context of post-war American Jewry and Judaism.

It is true that there were aspects to these congregations and to their respective mergers which were special. However, because the five congregations in this case study were Conservative congregations located in Woodbridge Township, the similarities to other suburban congregations and their mergers in the State far outweigh any distinctions. Both Conservative Judaism and Woodbridge Township are suburban exemplars of the post-war era in New Jersey. As a middle ground movement, the Conservative movement which originated in America was the largest and fastest growing Jewish denomination in the 1950s and 1960s. At the end of World War II, it included about 350 congregations, but between 1955 and 1961 United Synagogue of America³ welcomed 269 new congregations to its ranks.⁴ Similarly, Woodbridge Township's population growth between 1950 and 1960, from 35,758 to 78,846 as a result of it being a popular suburb for some of New Jersey's and New York's largest cities, illustrates why Woodbridge Township is an excellent choice as a location for this case study.⁵ To examine the lifecycles of the congregations of Woodbridge Township is to better understand synagogue consolidation in post-war New Jersey. Their lifecycles typify the experiences of other congregations throughout New Jersey and especially those which were expanded and established in the suburbs in the post-war era.

C. Methodology

The effort to understand the consolidation of Woodbridge Township's five Conservative congregations was approached in a variety of ways. I conducted interviews with clergy and

³ United Synagogue of America was organized in 1913 and is the central federation of the Conservative Jewish congregations located in the United States and Canada.

⁴ Hasia R. Diner. *The Jews of the United States 1654 to 2000*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2004. 299-301.

⁵ New Jersey Department of Labor Albert G. Kroll, Commissioner Division of Labor Market and Demographic Research. *NJSDC 2000 Census Publication New Jersey Population Trends 1790 to 2000*. New Jersey State Data Center. 2001. 40. It should also be noted that the National Municipal League selected Woodbridge Township as an "All American City" in 1964. Virginia Bergen Troeger and Robert J. McEwen. *Woodbridge New Jersey's Oldest Township*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing. 2002. 140.

congregants who served as officers and/or board members of the respective synagogues;⁶ reviewed oral histories recorded by the Oral History Archive from the Woodbridge Public Library concerning Woodbridge Township and these five congregations; examined archival records housed at the Jewish Historical Society of Central New Jersey and the Rutgers University Special Collections and University Archives regarding the respective congregations; evaluated Middlesex County and Jewish community newspapers such as the *Home News Tribune* and *New Jersey Jewish News* in terms of what had been written about the mergers; and consulted sources discussing the United States and specifically Woodbridge Township as well as the trends concerning American Jewry and Judaism in order to properly locate Woodbridge Township's Jewish community within a larger historical framework.

II. PROLOGUE

A. Woodbridge Township's History

Woodbridge Township was settled in 1664 and is the oldest Township in the State of New Jersey.⁷ Excluding Perth Amboy, it was comprised of 30,000 acres that extended from Piscataway Township in the west to the Arthur Kill in the east, and from the Raritan River in the south to the Rahway River in the north. The original boundaries included the future towns of Carteret, Rahway and Metuchen, sections of Edison Township and the communities that comprise the township of Woodbridge today: Avenel, Colonia, Fords, Hopelawn, Iselin, Keasbey Menlo Park Terrace, Port Reading, Seawaren and Woodbridge proper.⁸

Woodbridge Township like New Jersey had transformed during the 1800s from an agricultural settlement to an industrial center. Already by the early 1800s Woodbridge Township

⁶ The interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via telephone. The interviewees were identified via newspaper articles and/or archival records concerning the mergers. The questions asked were open-ended and according to a script attached hereto as Appendix I. Often the answers provided would generate additional questions which were not scripted.

⁷ Ruth Wolk, *The History of Woodbridge*, New Jersey. Woodbridge, New Jersey. 1970.1.

⁸ Troeger. 19. See also a map of Woodbridge Township and its surrounding areas attached hereto as Appendix II.

became an important location between New York and Philadelphia and possessed an emerging clay industry.⁹ The first “documented clay shipment” took place in 1816, when a boatload of fire clay was sent to Boston.¹⁰ Later, the Salamander Works, which manufactured “fireproof ware,” opened its doors in 1825 and in the years to follow many more factories supported by the clay industry arrived.¹¹ With an ever increasing need for shipping and travel, freight and passenger services developed in Woodbridge Township. In 1821, steamboat service began daily to New York City from the Rahway River and by 1832; many vessels provided Rahway travelers and merchants a wide choice of steam lines across the Staten Island Sound. In 1835, the New Jersey Railroad and Transportation Company (NJRR&T Co.) began to run from Rahway to Jersey City and in 1864 a branch from Rahway to Perth Amboy that ran further into Woodbridge Township was opened. Eventually in 1867, the NJRR&T Co. and the Camden and Amboy Railroad merged their companies and tracks and thus enabled passengers and freight to travel from Woodbridge Township to New York and Philadelphia.¹²

By 1901 Woodbridge Township had helped New Jersey become the largest producer of raw clay in the United States. Yet, even with a decline in the demand for the state’s clay in 1920,¹³ Woodbridge Township continued to maintain its economic vitality thanks to the emergence of chemical and petroleum refining plants which found Woodbridge Township very

⁹ The Essex, Middlesex, Perth Amboy and Woodbridge Turnpikes all ran through Woodbridge Township. Troeger. 69-70.

¹⁰ Wolk. 47.

¹¹ Examples of fireproof ware include: cupola linings, furnace blocks, slabs, bakers’ ovens as well as pipes for drains, sewers and heaters.

¹² Troeger. 57-80.

¹³ Troeger. 66-67.

attractive for its abundance of open land, rail services and deep water transportation along the sparsely inhabited shores of the Arthur Kill in the early 1900s.¹⁴

This transformation from agricultural settlement to industrial center also coincided with an increase in population. Indeed, the population in Woodbridge Township rose despite the losses of the city of Rahway in 1858, parts of Edison Township including the Borough of Metuchen in 1870¹⁵ and the Borough of Carteret in 1906¹⁶ from just over 4,000 in 1810 to over 25,000 in 1930.¹⁷ However, Woodbridge Township's largest population growth up until this point was between 1890 and 1930 whereby its population quintupled. Notably, this corresponded with the mass migration to the United States that occurred between 1880 and 1924.¹⁸

Despite the Great Depression and World War II slowing Woodbridge Township's development, by 1950 the population was over 35,000. This growth however was modest compared to the 120 percent increase in population Woodbridge Township would experience between 1950 and 1960. In the years following World War II, America's middle class became suburbanized and America witnessed a great housing boom.¹⁹ Twelve million Americans moved to the suburbs between 1948 and 1958.²⁰ Woodbridge Township which was located within 20

¹⁴ Woodbridge Redevelopment Agency, Victor Gruen Associates, Larry Smith & Company *Woodbridge – Tomorrow, A Community Renewal Program*. Woodbridge: Woodbridge Redevelopment Agency. 1962. 13.

¹⁵ Maxine N. Lurie and Marc Mappen. "Edison." *Encyclopedia of New Jersey*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 2004. 240.

¹⁶ John P. Snyder. *The Story of New Jersey's Civil Boundaries: 1606-1968*, Bureau of Geology and Topography; Trenton, New Jersey. 1969. 173-74.

¹⁷ "Township's 1810 Population Greater Than in 1880, Census Shows." Editorial. *The Woodbridge Leader*. Ed. 29 May 1930. 1.

¹⁸ In 1924, Congress passed the Johnson Act which closed the doors of the United States to immigration by creating quotas for each country.

¹⁹ Chaim I. Waxman. *America's Jews in Transition*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 1983. 82.

²⁰ Samuel C. Heilman. *Portrait of American Jews: The Last Half of the Twentieth Century*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. 1995. 10.

minutes of the Newark-Jersey City complex became a popular suburb.²¹ All of Woodbridge Township experienced growth throughout this period; however, it was Iselin, Colonia and Fords which had large tracts of land that could be subdivided into mass produced developments which experienced the greatest growth.²²

Like Woodbridge Township in general, the greatest impetus to suburban development in Iselin came with the opening of an exit on the Garden State Parkway which enabled Iselin residents to easily reach employment at the manufacturer and mercantile centers throughout New Jersey and New York.²³ Developments like Victory Acres, Woodbridge Oakes, Star Eagle, Westbury Park, Chain O'Hills and Hearthstone Homes were built in the 1940s and 1950s. Iselin entered the 1950s with more than half its lands undeveloped, but by the mid-1970s it reached its saturation point.²⁴

Likewise in Colonia, albeit a little later and with larger homes, developments began sprouting everywhere. These developments included Colonia Village, Dukes Estates, Canterbury Village, Woodbridge Knolls, Video Park, Shorecrest, Lynn Oaks, Oak Ridge and Jordan Woods. By the dawn of 1960, very few large pieces of acreage were left for major developments and whereas in the three hundred years before World War II only 85 streets were created in Colonia, in the twenty years following World War II nearly 150 streets were constructed.²⁵ Fords too experienced an unprecedented growth and development. The only place in New Jersey where the

²¹ In addition to the construction of the Garden State Parkway and the New Jersey Turnpike in the 1940s and 1950s, connecting highways like Routes 1, 9, 27 and 35 were constructed throughout Woodbridge Township in the 1920s and 1930s resulting in better transportation to and from New Jersey's, New York's and Pennsylvania's cities. Tex Perry and David T. Miller Sr. *A History of Iselin, New Jersey*. Iselin: St. George Press. 1975. 26.

²² David. T. Miller Sr. *Colonia a Tercentenary Community*. Colonia: St. George Press. 1971. 36. See also Kenneth T. Jackson. *Crabgrass Frontier, The Suburbanization of the United States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1985. 231-71.

²³ The Garden State Parkway was constructed between 1946 and 1957 and is a 172.4 mile limited-access toll highway that stretches the length of New Jersey from Montvale to Cape May.

²⁴ Perry. 26, 35-37

²⁵ Miller. 33-37.

Garden State Parkway and the New Jersey Turnpike meet, Ford's population grew from 4,000 in 1950 to 12,000 in 1964.²⁶ Developments like the 500 home development constructed by Sommer Brothers Construction Company Incorporated at Varady's Grove filled the community. Notably, 75 percent of the people who bought homes in these developments were from out of town.²⁷

B. Woodbridge Township's Jewish History

In many ways Woodbridge Township's Jewish history mirrored Woodbridge Township's. Attracted by Woodbridge Township's vital economy, individual Jewish settlers joined the masses of immigrants seeking to better their lives in the late nineteenth century. They opened stores or peddled the country side in the late 1880s and 1890s despite the lack of an organized Jewish community.²⁸ More Jews attracted by the economic vitality of Woodbridge Township would arrive and by 1906, the first Jewish families began holding religious services in their homes and later at the Avenel Hotel.²⁹ In 1907 an increase in the number of Jews in Woodbridge Township led a group of local Jewish families to meet for the High Holy Days at Kendal's Hall in Woodbridge proper.³⁰ By 1913, Congregation B'nai Jacob built a synagogue on Lord Street in Avenel and Congregation Adath Israel in Woodbridge proper incorporated. Ten years later with the addition of more Jews, Adath Israel was able to construct its synagogue

²⁶ The New Jersey Turnpike was constructed from 1950 to 1952 and is a 122.40 mile limited-access toll highway that stretches from Interstate 295 near the border of Pennsville and Carneys Point Townships in Salem County, one mile east of the Delaware Memorial Bridge to the George Washington Bridge in Fort Lee, Bergen County.

²⁷ Dorothy F.D. Ludewig. *Fords, Yesterday and Today*. Fords. 1964. 27-29.

²⁸ Congregation Adath Israel. (14 March 1964) 50th Anniversary Journal and Troeger. 110. Indeed peddling which was a common occupation for Jews became so prevalent in Woodbridge Township that the Town Committee in 1894 began requiring licenses for peddlers. In 1907, the Town Committee also took action for the first time to license junk dealers which was also a popular trade for Jews. Volk. 65-74.

²⁹ In smaller cities and towns where Jewish residents were few in number or completely absent in the period before 1880, the clearest indication that a full-fledged Jewish community had come into being around the turn of the century was the establishment of a prayer group. Lee Shai Weissbach. *Jewish Life in Small-Town America*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2005. 163-64

³⁰ The Jewish High Holidays or High Holy Days are *Rosh Hashanah* the holiday celebrating the Jewish New Year and *Yom Kippur* the holiday marking the Jewish Day of Atonement. Troeger. 101-04.

on School Street. In the years to follow, more Jews would arrive so that on the eve of World War II, Woodbridge Township had two congregations and a Jewish population of approximately 400.³¹

However, it was in the 1950s and 1960s that Woodbridge Township's Jewish community experienced its greatest growth. Jews like their fellow Americans took advantage of the G.I. Bill and the Servicemen's Readjustment Act and moved to the suburbs.³² Individual Jews like Phil Schreiber, a veteran of World War II and the Korean War, were drawn to Woodbridge Township because of its location and cheap housing.

[T]he Parkway, at that time, 1953, had just extended all the way to the Raritan River and the builders were putting up thousands of homes. Among them was the 750 home unit in Iselin called Westbury Homes. You could buy them under the G.I. Bill for \$12,750.00, no money down. ... The entire carry charges came to \$77.00 a month. It covered the mortgage, interest, insurance, taxes, and escrow payments.³³

Similarly, Jews joined the general religious revival which was taking place in America after the war. In 1954, *Gallup* indicated 79 percent of American adults belonged to a church.³⁴ Likewise, well over 50 percent of Jewish adults joined congregations.³⁵ Between 1945 and 1952, Jews spent over fifty million dollars on new synagogue buildings. In the following decade, the amount for synagogue construction was doubled.³⁶ Accordingly, the small town Conservative synagogues that previously existed in Avenel and Woodbridge proper were

³¹ American Jewish Committee (eds.) *American Jewish Year Book*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society. 1940-41. 253.

³² Diner. *The Jews of the United States*. 260-87.

³³ Phil Schreiber. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 29 January 2009. Brenda Velasco is not affiliated with this work. Her interviews which were performed for the benefit of the Woodbridge Township Oral Histories Project were merely utilized for their content.

³⁴ Heilman. 28.

³⁵ Diner. *The Jews of the United States*. 260.

³⁶ Diner. *A New Promised Land*. 97-98.

transformed into large bustling congregations and the population explosions in Iselin, Colonia and Fords brought on by suburbanization created the need for two new congregations.

Notably, synagogue construction and expansion in the suburbs was motivated not only by the religious revival, but also by parents and especially mothers who wanted their children to have a Jewish education.³⁷ The inner tone and structure of Jewish life underwent major changes during the shift from city to suburb.³⁸ This shift weakened Jewish identity. In the cities Jewish identity was absorbed in the Jewish neighborhoods through osmosis. In the suburbs where there were smaller concentrations of Jews it had to be developed.³⁹ Because Jewishness was based on the idea of Jews as a distinctive people, it conflicted with American suburb ideals which emphasized the importance of “fitting in.” Fearful that Jewish children growing up in the suburbs would lose their Jewish identity and conform in this new environment, Jewish parents who were by in large not observant reacted by sending their children in mass to Hebrew school.⁴⁰

This was also apparent in Woodbridge Township where Beth Sholom was at least partially created in Iselin according to Schreiber because of the necessity of Iselin’s Jews to educate their children. “It was the women who wanted the kids to have a Jewish education and it was a group of women who really were the initiators of that congregation and they drew the men into it. My wife was one of the women who were in that group.”⁴¹ Similarly, as illustrated by

³⁷ Women in the 1950s and 1960s, emerged as the most powerful force in suburban congregations. They dominated activities in the synagogue and their efforts made almost all religious functions possible. Diner. *The Jews of the United States*. 301-02.

³⁸ Irving Howe. *World of Our Fathers*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc. 1976. 614-15.

³⁹ Edward S. Shapiro, *A Time for Healing: American Jewry Since World War II*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press. 1992. 147.

⁴⁰ The least attended activity in suburban synagogues was religious worship. Suburban Jews attended weekly services “significantly less often” than their Christian neighbors. A 1958 survey found that 18 percent of Jews attended synagogue as opposed to 76 percent of Catholics and 40 percent of Protestants who attended church. Diner. *A New Promised Land*. 96-99.

⁴¹ Phil Schreiber. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 29 January 2009.

B'nai Jacob's 1963 brochure, the members of B'nai Jacob in Avenel used their Hebrew school as a major reason for recruiting new members.

We know that society exposes the growing child to many germs of ideas and cultures ... some good, and some corruptive. As Jewish parents, it is our responsibility to immunize our children against infection by the germs of false gods and false standards. Herein lies the importance of Jewish education. Through the wisdom of our teachers and spiritual advisor, the proud heritage of Judaism comes to life... Transported to our Hebrew School in our very own bus, the child learns with wonder the living language and the proud history that is his. Judaism comes to life for the young imaginative mind as he learns the language and culture of his forefathers, joining with the heroes of our Bible as they vanquish their foes in their astonishing and remarkable adventures. With careful guidance the younger child is led happily into the pathways of Judaism. We are builders ... We have Built ... And we will continue to build ... For upon these foundations rest the future of our children.⁴²

Consequently, by the mid 1960's Woodbridge Township had a Jewish population of approximately 4,550 and four Conservative congregations.⁴³

III. THE EARLY MERGERS

A. Congregation B'nai Jacob

Built in 1913 B'nai Jacob's synagogue was the first house of worship in Avenel and the first synagogue in Woodbridge Township. The lack of members meant that it was initially only open on High Holidays and that it even became inactive for five years in 1922.⁴⁴ Despite its reactivation in 1927, the modest synagogue on Lord Street never maintained a congregation of more than 20 families during the interwar and immediate post-war periods. Its activities during this time according to the local newspapers were religious and fraternal in nature. However, by 1950, the congregation membership and the amount of activities began to expand at a rapid rate.

⁴² Congregation B'nai Jacob. (1963) Brochure.

⁴³ In the next fifty years only one other congregation would be established. It was also Conservative. There was never a formal Reform congregation in Woodbridge Township and aside from the B'nai Jacob and Adath Israel congregations which may have practiced Orthodox rituals in the early twentieth century, there was never a formal Orthodox congregation in the Township. *American Jewish Year Book*. New York: American Jewish Committee and Jewish Publication Society. 1964. 10.

⁴⁴ Troeger. 104 and "Avenel Congregation, Sons of Jacob to Build Synagogue." *The Woodbridge Leader*. 21 January 1927. 1.

The membership grew to 30 families in 1950 and nearly doubled by 1955. In 1960, the congregation's membership was over 100 families and by 1963, membership totaled nearly 180 families. Activities during this era included a men's club, sisterhood, youth group, Hebrew school and other religious and social activities. Congregation B'nai Jacob's rapid growth in membership and activities required the modest temple to expand its physical plant twice in the post-war period the last in the mid-1960s.⁴⁵ Active and financially sound B'nai Jacob announced the burning of its mortgage in December 1970.⁴⁶

B. Congregation Beth Am

Before the suburban building boom in the 1950s the few Jewish residents of Colonia joined either Congregation Adath Israel in Woodbridge proper or Congregation B'nai Jacob in Avenel. However, on April 1, 1958, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Cubitz, the nucleus of Colonia's Congregation Beth Am was formed. On May 16, 1958, the first evening services were conducted at the Colonia First Aid Squad building and by July 15, membership had risen to 108 families. On October 21, 1958, the Jewish Community Center of Colonia purchased nearly two acres of land for a future synagogue on Cleveland Avenue North, and during 1959 the newly formed congregation became affiliated with the United Synagogue of America. On July 30, 1961, with a membership of 155 families, ground was broken for the synagogue and on June 9, 1963, Beth Am was dedicated by Rabbi Herbert Witkins.⁴⁷ Like B'nai Jacob, it sponsored many social and religious activities and maintained a steady and active membership into the early 1970s.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Congregation B'nai Jacob. (1963) Brochure.

⁴⁶ "To Burn Mortgage." *Leader Press*. 3 December 1970. 2.

⁴⁷ Miller. 90-91.

⁴⁸ Al Kapit. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5 August 2013.

C. Merger

Unfortunately, there are no organizational records for either B'nai Jacob or Beth Am. Gone are board minutes, membership lists, Hebrew school roles, monthly bulletins and other organizational materials which might have been useful in piecing together B'nai Jacob's and Beth Am's reasons for merger. What are left are the fading memories of those few remaining members who experienced the consolidation and their mementos. According to these members' recollections, the number of members in both congregations had plateaued in the 1960s and by the 1970s began to decline.⁴⁹

By the mid-1970s, Al Kapit, the former president of Beth Am believed he saw the "handwriting on the wall" and informally approached Peter Wulff, a member of B'nai Jacob's board, about the possibility of a merger. Kapit, an astute and successful business owner, saw redundancy in having two Conservative congregations in one geographic area and recognized the financial and cultural strain a diminished membership had on Beth Am. B'nai Jacob initially rejected Kapit's overtures, but within a year Wulff contacted Kapit and indicated that B'nai Jacob was now interested in exploring the possibility of a merger.⁵⁰ Between the time of Kapit's offer and Wulff's acceptance, B'nai Jacob's board concluded that they had taken B'nai Jacob "as far as it could go." Their own financial difficulties and decreasing membership also strained the limited resources of their small congregation. The actual merger process took about 15 months with various subcommittees discussing the intricacies of the merger. It was a "friendly" and

⁴⁹ Adam Glinn. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 20 June 2013 and 17 July 2013 and Al Kapit. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5 August 2013.

⁵⁰ Al Kapit. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5 August 2013.

“secretive” process conducted and controlled by the lay leadership of the congregations with little to no input made by the clergy of either congregation⁵¹ or outside consultants.⁵²

On August 14, 1977, a large ceremony was held with special guests and members from each congregation celebrating the merger. The event began at B’nai Jacob where a closing ceremony was held. After the ceremony, B’nai Jacob’s *torahs* were paraded out of the synagogue and marched three blocks from the synagogue to the intersection of Avenel and Demarest Streets. The *torahs* were then placed into cars and transported to Dukes Road and Inman Avenue in Colonia. From there the parade reassembled and the *torahs* were brought to Beth Am. Upon arrival of the *torahs* to Beth Am, the consolidated congregation Ohev Shalom was dedicated.⁵³ Thereafter, a short religious service was followed by an address by Governor Brendan Byrne.⁵⁴

Priscilla Glinn, a former member of B’nai Jacob, described the merger process as a merger between “equals.” Each had an equal amount of congregants which was estimated to be between 100-150 “units.”⁵⁵ Certainly, in many ways the congregations’ actions reflected the equality of the congregations and a blending of their respective members. Although the location of the “new” congregation was the former location of Beth Am, the congregants of B’nai Jacob in addition to their *torahs* brought their “Tree of Life” and *yahrzeit* (memorial) plaques which were incorporated into the “new” synagogue without distinction.⁵⁶ Moreover, instead of

⁵¹ The role of rabbis as Jewish community leaders in the 1950s had shrunk. A rabbi was the servant of the congregation. He could prod the members of his congregation, but he could not really lead them because less was expected or granted to him in the way of authority and prestige. Mark K. Bauman. *Harry H. Epstein and the Rabbinate as Conduit for Change*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press. 1994. 120.

⁵² Al Kapit. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5 August 2013 and Adam Glinn. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 20 June 2013 and 17 July 2013.

⁵³ Robert and Sandy Zimmerman. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 27 July 2013.

⁵⁴ “Dedication.” *News Tribune*. 15 August 1977.

⁵⁵ A unit was defined as a couple, single or family.

⁵⁶ Adam Glinn. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 20 June 2013 and 17 July 2013.

retaining the name of one congregation or combining the names, thus maintaining separate identities, the merged congregation determined to find a new name. They had a contest among the Hebrew school children and Ohev Shalom (Lovers of Peace) was selected as the new congregation's name.⁵⁷ Indeed, the ceremony was publicized as the dedication of a new congregation, not the absorption of one congregation into another.

Additionally, whereas Terry Glinn, a former president of B'nai Jacob, was the first president of the new congregation, the president-elect was Bob Zimmerman, the president of Beth Am immediately before the merger. In fact, the notion of equality was so prevalent during the negotiations that the presidency of the new congregation was decided by a simple coin flip. There were neither winners nor losers in this merger, an attitude often illustrated by the running joke between Terry Glinn and Zimmerman who could never really decide who "won" the coin toss.⁵⁸ The belief that there was no victor was further demonstrated by the consistent sharing of leadership honors between the members of each congregation. During the dedication Terry Glinn and Zimmerman formally welcomed Ohev Shalom's congregants and guests. Likewise, the *Sheh-heh-Chayanu*⁵⁹ and the Candle Lighting Ceremony⁶⁰ were both performed by the joint presidents of the Men's Club and Sisterhood.⁶¹ This model of joint leadership continued throughout the year following the merger as the different social and religious groups within Ohev Shalom had joint presidents fulfilling and receiving the various responsibilities and honors

⁵⁷ Priscilla Winn Glinn. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 12 November 2008.

⁵⁸ Robert and Sandy Zimmerman. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 27 July 2013.

⁵⁹ The *Sheh-heh-Chayanu* is a blessing Jews offer for new and unusual experiences. It is typically recited at the beginning of holidays and to celebrate special occasions. Ronald L. Eisenberg. *Jewish Traditions: A JPS Guide*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society. 2004. 479.

⁶⁰ Candlelight is often thought of as a reminder of God's divine presence in Judaism. Candles lit during holidays serve as reminders that the occasion is holy and distinct from day-to-day life. Daniel B. Syme. *The Jewish Home: A Guide for Jewish Living*. New York: URJ Press. 2004. 12.

⁶¹ Congregation Ohev Shalom. *Dedication Program*. 14 August 1977.

required and bestowed on a leader.⁶² Terry Glinn even insisted that Zimmerman sit with him on the *bima*⁶³ for the term of his presidency, an honor usually reserved for the current president of a congregation.⁶⁴ Similarly, while Rabbi Phillip Brand the former rabbi of B'nai Jacob became the rabbi, Cantor Royal Rockman the former cantor of Beth Am became the cantor.⁶⁵

D. Congregation Adath Israel

Like the merger between B'nai Jacob and Beth Am, the merger between Adath Israel and Beth Sholom was between a congregation established in the early twentieth century and a congregation established in the post-war era. Adath Israel was incorporated in 1913. Originally, its members prayed with Jews in Avenel, but when it was apparent that there were enough Jews in Woodbridge proper to form a *minyan* the Jews in Woodbridge proper decided to form a congregation of their own.⁶⁶ Adath Israel's Certificate of Incorporation stated that its forming was "for the purposes of conducting religious services and religious instruction in accordance with the Hebrew faith." The members of Adath Israel met at various locales until their first building was built on School Street in 1923. Even after the synagogue was built, Adath Israel did not have a rabbi except for the High Holy Days until 1945. As a result of the growing membership, which enabled the permanent employment of a rabbi, Adath Israel eventually outgrew its modest synagogue and laid the cornerstone for a new synagogue and community center on Amboy Avenue in 1948. For a congregation of 69 families in 1942, the growth to 229 members in 1964 was extraordinary. Various religious and social activities like those found in

⁶² Adam Glinn. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 20 June 2013 and 17 July 2013.

⁶³ A raised platform which, in Jewish ritual, the *torah* and *haftarah* (a reading from the prophets) are read on the Sabbath and festivals.

⁶⁴ Robert and Sandy Zimmerman. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 27 July 2013.

⁶⁵ Priscilla Winn Glinn. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 12 November 2008.

⁶⁶ A *minyan* in traditional Judaism is the quorum of ten Jewish males over the age of thirteen required for certain religious obligations.

the previously discussed congregations filled the calendar as the congregation continued to grow.⁶⁷

E. Congregation Beth Sholom

Prior to 1950, there were about ten Jewish families in Iselin. These families hired a teacher to come once a week and educate their children, but if they wished to attend religious services, they had to travel to Metuchen, Rahway or Woodbridge proper.⁶⁸ However, with the large numbers of Jews arriving to Iselin in the 1950s and Adath Israel unable to accept more new members, those desiring to form a congregation in Iselin held a meeting at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Kline on November 9, 1955.⁶⁹ This small group of Jews determined that a general meeting of all the Jews in Iselin would be called for November 27 and through the cooperation of St. Cecelia's which provided their recreation hall, about 35 families met. From this meeting, the congregation was formed.⁷⁰

With subsequent meetings held in a vacant store owned by Mr. and Mrs. D. Ander, the Jewish Iselin families chose the name Beth Sholom. In June 1956, the new congregation rented an old library for use as a Hebrew school and in the fall used the VFW Hall for their High Holy Day services. In the interim, land at the foot of Cooper Avenue and building materials were donated by Mr. and Mrs. Herman Stern and Mr. and Mrs. Jack Laden of Adath Israel. A "basement type building" was slowly constructed from the volunteer labors of the men of the congregation. When they had finished their "do it yourself" synagogue, the structure included an auditorium and two classrooms. In a few short years, membership outgrew the original structure and in 1960, the congregation decided that a larger building must be erected. In time the

⁶⁷ Congregation Adath Israel. 50th Anniversary Journal. 14 March 1964.

⁶⁸ Perry. 81.

⁶⁹ Phil Schreiber. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5, 7 June 2013.

⁷⁰ Perry. 81.

sanctuary was completed around and over the basement type building more than doubling the size of the synagogue. At its peak Beth Sholom's membership was believed to be over 200 families.⁷¹ In 1970, the congregation was holding various social and religious activities and had its largest Hebrew school enrollment.⁷²

F. Merger

Fortunately, unlike the B'nai Jacob-Beth Am merger, there is almost a complete set of records from Beth Sholom and Adath Israel regarding the merger process. An examination of Beth Sholom's organizational records reveals that the decision to merge was not the result of a sudden event, but rather one which occurred over time. As early as 1976 and 1977 there were already board meetings concerning the idea of merging the congregation with one of the other congregations in the Township due to a decrease in congregation membership and participation.⁷³ In fact, in 1977, when the incoming president asked for advice from the congregants on how to improve the synagogue, he received several letters suggesting consolidation.⁷⁴ By 1979, Beth Sholom's congregants' apathy was combined with extreme financial difficulties and a decrease in membership to a little over 100 members. As a result, Beth Sholom stopped paying its dues to United Synagogue of America and further raised its congregational dues by 20 percent in an attempt to meet its growing expenses.⁷⁵ Even their full time rabbi was not rehired to cut costs. Instead, David Steinhardt was hired part time, while he attended rabbinical school at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in New York City.

⁷¹ Perry. 81-82 and Phil Schreiber. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5, 7 June 2013.

⁷² "Record Enrollment Noted for Beth Sholom School." *Leader Press*. 23 September 1970. 12.

⁷³ Congregation Beth Sholom. (22 December 1976) Board of Directors and Congregation Beth Sholom. (16 January 1977) Special Congregation Meeting.

⁷⁴ Congregation Beth Sholom. (13 May 1980) Correspondence.

⁷⁵ Congregation Beth Sholom. (23 May 1979) Special Congregation Meeting.

Notably, in his role as rabbi, Steinhardt rarely conducted a Saturday morning service with a *minyan* and performed “at most” two *b’nai mitzvot* at Beth Sholom.⁷⁶

Left with the options of dissolving Beth Sholom or consolidating it with another congregation, then president, Phil Schreiber, set out to find the best merger partner in February 1980. He informally contacted the presidents of the Conservative congregations in Northern Middlesex County which included Adath Israel, Congregation Beth El in Edison, Congregation Beth Mordecai in Perth Amboy, Neve Shalom and Ohev Shalom. Discussions were held with each congregation separately and non-concurrently. By April, Beth Sholom’s board without the input of a clergy member or outside consultants narrowed the choice of merger partners to Adath Israel and Ohev Shalom. According to Schreiber, Beth El and Neve Shalom were rejected as potential merger partners because both had high dues and building funds. In contrast, Beth Mordecai was eliminated as a potential merger partner because although it had low dues and no building fund,⁷⁷ it too was suffering from a decreased membership.⁷⁸

The same criteria which were used to evaluate Beth El, Beth Mordecai and Neve Shalom were also used to distinguish Adath Israel and Ohev Shalom. In Beth Sholom’s board’s notes both Adath Israel and Ohev Shalom were noted to be fiscally strong and to have an equal number of activities. Additionally, it was set forth that whereas membership in Adath Israel offered a one year dues remission and no building fund, membership in Ohev Shalom made no such offer. The fact that membership at Ohev Shalom was more expensive than Adath Israel was also indicated within the notes. However, other factors such as congregational ideologies, rituals and

⁷⁶ Rabbi David Steinhardt. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 13 August 2013.

⁷⁷ Earlier during the post-war era Beth Mordecai’s membership was swelled by Jews from Fords attracted to Beth Mordecai’s low dues and handsome synagogue. Norman Rosen. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 18 July 2013. Fords never had a congregation of its own although it did have its own B’nai Brith branch. Ludewig. 60.

⁷⁸ Phil Schreiber. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5, 7 June 2013.

characteristics of the respective congregations were discussed as well. Notably, Adath Israel was indicated to be more conservative, to have greater participation in faith based activities and a long standing rabbi.⁷⁹ In contrast, Ohev Shalom was set forth to be egalitarian and younger.⁸⁰

Adath Israel's organizational records reveal that in the 1970s it was also suffering from a dwindling membership. In January 1980, before Adath Israel was approached by Beth Sholom, there were 210 members (156 families, 42 singles and 12 affiliates).⁸¹ This was down from Adath Israel's peak membership of over 250 families.⁸² These records also indicate that Adath Israel recognized the benefits of consolidation. Even before the merger, Adath Israel had begun to merge its youth services with other congregations in the area. In January 1979 and 1980, it merged its Hebrew school and youth groups with Beth Sholom and Beth Mordecai.⁸³ Consequently, although Adath Israel's board was not actively identifying other congregations to merge with or to absorb, it was aware of the changing circumstances in Woodbridge Township. Therefore, in contrast to other local congregations, when the opportunity to merge with Beth Sholom arose, Adath Israel's members had the foresight and the need to do so.

On May 7, 1980, Beth Sholom's merger committee recommended that Beth Sholom's board pursue a merger with Adath Israel and on September 7, 1980, the Areas of Agreement between Beth Sholom and Adath Israel were approved by Beth Sholom's board and

⁷⁹ While Adath Israel had large crowds on Friday nights, Saturday mornings and *shivas*, Ohev Shalom had large turnouts on Friday nights, but problems obtaining a *minyan* on Saturday mornings.

⁸⁰ In a Jewish congregation which is egalitarian men and women maintain the same religious rights and obligations. Congregation Beth Sholom. (23 April 1980) Board of Directors.

⁸¹ Affiliates were former members of Adath Israel who moved out of state, but still made small monetary contributions to the congregation. Congregation Adath Israel. (17 January 1980) Board of Directors Meeting.

⁸² Renae Kasper. "Woodbridge Congregation to Mark Anniversary." *Central Jersey News Tribune*. 27 March 1978.

⁸³ Northern Middlesex County Regional Conservative Religious School. (22 January 1979) Founders Agreement and Congregation Adath Israel. (23 January 1980) Correspondence.

congregation.⁸⁴ The consolidated congregations jointly celebrated the High Holidays at Adath Israel and on October 30, 1980, the consolidation agreement was ratified in a formal ceremony attended by Woodbridge Township's mayor. Schreiber and Manny Klein, the president of Adath Israel each addressed the meeting. Schreiber stated that "the Jewish community [would] be large and [would] speak with one strong powerful voice." Klein concurred with Schreiber's comments adding "how great [it was] to see so many at the meeting."⁸⁵

Although Beth Sholom's congregants wanted a merger, the consolidation would be more of an absorption.⁸⁶ Accordingly, the consolidated congregation's name would be Adath Israel and its location would be at the location of Adath Israel on Amboy Avenue. In return for Beth Sholom's assets and liabilities valued at nearly \$500,000,⁸⁷ Beth Sholom's former members received a dues remission and guaranteed representation on Adath Israel's board for one year⁸⁸ as well as assurance that its members and youth groups would be fully integrated into Adath Israel's committees and clubs.⁸⁹

Beth Sholom's assets, which included Beth Sholom's rabbi's residence, the building which housed the congregation and adjacent land, were all sold. Religious and cultural items like Beth Sholom's "Tree of Life," *yahrzeit* plaques, *torahs*, and synagogue furniture were transferred to Adath Israel's sanctuary and lobby. Other useful items like the sound system, gift

⁸⁴ Congregation Beth Sholom. (16 May 1980) Board of Directors and Congregation Beth Sholom. (7 September 1980) Board of Directors.

⁸⁵ Congregation Adath Israel. (30 October 1980) General Congregation Meeting.

⁸⁶ Congregation Adath Israel. (3 April 1980) Board of Directors.

⁸⁷ Congregation Beth Sholom. (23 July 1980) Financial Statement.

⁸⁸ Adath Israel expanded its board to include five board members from Beth Sholom.

⁸⁹ Congregation Beth Sholom and Congregation Adath Israel. (undated) Areas of Agreement and Congregation Beth Sholom and Congregation Adath Israel. (undated) Merger Agreement.

shop furniture, chairs, tables, school desks and kitchen equipment were also reconditioned by Adath Israel.⁹⁰ Those items which could not be sold, donated or used were simply discarded.⁹¹

G. Analysis

The failure to maintain a large enough membership to support an active congregation is consistently recognized in both academic and communal literature as a reason for synagogue consolidation. While academic literature has placed the reasons for diminishing memberships within the contexts of post-war American Jewry and Judaism, communal literature has set forth some common issues raised by the merger process. Neither, however, has examined how the issues of these mergers were informed by the changes in post-war American Jewry and the practices of Judaism. Yet, in order to do such, it is first necessary to understand what these changes were and what was occurring in Woodbridge Township during this time. Only then can one determine how these changes in American Jewry and practices in Judaism were factors in the Early Mergers.

1. Jews in the United States

In an ironic twist of fate, the same socio-economic factors which contributed to suburban congregations in America to boom in the 1950s and 1960s, partially caused their decline in the 1970s and 1980s. During the 1960s and 1970s, Jews continued to climb the socio-economic ladder which had initially brought them to the suburbs. The amount of blue collar workers among Jewish men had decreased dramatically from the turn of century as Jews quickly entered managerial and proprietorial occupations after one generation and in some cases sooner. By 1960, a new trend in the occupational patterns of American Jews had emerged, namely an

⁹⁰ Congregation Beth Sholom and Congregation Adath Israel. (undated) Areas of Agreement and Congregation Beth Sholom and Congregation Adath Israel. (undated) Merger Agreement.

⁹¹ Phil Schreiber. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5, 7 June 2013.

increase in Jews entering professional fields.⁹² As the 1960s progressed, Jews continued to advance. Jewish professionals broke out of the confines of local and regional Jewish firms to take key positions in national gentile firms.⁹³ While the vestiges of anti-Semitism in the workplace remained, the situation had improved enormously by the 1970s and 1980s.⁹⁴ Additionally, by the mid-1960s, 89 percent of native born Jews exceeded their fathers' levels of education. In 1970, for those Jews between the ages of 30 and 39, 70 percent had graduated college.⁹⁵ By the mid-1970s, whereas less than fifty percent of all Americans went on to college more than 80 percent of Jews did so.⁹⁶

The high occupational and educational levels of Jews in America meant that in order for most Jews to find work in their chosen careers, they had to move into areas other than those in which they were raised or where their families lived.⁹⁷ Job advancements also required additional moves, especially if they were employed by national firms with multiple offices. Similarly, for many Jews, the very act of going to college involved a geographic move since a college of choice may have been a substantial distance from one's family home.⁹⁸

2. Jews in Woodbridge Township

While Jews in America continued to advance socio-economically, Woodbridge Township remained primarily a collection of middle and working class neighborhoods.⁹⁹ As a result, it

⁹² Waxman. 141-42.

⁹³ Diner. *A New Promised Land*. 125.

⁹⁴ Shapiro. 51.

⁹⁵ Waxman. 144-45.

⁹⁶ Heilman. 48.

⁹⁷ This is not a question of whether the overall migration rates of Jews exceed those of the general population, but rather whether Jews with high educational and/or occupational levels often settled in locations which were not the same as they grew up.

⁹⁸ Sidney Goldstein and Alice Goldstein. *Jews on the Move, Implications for Jewish Identity*. Albany: State University of New York Press. 1996. 137-39.

⁹⁹ In 1960 the New York/Northeast New Jersey median family income was \$6,696 and Woodbridge Township's median family income was \$7,243. Similarly, in 1980, the State's median family income was \$22,906 and

suffered a veritable hemorrhage of upward striving families. Woodbridge Township, like other modest-priced and early post-war suburbs, began to be less desirable to families with more educated and wealthier members.¹⁰⁰ Not only did the Newark-Jersey City manufacturer and mercantile complex cease to offer the kinds of positions that were most appealing to young and educated individuals, but Woodbridge Township's neighborhoods had in some cases deteriorated by the 1970s. Thus, Woodbridge Township became less attractive to even those upper middle class families wishing to settle and reside in Northern Middlesex County. Indeed, Woodbridge Township suffered a 9 percent decrease in general population between 1970 and 1980.¹⁰¹

An early 1960s revitalization survey provides a snapshot of the character of the communities in Woodbridge Township and thus provides some understanding as to why its Jewish community was shrinking. Moreover, it offers insight as to why the Jewish communities in Avenel and Iselin may have specifically chosen to consolidate with the Jewish communities in Colonia and Woodbridge proper. Avenel, for example, was described as a "strip commercial highway" whose low level design and maintenance had a negative influence on the residential character of the area. Similarly, Iselin's residential area was described as made up of a high density of smaller and older houses.¹⁰² Virginia Bergen Troeger even goes so far as to indicate that Iselin's once thriving downtown area was unsafe during the 1970s.¹⁰³ In contrast, despite Woodbridge proper's Main Street losing most of its vitality because of the construction of

Woodbridge Township's median family income was \$25,280. US Census Bureau. "Summary of Economic Characteristics, for Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, Urbanized Areas and Urban Places of 10,000 or More." *1960 Census of Population Character of the Population*. Table 33 and US Census Bureau. "General and Social Characteristics for Towns and Townships of 50,000 or More." *1980 Census of Population General Social and Economic Characteristics New Jersey*. Tables 71 and 124a.

¹⁰⁰ Schoen. 89-90.

¹⁰¹ New Jersey Department of Labor Albert G. Kroll, Commissioner Division of Labor Market and Demographic Research. *NJSDC 2000 Census Publication New Jersey Population Trends 1790 to 2000*. New Jersey State Data Center. 2001. 40.

¹⁰² Woodbridge Redevelopment Agency. 21-29.

¹⁰³ Troeger. 114.

several shopping centers in the vicinity, it maintained a low vacancy ratio due to the “continuing attractiveness of the location.”¹⁰⁴ Likewise, Colonia was described as “clearly the best,” “the part of the Township most unlike any other,” “the most attractive” and with generally the “highest standards” of development. However, even Colonia’s affluent character was beginning to change with the construction of smaller and more affordable homes in the 1960s.¹⁰⁵

Given the rising socio-economic status of Jews in America, it is not shocking that in the late 1970s and early 1980s that these congregations were suffering from a lack of membership. Jews, like other upwardly bound individuals, had always left Woodbridge Township for better employment opportunities and college. But unlike in the 1950s and 1960s, in the 1970s, the same numbers of Jews were no longer moving into Woodbridge Township’s middle class neighborhoods. The Jewish socio-economic profile had changed. Jews left and stopped settling in Woodbridge Township. Instead, they began to settle in more affluent and newer developments in Edison Township, Metuchen and other areas outside of Northern Middlesex County.¹⁰⁶ Although all four congregations suffered from membership decreases, the congregations in Avenel and Iselin suffered the most because they were the least affluent. Indeed, it is believed by those interviewed that most of the Jews that remained in Woodbridge Township after 1980, lived in the more affluent areas of the Township like the “Estate” section in Colonia or the “Park” section in Woodbridge proper.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Woodbridge Redevelopment Agency. 28.

¹⁰⁵ Woodbridge Redevelopment Agency. 27.

¹⁰⁶ In 1969 Woodbridge Township’s \$11,260 median family income was well below the \$16,176 which was the 1970s median family income for Jews. Department of Planning and Development. “Income Characteristics of the Population.” *A Statistical Abstract of Woodbridge, New Jersey*. 1974 and Heilman. 47-48.

¹⁰⁷ Phil Schreiber. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5, 7 June 2013 and Adam Glinn. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 20 June 2013 and 17 July 2013.

Although there are no longer any records such as membership lists from B'nai Jacob or Beth Am to suggest that Jews stopped settling in Avenel, Priscilla Glinn's comments about B'nai Jacob's and Ohev Shalom's Hebrew schools are particularly illustrative. When Priscilla Glinn's eldest son celebrated his *bar mitzvah* in 1977 at B'nai Jacob in Avenel, there were 12 children in his Hebrew school class. Yet, when her other children celebrated their *bar* and *bat mitzvahs* in 1979 and 1980 at Ohev Shalom in Colonia, there were 36 and 28 children in their respective Hebrew school classes. Assuming that there were an equal number of children in B'nai Jacob's younger pre-*bar mitzvah* Hebrew school classes, it would appear that Beth Am had twice the amount of Hebrew school students as B'nai Jacob. Though both congregations were suffering from decreased numbers, Avenel was suffering from the lack of young Jewish families more than Colonia. This is further confirmed by Adam Glinn, Priscilla Glinn's eldest son, who believed that most members of B'nai Jacob and certainly those with children in his Hebrew school class at the time of the merger were living in Colonia.¹⁰⁸ He explained that in the 1970s, Jews were no longer settling "in Woodbridge, Carteret [and] Perth Amboy. ... They were moving to Colonia and out. They were moving to [more affluent areas] in Edison and Metuchen. They were moving to Southern Union County, Scotch Plains and Cranford."¹⁰⁹ Therefore, just as younger and more affluent Jews left the cities for the suburbs in the 1950s, so too, younger and more affluent Jews in the 1970s were leaving or never settling in the middle class working neighborhoods of Avenel. These circumstances may also explain why the merger was so cordial and thorough between B'nai Jacob and Beth Am. Since the majority of the members of B'nai

¹⁰⁸ B'nai Jacob was also known as the Jewish Community Center of Avenel and Colonia. As such, it is clear that many Colonia residents may have initially identified B'nai Jacob as the Colonia congregation.

¹⁰⁹ Adam Glinn. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 20 June 2013 and 17 July 2013.

Jacob resided in Colonia, they were not viewed as outsiders by the members of Beth Am, rather, they were perceived as friends and neighbors within the Colonia community.¹¹⁰

Like the B'nai Jacob-Beth Am merger, the Adath Israel-Beth Sholom merger supports the conclusion that for socio-economic reasons Iselin was suffering from a dwindling number of Jews more than Woodbridge proper. Adath Israel had always been the larger and wealthier synagogue. Whereas the 1948 excavation of Adath Israel's new synagogue inaugurated a \$150,000 project, Beth Sholom's synagogue was a "do it yourself" project on a small budget.¹¹¹ Indeed, it was even Adath Israel's members who donated the land and the cement to build Beth Sholom's synagogue. Iselin never reached the socio-economic status of Woodbridge proper. As a result, Iselin failed to retain those Jews who initially settled there, but continued to climb the socio-economic ladder. Likewise, Iselin failed to attract new Jewish families in the 1970s in order to replenish those families that had moved away. According to Schreiber:

With a growing community we always had new people coming in. In the middle of the 1970s, the building, more or less, hit a plateau and as we lost members, new Jewish families tapered off and our membership began to drop. By 1980 we were caught in a bind. [There were only] 120 families. By that time ... the more affluent, more up worldly mobile ones, had moved out. ... My six children went through the Woodbridge School system. They all went on to college. Three of them went beyond college and got graduate degrees. They all became professionals. ... But none, as well as all of my neighbors' [children], settled in Iselin or Woodbridge Township; they all moved south towards Manalapan.¹¹²

Beth Sholom's membership records in 1980 also support the conclusion that Iselin was suffering from the loss of young Jewish families. Nearly half of Beth Sholom's members lived outside of Iselin and most of Beth Sholom's members with children lived in Edison.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Priscilla Winn Glinn. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 12 November 2008.

¹¹¹ Wolk. 151

¹¹² Phil Schreiber. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 29 January 2009.

¹¹³ Congregation Beth Sholom. (undated) Merger File and Congregation Adath Israel. (3 April 1980) Board of Directors.

Also illustrative of the point that Woodbridge Township and specifically Avenel and Iselin became less attractive to younger and more affluent Jews in the 1970s was the Jewish Community Center's (JCC) and the YM-YWHA's relocations to Edison Township. Before merging with Adath Israel, Beth Sholom attempted to merge with the Middlesex County JCC which was searching for a location for a community center in Northern Middlesex County. From the perspective of Beth Sholom's members, it was a missed opportunity. It was believed that the JCC would enable Beth Sholom to maintain its identity and even increase synagogue membership.¹¹⁴ Similarly, in 1977 the YM-YWHA temporarily moved to B'nai Jacob's former location and could have remained there permanently. However, instead of settling in Iselin or Avenel, both organizations decided to move to Edison Township. The JCC and the YM-YWHA each recognized that the Jewish population in Woodbridge Township was diminishing and that neither institution would be able to maintain or attract enough members to function. Consequently, the JCC and the YM-YWHA selected an area for their new facilities in Edison Township which maintained a large and growing Jewish population.¹¹⁵

3. The Practice of Judaism in the United States

Socio-economic conditions were not the only reasons for suburban congregations to merge in New Jersey. Shrinking memberships were also the result of changes in the practice of Judaism in America. Indeed, American Jews in the twentieth century have never experienced a high degree of economic and/or residential stability.¹¹⁶ Yet, unlike the mergers of city congregations in the 1950s, the mergers of the 1970s and 1980s did not occur between synagogues relocating in order to follow their suburban bound congregations. Instead, these

¹¹⁴ Phil Schreiber. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5, 7 June 2013.

¹¹⁵ "Federation, 'Y' Plans Move to Avenel Soon." *The Jewish Voice*. 9 September 1977. 1, 4.

¹¹⁶ Stanley F. Chyet. "Understanding the Merger Phenomenon." *Sh'ma a Journal of Jewish Responsibility*. 2/32. 5 May 1972. 91.

mergers were between congregations who stayed in the same geographic areas and attempted to provide services for their remaining members.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Jewishness generally ceased to have much influence on how Jews in America led their lives.¹¹⁷ The number of Jewish children who received any Jewish education plummeted to less than half and of those who did, most dropped out after they celebrated their *bar* or *bat mitzvah*.¹¹⁸ For American Jews who grew up in the suburbs in 1950s and thereafter, identity was typically derived less from Jewish traditions and more from American culture. Anything that made them stand out as Jews was shunned. Unlike their parents, they did not have memories of an ethnic past and so they found it hard to appreciate their Jewish identity. To be sure, Jews were not aiming for assimilation, but after the 1960s, any remaining Jewish identity became more symbolic than substantive. Moreover, this new Jewish identity did not lead to much Jewish activity.¹¹⁹

4. The Practice of Judaism in Woodbridge Township

It is difficult to quantify how many Jews in Woodbridge Township were unaffiliated, but as late as 1973 the number of Jews thought to live in the Township was still estimated to be over 4,000.¹²⁰ When this number is compared to the estimated 500-600 synagogue members immediately before and after the mergers in 1977 and 1980, it is clear that a large portion of the Jews in Woodbridge Township during this time were not members of the local congregations. Attendance during the High Holidays is also an indicator of the percentage of unaffiliated Jews in Woodbridge Township. Indeed, all four congregations' members were outnumbered by the

¹¹⁷ This is not to say that during this time period there were not Jews who embraced and renewed their Jewish identities like those that participated in the *chavurot* programs which emerged in the 1970s, just that typically American Jews became more estranged from organized Judaism at this time.

¹¹⁸ Diner. *The Jews of the United States 1654 to 2000*. 314-19.

¹¹⁹ Heilman. 49-66.

¹²⁰ American Jewish Committee (eds.) *American Jewish Year Book*. New York: American Jewish Committee and Jewish Publication Society. 1973. 312.

hundreds of non-members who attended High Holiday services in the years immediately preceding the respective consolidations.

Additionally, the trend of “dropping out” identified by Hasia Diner was not unknown to these Woodbridge Township congregations. Schreiber explained that “[f]our years usually brought the kids up to *bar mitzvah* age when most of them would drop out. We’d lose a family very often. The members, you know, if they weren’t committed, the family would drop out.”¹²¹ Likewise, Kapit described some Jews in the community as those that once “[t]hey didn’t have educational needs [for their children] anymore ... they didn’t have a strong commitment to maintaining a Jewish community, ... [a] feeling that as Jews you [should] have a [Jewish] institution in your community.”¹²² As such, in addition to the changing socio-economic profile of American Jewry which directly led to a decrease in the number of Jews in Woodbridge Township, the changes in the religious practices of American Jewry also contributed to the dwindling memberships of these congregations.

5. Implications

Drazen and Brenner set forth several common issues which arise in mergers. Such issues which were also prominent in the Early Mergers include, but are not limited to: which congregation is the best merger partner, where the merged congregation should be located, who would make up the lay leadership of the merged congregation and whether the histories of the respective congregations should be acknowledged.¹²³ Not unexpectedly, the changes in the socio-economic profile of American Jews and the practice of Judaism informed the manner in which these issues were resolved in the Early Mergers.

¹²¹ Phil Schreiber. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 29 January 2009.

¹²² Al Kapit. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5 August 2013.

¹²³ Drazen. 4 and Brenner. 11.

In selecting merger partners, B'nai Jacob and Beth Am did not even seek out other partners. From the interviews conducted, it is apparent that the characters of B'nai Jacob and Beth Am were very similar. Most members of both congregations shared similar economic profiles as well as religious practices. Had the respective members not lived in Colonia and the respective congregations not been Conservative "Friday night" congregations, it is difficult to believe that these congregations would not have at least explored merging with the other congregations in town.¹²⁴ Likewise, Beth Sholom's selection of Adath Israel over Ohev Shalom reflects the manner in which the changing socio-economic profile and religious affiliation of Jews in America played a role in this merger. Since Beth Sholom's members were older than Ohev Shalom's due to the differences in the socio-economic profiles of Iselin and Colonia, Beth Sholom's members felt more comfortable merging with Adath Israel whose members were also older than Ohev Shalom's. Moreover, because Beth Sholom's remaining members were mostly older and more traditional, they were not as concerned with Adath Israel's non-egalitarian practices.¹²⁵

Another common issue raised in a merger is where to locate the consolidated congregation.¹²⁶ Obviously, in most cases, the merged congregation is located where the most Jews reside. In the Early Mergers, where the most Jews resided reflected the changing socio-economic profile of American Jewry and what was occurring in Woodbridge Township socio-economically. The chosen locations for these consolidated congregations were in Colonia and

¹²⁴ A Friday night congregation is a congregation which has a larger turnout on Friday night than on Saturday morning for Sabbath services. Adam Glinn. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 20 June 2013 and 17 July 2013 and Al Kapit. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5 August 2013.

¹²⁵ Phil Schreiber. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5, 7 June 2013.

¹²⁶ Drazen. 4.

Woodbridge proper which was where the youngest and/or most affluent Jews were located at the time.

These locations, however, also reflect another way in which the changing socio-economic profile and practice of Judaism for American Jews affected the selection of location. Previously merged synagogues followed their congregations from cities to suburbs. However, the B'nai Jacob-Beth Am and Adath Israel-Beth Sholom mergers did not follow their congregations because there was no one to follow. The changing socio-economic profile of Jews in America meant that Jews were less likely to concentrate in specific areas and that they were more mobile during the course of their lives. Moreover, the growing lack of Jewish identity meant that even if the synagogues did move to areas where larger concentrations of Jews resided, there were no guarantees that these Jews would become members. As such, the Early Merger congregations remained in Woodbridge Township because a relatively large concentration of Jews remained and because to these Jews who were mostly older, synagogue life remained important.

Additionally, because only small minorities of the congregations were made up of young families, one finds that the majority of the congregants who engaged in the mergers in 1977 and 1980 were those (or the same generation as those) who built or expanded these congregations in the 1950s and 1960s. This generation was generally still experiencing the pain of being Jewish (*Judenschmerz*).¹²⁷

Whether our reasons for joining the Temple were deep-rooted religious feelings...the responsibility of educating our children...or social, was of no importance. Regardless of how the mantle of Judaism rested upon our shoulders, rest there it did – and a segment of a generation once lost was suddenly finding its Judaic Heritage a source of inspiration and pride.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Heilman. 30-72.

¹²⁸ Congregation B'nai Jacob (1963) Brochure

As illustrated by B'nai Jacob's 1963 brochure, the Jewish heritage they embraced came from various sources. Yet, their partial, but consistent attachments to Judaism and Jewish life were of a generation which could not conceive of itself to be anything but Jewish.¹²⁹ Sandy Goldberg who arrived from Woodbridge Township via Newark and Perth Amboy echoes this sentiment when she indicated that she joined and remained a member of Adath Israel because the synagogue was always something her family "just did."¹³⁰ Similarly, Bob Zimmerman who came to Woodbridge Township from Newark and Milburn also cited family history as a reason why he joined and continued to be a member of Beth Am.¹³¹ This generation "made their choices in very Jewish terms." Initially, they clustered in a place with a substantial Jewish presence that supported the Jewish institutions that they themselves had created and expanded. They thereafter maintained social lives which were built around these Jewish networks.¹³²

Many of Woodbridge Township's congregations' former members indicated that their best friends were fellow members of their congregation. Almost their entire social network was made up of individuals from their respective congregations. They identified with other Jews when they arrived in the suburbs and continued to do so after the mergers. Bob Zimmerman, when recalling his experiences in Woodbridge Township, indicated that when he moved to Colonia he and his wife had "no friends ... living in the area," but that "all of [their] friendships," many of which they maintain to this day "happened ... through the temple."¹³³

¹²⁹ Heilman. 30-72.

¹³⁰ Sandy Spector Goldberg. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 6 June 2013.

¹³¹ Robert and Sandy Zimmerman. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 27 July 2013.

¹³² Diner. *The Jews of the United States 1654 to 2000*. 287.

¹³³ Robert and Sandy Zimmerman. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 27 July 2013.

Equally, Adam Glinn recalls his parents' closest friends being fellow synagogue members and their social lives revolving around the synagogue regardless of era.¹³⁴

Maintaining active and vital congregations was of the utmost importance to the congregations' members involved in the Early Mergers. Thus, the general sentiment of the era that led younger generations to affiliate less with organized Judaism was not apparent in the merger process. Instead, the feelings which led this generation to identify themselves as Jews as well as those beliefs that led them to establish and to expand these congregations, fueled the mergers.¹³⁵

The active spirit of the generation that built and expanded these congregations and their desire to participate in the leadership of the merged congregations is most clearly illustrated in the Areas of Agreement and Merger Agreement from the Adath Israel-Beth Sholom merger. These agreements stated that five former Beth Sholom members would be appointed as directors of Congregation Adath Israel and that representatives of Beth Sholom would be named to the committees of the merged congregation. Similarly, although the B'nai Jacob-Beth Am agreement has been lost, the joint leadership set forth in the dedication ceremony and the election of Terry Glinn as president demonstrates the active spirit B'nai Jacob's members felt. In both cases, the remaining members of Beth Sholom and B'nai Jacob who were made up of individuals who were the founders and/or expanders of these congregations were not just being absorbed, but rather were interested in becoming active members of the merged congregations.

Also related to the attachment this generation felt toward organized Judaism and their need to contribute to that organization was the legacy these individuals wished to leave behind. The creation and expansion of these congregations were not meant for a single generation, but

¹³⁴ Adam Glinn. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 20 June 2013 and 17 July 2013.

¹³⁵ Brenner 11.

rather for the benefit of previous and future generations. As also illustrated by B'nai Jacob's 1963 brochure, this generation which was involved in the creation and or expansion of these congregations was to be the link between the past and the future.

How happy the founding families who built the original Synagogue must be as they look down from Heaven upon our present edifice, now surrounded by a thriving Jewish community. As we celebrate our 50th Anniversary, each of us pauses to recall their pioneering Jewish spirit and the debt of gratitude we owe them. May we assume our responsibilities with similar enthusiasm and perseverance.¹³⁶

The synagogue which emerged during the 1950s and 1960s in the suburbs became the central institution for providing Jewish education and the manifestation of the link between the Jewish past and future.¹³⁷ Children occupied a place at the top of the Jewish communal agenda during this era and despite the lack of children in these merged congregations, there would be a continued emphasis on the education of the congregations' children. As set forth in an excerpt from an early Ohev Shalom brochure, the consolidated congregations remained manifestations of the link between past and future.

Judaism is a religion. Judaism is a people. Judaism is a way of life, a tradition, a civilization. At one time or another each of us has used one of the definitions listed above just as our ancestors did in the past and our children will in the future. ... We invite you to share with us in the upbuilding of American Judaism. We invite you to let us help you transmit to your children, who are our future, both traditions and the faith of Judaism.¹³⁸

Likewise, in the Early Mergers the decision to recognize the histories of the individual congregations reflected this same desire to be the link between past and future generations.¹³⁹

This was evidenced in the manner in which B'nai Jacob and Beth Sholom incorporated their histories into the merged synagogues. *Torahs*, "Trees of Life" and memorial plaques were of the

¹³⁶ Congregation B'nai Jacob. (1963) Brochure.

¹³⁷ Diner. *The Jews of the United States 1654 to 2000*. 288-90.

¹³⁸ Congregation Ohev Shalom. (undated) Brochure.

¹³⁹ Brenner. 11.

greatest concern during these mergers.¹⁴⁰ Of all the issues, the issues concerning the “Trees of Life” and memorial plaques caused the most deliberation. Indeed, even the location and division of these items within the merged congregations was deliberated at length.¹⁴¹

As such, it is clear that the changes in the socio-economic profiles and religious practices of American Jewry informed these Early Mergers by leaving these congregations with a large concentration of individuals who were the founders and/or expanders of these congregations. The decisions regarding the merger partners, location of the merged congregations, the merged congregations’ lay leadership and the recognition of the histories of the respective congregations were thus shaped almost exclusively by this generation’s beliefs. Therefore, the Early Mergers were constructed so that these mergers would provide for a unified and long lasting Jewish community in Woodbridge Township. These agreements were further designed so that this generation would continue to be the link between past and future generations and that they would continue to be active in leading these consolidated congregations.

IV. THE LATE MERGERS

A. Congregation Ohev Shalom

Ohev Shalom, with a membership of between 200-300 members, was at its peak after the merger.¹⁴² It continued to offer the same kind of social and religious activities B’nai Jacob and Beth Am provided in the past.¹⁴³ Yet, in the years that followed the merger, Ohev Shalom’s numbers began to dwindle and the congregation’s members’ average age began to increase. A Hebrew school which in the early 1990s had over 100 students on its roster ceased to exist.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Adam Glinn. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 20 June 2013 and 17 July 2013 and Congregation Adath Israel. (3 April 1980) Executive Committee.

¹⁴¹ Congregation Adath Israel. (17 April 1980) Board of Directors and Congregation Adath Israel. (30 April 1980) Merger Committee.

¹⁴² Al Kapit. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5 August 2013.

¹⁴³ Congregation Ohev Shalom. (undated) Brochure.

¹⁴⁴ Paul Nelson. “Decline in Membership Temple’s Future in Doubt.” *Home News*. 7 March 2002.

Instead, Ohev Shalom was forced to join the Northern Middlesex County Regional Conservative Religious School with Adath Israel and Beth Mordecai. By 1995, Rabbi Diane Cohen arrived to a congregation with only 125 members and 10 Hebrew school students. Rabbi Cohen described the congregation as “sad” and on the verge of closure. Yet, in five years Rabbi Cohen reinvigorated and revitalized the congregation to the point that the dwindling stalled. Together with Adam Glinn, an active and young president, Rabbi Cohen instituted a greater emphasis on adult and youth learning. Ohev Shalom quit the Northern Middlesex County Regional Conservative Religious School to join the “blue ribbon” Hebrew school at Beth Israel in Scotch Plains and instituted more adult education. Ohev Shalom even renovated the synagogue and hired a new cantor. By 2000, Ohev Shalom had twice renewed Rabbi Cohen’s contract and recently signed her to three more years.¹⁴⁵

B. Congregation Neve Shalom

Neve Shalom’s history in many ways resembles the histories of Adath Israel and B’nai Jacob. When the Borough of Metuchen was incorporated in 1900, the Jewish families were too few in number to construct a synagogue and instead met in each other’s homes. High Holiday services and social events were conducted in places like H. Gray’s farm and the Royal Arcanum Hall on Main Street in Metuchen. With increasing numbers of Jews arriving to Metuchen between 1938 and 1941, the congregation was able to elect its first officers, convert a two-family house into a synagogue and obtain a charter. Like Woodbridge Township, Metuchen became a popular suburb in the post-war years. Between 1949 and 1954, the congregation grew to 225 families and hired a full-time rabbi. It also moved twice, eventually settling in its present

¹⁴⁵ Rabbi Diane Cohen. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 13 August 2013 and Adam Glinn. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 20 June 2013 and 17 July 2013.

building on Grove Avenue in Metuchen. Continued growth in membership led the congregation to make additions to the synagogue's physical plant in the 1980s.¹⁴⁶

At its peak, Neve Shalom had over 600 members, but by 1999 its numbers had plateaued. Then president Marc Bressler, an attorney with his own firm, recognized the demographic changes that were taking place in Northern Middlesex County. He was active in many Jewish organizations in Middlesex County and was a part of the Northern and Southern Middlesex County Jewish Federation merger.¹⁴⁷ Consequently, he identified Ohev Shalom, Adath Israel and Beth Mordecai as those surrounding congregations which he believed should merge with Neve Shalom so as to provide a single regional congregation. Bressler quietly approached individuals in these congregations and discussed the possibility of merging to create the strong congregation he sought.¹⁴⁸

C. Merger

Despite the gains made by Ohev Shalom during Rabbi Cohen's tenure, the membership shrunk to 80, which caused Ohev Shalom's congregants to begin considering a merger in 2002. The due diligence process took approximately a year whereby the merger committee searched for a viable home which was Conservative, egalitarian and had a Hebrew school. As in previous mergers, different partners were discussed with very little consultation of the rabbi. A thorough merger committee identified six Conservative synagogues within a 5 to 10 mile radius of Ohev Shalom. They were: Neve Shalom, Beth Israel, Temple Beth-El Mevor Chayim in Cranford, Temple Beth Or/Beth Torah in Clark, Adath Israel and Beth El.¹⁴⁹ Members of the merger committee visited the congregations' physical plants, attended services, and met with

¹⁴⁶ Neve Shalom. *Our History* 13 February 2013. <<http://www.neveshalom.net/about/our-history/>>

¹⁴⁷ A Jewish Federation is a group of Jewish social agencies whose purpose is to provide social services to the local Jewish community.

¹⁴⁸ Marc Bressler. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 14 August 2013.

¹⁴⁹ Temple Beth Or of Clark and Temple Beth Torah of Rahway merged in 1992.

representatives of the designated congregations. Adath Israel and Beth El were quickly disqualified as both were clearly suffering from small and aging memberships. Then, Temple Beth Or/Beth Torah and Temple Beth-El Mekor Chayim were disqualified. Beth Or/Torah was likewise found to be suffering from a dwindling and aging membership and Beth El Mekor Chayim had too many stairs for Ohev Shalom's older congregants. The merger committee therefore narrowed the choice to Neve Shalom and Beth Israel, which were both large viable synagogues with over 400 families each. Beth Israel was bursting at the seams and even worried that it would out grow its physical plant, but it was not in Middlesex County and was less accommodating regarding the recognition of Ohev Shalom's legacy and its members' desire to earmark some of Ohev Shalom's assets. In contrast, Neve Shalom's membership had plateaued, was located in Middlesex County, recognized Ohev Shalom's legacy, offered Ohev Shalom's members a 10 year reduction on membership dues and was more accommodating regarding Ohev Shalom's members' desire to earmark some of Ohev Shalom's assets. The merger committee decided heavily for Neve Shalom and presented its findings to the congregation which in turn also overwhelmingly supported a merger with Neve Shalom.¹⁵⁰

Similarly, when Neve Shalom's board was evaluating the merger proposal, its board took into account several factors.¹⁵¹ Although Ohev Shalom only added approximately 40 families almost all of which were "empty nesters," it would be providing over \$900,000 from the sale of its real estate. Such proceeds would ease the cash flow shortfalls that Neve Shalom had begun to experience as a result of a diminishing membership. The anticipated windfall was hypothetically divided by Neve Shalom's board according to the needs of Neve Shalom and the desires of the

¹⁵⁰ Adam Glinn. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 20 June 2013 and 17 July 2013.

¹⁵¹ No vote was necessary at Neve Shalom since it was simply a matter of expanding membership. Norm Oshrin. "Shuls Merge with Tears, Memories and Hopes." *The Jewish State*. 23 May 2003. 13.

members of Ohev Shalom to earmark a portion of their congregation's assets. It was noted that at least \$100,000 each could be added to the Operating Account and the Repair and Replacement Fund. Neve Shalom's outstanding mortgage principal balance of \$120,000 could also be paid down and \$125,000 could supplement the construction costs for a new chapel Neve Shalom was constructing. The remaining \$450,000 could establish an endowment fund, the income to be used for: Adult Education programs (scholars-in-residence, speakers etc.), need based scholarships for the Hebrew School, the Hebrew High School and the Summer Youth Program.¹⁵²

Each confronting their respective challenges, Ohev Shalom and Neve Shalom merged on May 18, 2003. Rabbi Cohen and Rabbi Gerald Zelizer constructed special services which had a sorrow to joy theme. The services were well choreographed and had two distinct parts. The first part was conducted at Ohev Shalom without the presence of Neve Shalom's members and was to be Ohev Shalom's last service. It began Sunday morning and resembled the rites conducted at a funeral or unveiling.¹⁵³ Accordingly, Rabbi Cohen gathered people in a circle as she had done previously with individuals and asked her congregation to share the fond memories they had of Ohev Shalom.¹⁵⁴ The ceremony closed with the Eternal Light being extinguished, members of Ohev Shalom closing the synagogues doors and carrying their *torahs* from Temple Way to Inman Avenue before driving them to Metuchen High School.¹⁵⁵ At Metuchen High School, the second part began and resembled a wedding. Members of both congregations joined in a walk

¹⁵² Congregation Neve Shalom and Ohev Shalom. (undated) Memorandum of Understanding.

¹⁵³ In Judaism it is customary for an "unveiling" of the grave marker to be held after the mourning period is over.

¹⁵⁴ Rabbi Diane Cohen. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 13 August 2013.

¹⁵⁵ An Eternal Light hangs above the ark in most synagogues. It is associated with the menorah, the seven-branched lamp which stood in front of the Temple in Jerusalem or the continuously-burning incense altar which stood inside of the Temple.

down Grove Avenue to Neve Shalom.¹⁵⁶ Wedding imagery included the recitation of sections of the *sheva berachot*,¹⁵⁷ *chuppahs*,¹⁵⁸ and Rabbi Cohen giving away her congregation. A wedding banquet concluded the ceremony.¹⁵⁹

D. Congregation Adath Israel

In November 1980, immediately after the Beth Sholom merger, Adath Israel had 343 members, 105 of which came from Beth Sholom.¹⁶⁰ On October 15, 1981, one year after the merger, roughly 85 percent of Beth Sholom's former members remained. Adath Israel's membership was approximately 325 members, but despite its overall growth, the size of its Hebrew school told the story of an aging membership.¹⁶¹ Whereas in 1965 there were 144 students, in 1980 Adath Israel had only 61 Hebrew school aged children.¹⁶² By contrast, Ohev Shalom, which had fewer congregants, had single *bar* and *bat mitzvah* classes, which numbered more than half of Adath Israel's entire Hebrew school during the same period of time.

Regardless of the aging of its congregation, Adath Israel celebrated its 75th anniversary in 1987 with the opening of a \$100,000 new wing. Its leadership acknowledged the changes in its membership but remained optimistic.

Through the years there have been plenty of ups and downs in the number of people attending Adath Israel – the second largest synagogue in Central Jersey. ‘There was a big upsurge (in the number of members) five or six years ago but now it has leveled off.’ [T]he amount of residential construction in the Woodbridge area made it inevitable that more people will be attending the synagogue. [The] addition was built to meet those future needs and its present ones.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁶ Oshrin. 13.

¹⁵⁷ The *sheva berachot* are the seven blessings recited during a traditional Jewish wedding.

¹⁵⁸ A *chuppah* is the canopy under which a Jewish couple stands during their wedding ceremony.

¹⁵⁹ Rabbi Diane Cohen. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 13 August 2013.

¹⁶⁰ Congregation Adath Israel. (20 November 1980) Board of Directors Meeting.

¹⁶¹ Congregation Adath Israel. (15 October 1981) Board of Directors Meeting.

¹⁶² Congregation Adath Israel. (17 September 1981) Board of Directors Meeting and Congregation Adath Israel. 50th Anniversary Journal. 14 March 1964.

¹⁶³ Penelope Bassett. “Congregation Adath Israel marking 75th Anniversary.” *The News Tribune*. 20 November 1987. 25.

In the years to follow, however, Adath Israel's membership dwindled, never again experiencing the kind of growth it did after the merger. Despite its losses, in 2004, it maintained a rabbi with a tenure of over 25 years and a loyal membership.¹⁶⁴

E. Congregation Neve Shalom

There was not much change in the status of Neve Shalom between 2003 and 2006. It was a little larger and had more assets, but the situation in Northern Middlesex County had not changed. Neve Shalom's membership was not naturally growing nor was it growing younger. Overtures to merge with Adath Israel and Beth Mordecai continued, but no new advancements had occurred. The only real development was that after only two years, Neve Shalom elected Priscilla Glinn, a former member of B'nai Jacob and Ohev Shalom, as president.

To Priscilla Glinn and the former members of Ohev Shalom this was an important step in the merger process and signified that they had become a part of Neve Shalom. They proved they were active and not merely absorbed by a larger congregation. They intended to put their mark on the future of Neve Shalom and to continue shaping Jewish life in Northern Middlesex County.¹⁶⁵

F. Merger

By 2004, the membership at Adath Israel was alerted to Adath Israel's poor financial and membership state. Although Adath Israel had experienced financial woes in the past, then president Alan Blank indicated in Adath Israel's newsletter that the congregation almost fell off the "financial cliff" between the months of March and June. The loss of revenue was partially due to diminished membership, but also a result of a decrease in donations due to the death of the congregation's largest benefactors. Operating expenses were a concern as payroll and utility

¹⁶⁴ Rabbi Milton Kula became Rabbi in 1977 after serving ten years as Adath Israel's youth advisor and Hebrew school principal. "Adath Israel Picks Rabbi Milton Kula." *Jewish Voice*. 9 September 1977.

¹⁶⁵ Adam Glinn. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 20 June 2013 and 17 July 2013.

bills went unpaid. Blank, believing that he could no longer continue the “*status quo*,” organized two open board meetings to explore solutions to Adath Israel’s financial crisis. One option was to raise dues and do away with the multi-tiered dues structure. Another option was to borrow one million dollars on credit in order to renovate the synagogue and open a day care center. An additional option was to merge with an orthodox group who would purchase the building in two years. Yet, none of the options were approved and by 2005 Adath Israel’s financial and membership issues had not improved.¹⁶⁶ Schreiber, who had remained an active member of Adath Israel since the Beth Sholom merger, indicated that “our income had dropped off in Adath Israel. We just couldn’t handle it anymore ... The [members] that were left really were the ones who really couldn’t afford to move and they couldn’t pay the full dues either.”¹⁶⁷

Estelle Marcus, who became president in 2005 confronted a situation where Adath Israel was spending more money than it was taking in, a deteriorating physical plant and only 65 members whose median age was 70. Like Blank, Marcus and her board explored every option available to save the congregation. Goldberg who had been on Adath Israel’s board since the 1960s affirmed:

Prior to the decision to close the building, there were many anguishing moments and many avenues explored to try to keep the congregation going. ... We had explored the idea of renting space to a yeshiva there. We even thought of a nursery school there. I mean we went through the gamut.¹⁶⁸

Marcus and her board saw these avenues as well as the idea of a smaller building as a waste of assets. In the end, having to replace a \$27,000 boiler pushed Marcus and her board to seek a merger.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Alan Blank. “President’s Message.” *Adath Israel Community Voice*. Volume 39 Issue 8 Passover 2005.

¹⁶⁷ Phil Schreiber. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 29 January 2009.

¹⁶⁸ Sandy Spector Goldberg. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 16 January 2009.

¹⁶⁹ Phil Schreiber. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5, 7 June 2013.

When the decision to merge was made, Marcus enlisted the help of Goldberg, Stuart Hutt, Adath Israel's longest serving member, and Schreiber, who had all been involved in the merger between Beth Shalom and Adath Israel.¹⁷⁰ Merger was discussed with Beth El, the Highland Park Conservative Synagogue¹⁷¹ and Neve Shalom because they were the closest and most vital Conservative congregations in Middlesex County. According to Marcus, however, neither Beth El nor the Highland Park Conservative Synagogue offered the vibrancy or compassion Neve Shalom did.¹⁷²

Just seeing how much they [the members of Ohev Shalom] loved it [Neve Shalom] and knowing that they came in 2003 and in 2005, she [Priscilla Glinn] was already the president...she was an outsider, pretty much, and look here she is sitting at the head of the table. So this is a good place to be. Accepting everyone who wants to be involved; that was a big factor.¹⁷³

Goldberg agreed:

We decided Neve Shalom was our best prospect because it is a very vibrant congregation. ... [A]s far as proximity, it wasn't too far, ... [and] there weren't that many people living in Woodbridge proper anyhow anymore. So geographically it was a good choice.¹⁷⁴

Yet, not everyone was happy with the proposal. According to Goldberg, "[t]here were some who were realistic and realized we didn't have a choice and unfortunately there were some people who were unhappy with the decision."¹⁷⁵ Until the end, Rabbi Kula maintained faith that the merger would be averted and urged members of his congregation to reject the merger proposal.¹⁷⁶ At the March 16 congregation meeting to determine whether to merge with Neve

¹⁷⁰ Estelle Marcus. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 12 June 2013.

¹⁷¹ The Highland Park Conservative Synagogue merged with Congregation Anshe Emeth from South River in 2006.

¹⁷² Estelle Marcus. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 12 June 2013.

¹⁷³ Estelle Marcus. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 12 June 2013.

¹⁷⁴ Sandy Spector Goldberg. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 16 January 2009.

¹⁷⁵ Sandy Spector Goldberg. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 16 January 2009.

¹⁷⁶ Rabbi Milton Kula. "Reflections from the Rabbi." *Adath Israel Community Voice*. January 2006 Volume 40 Number 3.

Shalom, the “tensions and tempers ran high.” Children of members, who had celebrated life events at Adath Israel drove long distances to attend. As non-members they were not allowed to vote, but were permitted to remain as long as they did not disrupt the meeting. Despite Rabbi Kula’s best efforts, the merger passed by a vote of 57-28. Adath Israel’s assets, which amounted to over one million dollars, were to be liquidated and provided to Neve Shalom for the right of Adath Israel’s members to join Neve Shalom at a 10 year reduced membership rate. These members would also receive various honors and acknowledgments.¹⁷⁷

Subsequently, on May 21, 2006, Adath Israel and Neve Shalom celebrated their merger. Rabbi Kula inspected the *torahs*, but did not participate in the merger ceremony.¹⁷⁸ In contrast to the Ohev Shalom-Neve Shalom merger, no closing ceremony was held at Adath Israel. Instead, the *torahs* were simply transported by car to the front of Neve Shalom. There, members from Adath Israel met members from Neve Shalom and walked slowly around Neve Shalom seven times, symbolizing the marriage between the two congregations.¹⁷⁹ Many members from Adath Israel expressed that the event was “like a pendulum between sadness and happiness.” Morris Heller, a longtime member of Adath Israel indicated that he felt “a bit displaced,” but that Neve Shalom’s members were “very kind” and that the reception they received was “absolutely unbelievable.”¹⁸⁰ Similarly, Goldberg said the day was very emotional, but that she knew it would be “for the better.”¹⁸¹ Likewise, the sentiment of sadness and happiness was matched with Neve Shalom’s lay and religious leadership expressing both empathy and hope. Priscilla Glinn

¹⁷⁷ Ron Ostroff. “Woodbridge and Metuchen Synagogues Plan to Merge.” *The Jewish State*. 31 March 2006. 1, 34-35 and Estelle Marcus. Interview with Jason R. Gosnell. 12 June 2013.

¹⁷⁸ Rabbi Kula was unable to be reached for comment.

¹⁷⁹ Kristin Boyd. “Bittersweet Welcome for New Beginning, Celebrations Mark Area Synagogues’ Merger.” *Home News Tribune*. 22 May 2006. A2.

¹⁸⁰ Boyd. A1.

¹⁸¹ Debra Rubin. “Woodbridge’s Last Synagogue merges with Metuchen’s Neve Shalom.” *New Jersey Jewish News*. 30 May 2006. 19.

remarked during the ceremonies: “I know this is a difficult thing because it happened to us three years ago. Three years ago almost to the day we left a beloved *shul*.¹⁸² We truly understand, and I want you to know we support you.” She further expected that Adath Israel’s members, like Ohev Shalom’s former members, would find a welcoming family and a home where “the Jewish community could be strengthened for future generations.”¹⁸³ Rabbi Zelizer echoed this sentiment in his address to the formers members of Adath Israel:

realistically, today is bitter-sweet because it is for you a dislocation from a familiar location...but that melancholy can be mitigated by the knowledge that throughout the years, this union further strengthens and guarantees our future together as a *shul* in Northern Middlesex County.¹⁸⁴

The ceremony, which marked an end to 100 years of organized Jewish life in Woodbridge Township, concluded with members from the newly merged congregation joining each other in a meal.

G. Analysis

As with the Early Mergers, the Late Mergers were informed by the changing socio-economic profile and religious practices of American Jewry. However, in order to determine how these changes affected the Late Mergers, it is again necessary to examine the socio-economic profile of American Jewry, their changing religious practices as well as what was occurring in Woodbridge Township during this time.

1. Jews in the United States

By the 1980s, Jews had become a part of the American economic establishment. According to *Forbes*, Jews made up over 1/4 of the richest Americans despite constituting less than 3 percent of the population. Almost 1/3 of America’s billionaires were Jewish. Based on

¹⁸² *Shul* is the Yiddish word for synagogue.

¹⁸³ Rubin. 1.

¹⁸⁴ Rubin. 19.

income and education, Jews were in the upper strata of American society by the 1980s.¹⁸⁵ These trends continued as a greater proportion of Jews were employed in managerial and professional occupations in 1990 than other Americans. The gap only increased by 2000.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, in 1990, about 75 percent of American Jews between the ages of 25 and 44 graduated from college, significantly more than the less than 25 percent of the white Americans who did so.¹⁸⁷ In 2000, approximately 85 percent of Jewish high school graduates went on to college.¹⁸⁸

As for settlement patterns, it was found that there continued to be a correlation between education, profession and mobility.¹⁸⁹ In increasing numbers, young American Jews moving up the socio-economic ladder continued to move away from where they grew up and large Jewish population centers. Almost 50 percent of American Jews changed their residences between 1985 and 1990. Both the West and South posted net gains in population while the Northeast and Midwest showed losses.¹⁹⁰ Indeed, whereas 63 percent of American Jews lived in the Northeast in 1970, only 43 percent were living in the Northeast by the beginning of the 2000s.¹⁹¹

2. Jews in Woodbridge Township

Priscilla Glinn contended that the lack of young Jewish families settling in Colonia was one of the reasons Ohev Shalom needed to merge.

¹⁸⁵ Shapiro. 116-55.

¹⁸⁶ In 1990, 62 percent of Jewish men and 56 percent of Jewish women worked in managerial and professional occupations. Only 32 percent of American men and 34 percent of American women worked in similar positions. In 2000, 68 percent of Jewish men and 67 percent of Jewish women worked in these positions, while 35 percent of American men and 39 percent of American women did so. Barry R. Chiswick. "The Occupational Attainment of American Jewry: 1990 to 2000." *Contemporary Jewry* 27. 2007. 112-36.

¹⁸⁷ Heilman. 39.

¹⁸⁸ Michael Hoberman. *How Strange it Seems: The Cultural Life of Jews in Small-town New England*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press. 2008. 133.

¹⁸⁹ Goldstein. 139-49.

¹⁹⁰ Heilman. 125-27.

¹⁹¹ Goldstein. 41 and *The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01 Strength, Challenge And Diversity In The American Jewish Population*. New York: United Jewish Communities. 2003. 5.

[A]s years went on, the congregations just dwindled. When Ohev Shalom merged with Neve Shalom, ... we went with about 80 units. ... [T]here were only, maybe, three families with children, that's it. ... Otherwise, we had no Hebrew school, we hadn't had a Hebrew school for a number of years. ... [W]e all moved to the suburbs 40 years ago. ... But [three out of my four children live outside Colonia]. If I talk to any of my friends all of their kids are down in Manalapan or East Brunswick or Howell or Jackson.¹⁹²

Similarly, Schreiber attributed Adath Israel's need to merge with the lack of new Jewish families in Woodbridge Township and those problems associated with an aging congregation.

It was simply that we weren't getting any new members. Young Jewish families did not move into Woodbridge Township. They were buying, like my kids, in a newer, more affluent, community. So as years went by, without new members [and] older ones mov[ing] down to Florida or retirement communities [we had no choice but to merge].¹⁹³

Indeed, the numbers would appear to support Glinn's and Schreiber's impressions. Despite Woodbridge Township's population growth between 1980 and 2000 as well as its elevation in socio-economic status as a result of the influx of Indian and Asian immigrants, Woodbridge Township maintained its middleclass character.¹⁹⁴ In 1990, its median household income was only about \$4,500 more than the state average of \$40,927.¹⁹⁵ In contrast, in 1988, twice as many Jews as non-Jews reported annual household incomes of more than \$50,000.¹⁹⁶ Similarly, whereas in 2007-11 New Jersey's and Woodbridge Township's median household incomes were

¹⁹² Priscilla Winn Glinn. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 12 November 2008.

¹⁹³ Phil Schreiber. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 29 January 2009.

¹⁹⁴ Troeger. 114.

¹⁹⁵ US Census Bureau. "Social and Economic Characteristics – Places and in Selected States County Subdivisions [10,000 or more Persons.]" *1990 Census of Population Social and Economic Character New Jersey*. Tables 28 and 177.

¹⁹⁶ Shapiro. 156. The most poignant example of how the changing socio-economic profile of Jews affected the settlement patterns in Woodbridge Township was in Avenel and Colonia which had median household incomes of \$38,112 and \$53,269 respectively in 1990. As noted in the previous section whereas Colonia maintained an organized Jewish community in 1990, Avenel did not. Moreover, as demonstrated by a 2008 census of the Jewish population in Middlesex County, whereas tens of Jews still live in Colonia almost none remain in Avenel. US Census Bureau. "Social and Economic Characteristics – Places and in Selected States County Subdivisions [10,000 or more Persons.]" *1990 Census of Population Social and Economic Character New Jersey*. Tables 28 and 177 and Ira M. Sheskin. *The 2008 Greater Middlesex County Jewish Community Study*. Jewish Federation of Greater Middlesex County. January 2009. 17.

\$71,180 and \$78,446,¹⁹⁷ the median household income for Jewish households in Middlesex County in 2008 was \$90,000.¹⁹⁸

It is thus no great surprise that the greatest concentrations of young Jewish families in Middlesex County were not in Woodbridge Township, but rather in Highland Park/South Edison and Central Middlesex County where the median household incomes were \$120,000 and \$110,000 respectively. In fact, Northern Middlesex County has the smallest Jewish population in Middlesex County as well as the second highest concentration of Jews over the age of 65 and second lowest median household income. Notably, only Southern Middlesex County, which is the location of many adult communities, had a higher concentration of Jews over the age of 65 and a lower median household income.¹⁹⁹ Therefore, it is clear that, the changing socio-economic profile of American Jewry which partially caused the Early Mergers was also partially responsible for the Late Mergers.

3. The Practice of Judaism in United States

The trends concerning unaffiliation that began in the late 1960s also continued throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Data suggest that children's religious practices tend to mimic their parents'. As parents have diminished their ritual practice so too have their children, only more so. Although recently there has been a leveling off of non-observance, such is a condition of there being fewer rituals to stop doing than a maintenance of observance. Thus, the famous maxim by historian Marcus Hansen is not true. "That what the child wishes to forget," is not

¹⁹⁷ U.S. Department of Commerce. United States Census Bureau. "Woodbridge CDP, New Jersey." *State & County QuickFacts*. 16 June 2013. <<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/34/3481950.html>>

¹⁹⁸ Sheskin. 69. Notably, the median household income in Colonia was \$85,828 and \$97,011 in Metuchen. U.S. Department of Commerce. United States Census Bureau. "Colonia CDP, New Jersey." *State & County QuickFacts*. 16 June 2013. <<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/34/3414380.html>> U.S. Department of Commerce. United States Census Bureau. "Metuchen (borough), New Jersey." *State & County QuickFacts*. 16 June 2013. <<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/34/3445690.html>>

¹⁹⁹ Sheskin. 44-68.

“what the grandchild wishes to remember.”²⁰⁰ Consequently, Jews generally became more distant from Judaism and its traditional observances. They continued to identify themselves more as an ethnic group than a religion. By the 2000s, only about 46% of Jews belonged to a synagogue either personally or as a household.²⁰¹

4. The Practice of Judaism in Woodbridge Township

When asked about the remaining Jewish population in Woodbridge Township, Priscilla Glinn believed that there was still a significant population.

I have to tell you there are still plenty of Jewish people in town. A lot of them chose not to continue affiliation with synagogues when we merged. When Ohev Shalom merged with Neve, we did come with about 80 units of which I would say at least 30 still live in town, ... in and around Colonia, plus we have some in Fords and Woodbridge, I mean, they're still around.²⁰²

Likewise, Blank believed there to be wide spread unaffiliation in Middlesex County.

“[A]lthough I’ve heard often of the great numbers of non-affiliated Jews in Middlesex County, it seems they are simply unwilling to commit themselves to membership – with us or any other organized institution for that matter.”²⁰³

Again, the statistics suggest that Glinn and Blank understood the amount of unaffiliation occurring in Woodbridge Township. Studies revealed that the majority of Jews in Middlesex County under the age of 75 did not belong to a synagogue in the 2000s. It is clear from the same study that hundreds of Jews still resided in Woodbridge Township and if desired, they could have maintained a vital congregation.²⁰⁴ Thus, like in the Early Mergers, the Late Mergers

²⁰⁰ Heilman 120-41.

²⁰¹ *The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01 Strength, Challenge And Diversity In The American Jewish Population*. New York: United Jewish Communities. 2003. 7.

²⁰² Priscilla Winn Glinn. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 12 November 2008.

²⁰³ Alan Blank. “President’s Message.” *Adath Israel Community Voice*. Volume 39 issue 8 Passover 2005.

²⁰⁴ Sheskin. 17-69.

appear to have at least partially been the result of large scale unaffiliation in Woodbridge Township.

5. Implications

As in the Early Mergers, the lack of members led Ohev Shalom and Adath Israel to consolidate. The continued dearth of young Jewish families settling in Woodbridge Township and growing unaffiliation of Jews meant that both congregations did not grow. However, the circumstances that led to the Late Mergers were slightly different than those found in the Early Mergers. In addition, to the changes in the socio-economic profile of Jews, which led less Jews to settle and remain in Woodbridge Township and the practice of suburban Judaism in America which caused Jews to become less affiliated with organized Judaism, the Late Mergers partially resulted because of the emergence of issues in these congregations that are typically faced by aging communities. Notably, more members of Ohev Shalom and Adath Israel began to relocate or pass away. As more members “moved on,” the more difficult it became to maintain an active and vital community. Financially, the congregations could no longer keep up with the mounting operational costs and the lack of members made it difficult for the congregations to provide the activities that those remaining members wanted to attend. Simon Kaufman, a former president of Ohev Shalom indicated that a steady loss of aging members, many of whom have either relocated from Colonia to retirement communities or migrated to warmer climates, was the cause of Ohev Shalom to seek merger. Moreover, he stated, the lack of wanting “to be in a position of weakness so that we couldn’t offer services to our membership” was another reason merger was explored.²⁰⁵ Stuart Hutt, put it more bluntly “its simple demographics...the old congregation is either in Florida or Beth Israel (a local cemetery).”²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Paul Nelson. “Decline in Membership Temple’s Future in Doubt.” *Home News*. 7 March 2002.

²⁰⁶ Rick Malwitz. “Adath Israel Shutting its Doors.” *Home News Tribune*. 17 May 2006. A1.

Again, like in the Early Mergers, the changing socio-economic profile of Jews and the practice of Judaism in America, caused the remaining members of Ohev Shalom and Adath Israel to be mostly those individuals who built or greatly expanded these congregations. Thus, the Late Mergers like the Early Mergers were informed by the beliefs of those who saw the synagogue as the center of their community and their Jewish lives. However, perhaps because this generation was also aware of their own mortality, they also wanted to make certain that the legacies they worked so hard to build would be remembered and ensured long after they ceased being active members of the community.

These beliefs greatly informed the selection of merger partner and location of the merged congregations. Indeed, the remaining members in the case of Ohev Shalom disqualified Adath Israel as a merger partner although it was in the same community because they wanted to be members of vital congregations which offered and would continue to offer the kinds of activities they believed were important. So too, Adath Israel's members for the same reasons did not even consider Beth Mordecai, despite Adath Israel's and Beth Mordecai's members' long and close relationship. Each congregation combined its membership with Neve Shalom for the purpose of "strengthen[ing] the Conservative Jewish community of Northern Middlesex County and enhance[ing] the Jewish religious, cultural and educational opportunities of the members of both synagogues."²⁰⁷

Additionally, with no viable congregations remaining in Woodbridge Township, the members of Ohev Shalom and Adath Israel were forced to search for a new home outside of the Township. Yet, because they were concerned with their individual and their congregations' legacies, they selected a congregation that was in the same county and federation. Many of

²⁰⁷ Congregation Neve Shalom. (undated) Resolution on Merger with Congregation Ohev Shalom and Congregation Neve Shalom. (undated) Resolution on Merger with Congregation Adath Israel.

those involved in the Late Mergers were a part of county and federation Jewish organizations and moving to a different county or federation would mean losing the connections that these individuals had cultivated for most of their adult lives.²⁰⁸ There was a history between the congregations and Neve Shalom. Individual members of the respective congregations were family, friends, neighbors and acquaintances. Rabbi Zelizer highlighted this fact in the merger ceremony with Ohev Shalom.

This (the merger) was destined, There were precursors all along the way. Neve Shalom, he pointed out, had purchased Torahs from Ohev Shalom 20 years ago. A former Ohev Shalom rabbi was an auxiliary rabbi at Neve Shalom, and a former Ohev Shalom cantor was a charter member at the Metuchen synagogue.²⁰⁹

He again repeated this point in the merger ceremony with Adath Israel. “Congregation Neve Shalom is now strengthening a brother, Congregation Adath Israel, to whom we have been close geographically and through personal association since the inception of our *shul*.”²¹⁰ Since the remaining members of Ohev Shalom and Adath Israel wanted join a congregation where they would be known and their histories celebrated, Neve Shalom was selected.

Mixed feelings between the loss of a former sanctuary and the excitement to join a new and active home, defined the sentiments expressed by members of each congregation during their merger ceremonies. Neil Frederick, president of Ohev Shalom during the merger described the merger ceremony as “beg[inning] with sad reminiscing, but end[ing] with a hopeful look forward.”²¹¹ Ohev Shalom, member Bob Schickler, looked forward to keeping the congregation together and further indicated, “[y]ou have to realize it’s only a building, [t]he congregation is

²⁰⁸ Adam Glinn. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 20 June 2013 and 17 July 2013.

²⁰⁹ Oshrin. 13.

²¹⁰ Rubin. 19.

²¹¹ Jonathan Tamari. “Congregations Mark Merger.” *Home News Tribune*. 19 May 2003. A1.

what makes the temple.”²¹² Similarly, Irene Hutt whose husband Stuart’s family were founders of Adath Israel thought it would “be the rebirth of our synagogue.”²¹³ Estelle Marcus opined that Neve Shalom would “really be the center for Jewish life in Middlesex County” due to the merger²¹⁴ and that “[t]he consolidation of synagogues doesn’t necessarily signal the demise of the community. It is a rebirth.”²¹⁵

Not surprisingly, these feelings paralleled the two approaches found in the merger agreements concerning the need to ensure Ohev Shalom’s and Adath Israel’s legacies and their respective members’ determinations of the merged congregations’ lay leadership. On the one hand, because the remaining members of Ohev Shalom and Adath Israel had worked so hard in building and sustaining their congregations, they wanted the legacies of their congregations remembered. “We put our blood, sweat and tears in this place” explained Priscilla Glinn.²¹⁶ Flora Neiss Laden, whose grandparents were part of the first congregation in 1907 and whose father donated the land on which Adath Israel stood echoed her sentiment: “I’m kind of sitting *shiva*, ... My children tell me to let go, but Adath Israel was so much of my life.”²¹⁷ As such, not only did these members bring their *torahs*, memorial plaques and “Trees of Life” which were integrated into Neve Shalom’s ark, sanctuary and “Tree of Life,” but the agreements with Neve Shalom ensured that historical tributes to these communities would be created. Perhaps more than in the Early Mergers, because of the sense of mortality in their respective members, the need to ensure the legacies of Ohev Shalom and Adath Israel was amplified. There was a historical tribute to the Colonia and Avenel Jewish communities that was installed in the corridor

²¹² Tamari. A2.

²¹³ Rubin. 19.

²¹⁴ Rubin. 19.

²¹⁵ Boyd. A2.

²¹⁶ Oshrin. 13.

²¹⁷ Malwitz. A1-A2. *Shiva* is the mourning ritual Jews perform for first degree relatives.

to the new chapel at Neve Shalom and the classroom wing in Neve Shalom was designated the “Ohev Shalom Education Wing.” Likewise, the entrance to Neve Shalom now houses Adath Israel’s brass ark doors and the auditorium in Neve Shalom is dedicated to Adath Israel. Neve Shalom also openly embraces the histories of Ohev Shalom and Adath Israel on its homepage and highlights the fact that some of its members originate from the Colonia and Woodbridge proper communities.²¹⁸

On the other hand, because the remaining members of Ohev Shalom and Adath Israel were still active, the merger agreements reflected their desires to remain involved in the merged congregations. They resolved that in order to ease transition, the presidents of Ohev Shalom, Adath Israel and Neve Shalom would each appoint three members to a Transition and Integration Committee to resolve questions and issues regarding the mergers. Moreover, past presidents of Ohev Shalom and Adath Israel were considered as past presidents of the combined congregations for the purposes of board seats. Additionally, officer seats were allocated to Ohev Shalom’s and Adath Israel’s members for two years after the mergers.²¹⁹ Ohev Shalom’s leadership even insisted that its former members pay dues²²⁰ as doing such would make former Ohev Shalom members feel as if they were more a part of Neve Shalom and as if they were actively contributing to its existence.²²¹ Further, Ohev Shalom’s and Adath Israel’s former presidents were also considered to be past presidents at Neve Shalom for the purposes of High Holy Day honors and High Holy Day honors were also set aside for former members of Ohev Shalom and

²¹⁸ Neve Shalom. *Our History* 13 February 2013. <<http://www.neveshalom.net/about/our-history/>>

²¹⁹ Congregation Neve Shalom. (undated) Resolution to Merge with Ohev Shalom, Congregation Neve Shalom and Congregation Ohev Shalom (undated) Memorandum of Understanding and Congregation Neve Shalom and Congregation Adath Israel. (16 March 2006) Memorandum of Understanding.

²²⁰ Marc Bressler. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 14 August 2013.

²²¹ Attached hereto as Appendix III and IV are the relevant provisions from the merger agreements between Ohev Shalom and Neve Shalom as well as Adath Israel and Neve Shalom.

Adath Israel for two years after the merger.²²² Also noteworthy, when one evaluates Ohev Shalom's and Adath Israel's members' desires to be active in the managing of Neve Shalom's future affairs was the fact that some of the assets provided to Neve Shalom as a result of the merger with Ohev Shalom were to be earmarked and not simply placed in Neve Shalom's Operating Account.²²³

V. CONCLUSION

Findings regarding the Early and Late Mergers reveal that as a result of the changing socio-economic profile of American Jewry and practice of Judaism in the post-war years, both sets of mergers had a large concentration of individuals who were responsible for building and/or expanding these respective congregations. As such, these individuals remained involved and greatly informed the mergers themselves. Specifically, merger partners, locations of the merged congregations, leadership of the merged congregations and whether the merged congregations would acknowledge each congregation's history were determined according to the active and involved spirit that typified these individuals. However, the Late Mergers were also heavily influenced by the advanced ages of the respective congregations' members. It was found that since the individuals responsible for the Late Mergers were older than they were during the Early Mergers, they were most concerned with the recognition of their respective histories and the continued presence of Jewish life in Northern Middlesex County not just Woodbridge Township or Northeast Middlesex County. This was most clearly illustrated in the Late Mergers by the specific dedications which were made to commemorate the absorbed congregations and the disqualification of potential merger partners which regardless of being in the same town or

²²² Congregation Neve Shalom. (undated) Resolution to Merge with Ohev Shalom, Congregation Neve Shalom and Congregation Ohev Shalom (undated) Memorandum of Understanding and Congregation Neve Shalom and Congregation Adath Israel. (16 March 2006) Memorandum of Understanding.

²²³ Marc Bressler. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 14 August 2013.

geographic area could not ensure a vital Jewish presence in Northern Middlesex County after these individuals ceased being a part of the community.

In many ways the history of the congregations built and expanded in suburban New Jersey during the 1950s and 1960s is actually the history of the generation which built and expanded these congregations. Indeed their lifecycles mirror one another. As these individuals came to the suburbs from the cities many brought their congregations with them. At the same time these individuals raised their families, these congregations expanded. When these individuals became empty nesters, these congregations contracted and as these individuals began to pass away, these congregations began to dissolve.

The circumstances that led to the establishment, expansion, consolidation and eventual dissolution of the five Woodbridge Township congregations are clearly not unique. Throughout New Jersey, suburban congregations progressed through these same lifecycle stages as their communities faced similar demographic challenges brought on by changes in the socio-economic profile and religious practice of American Jewry. They were the responses of a generation who identified themselves as Jews. They believed themselves to be the link between a Jewish past and a Jewish future. As such, they initially established and/or greatly expanded congregations within their communities and thereafter despite decreasing numbers fought to preserve them. These congregations were the physical manifestations of their Jewish identity and just as they refused to relinquish their Jewishness in the suburbs they rejected the idea of living in a community without a physical Jewish presence.

VI. EPILOGUE

The closing of Ohev Shalom's and Adath Israel's doors ended 100 years of organized Jewish life in Woodbridge Township. Ohev Shalom's and Adath Israel's consolidations into Neve Shalom meant that Neve Shalom had become home to Woodbridge Township's five

former Conservative congregations and that Woodbridge Township's Jews once more worshipped under one roof as they had done in each other's homes in 1906. Yet, despite these mergers and the hopes that such actions would ensure the continued presence of a strong organized Jewish community in Northern Middlesex County, the same changing socio-economic factors and practices of Judaism in America continue to affect this community.

The numbers in Northern Middlesex County continue to decrease. Whereas in 1985 there had been as many as 22,000 Jews in Northern Middlesex County, by 2008 there were only 2,000.²²⁴ The continued changes in the socio-economic profile and religious practices of American Jewry most likely means synagogue participation and membership will continue to decrease in Northern Middlesex County. To the extent that the proportion of Jews with more education will increase, it can be expected that in the years ahead migration will continue to decrease the number of Jews in Northern Middlesex County.²²⁵ Moreover, with fewer Jews identifying with formal synagogue based Judaism, it is safe to assume that large numbers of Jews will continue to remain unaffiliated. Likewise, as the generation of Jews which built or greatly expanded the congregations in Northern Middlesex County pass away or leave Northern Middlesex County for retirement communities, it is probable that the current rates of apathy and unaffiliation will only increase.

With regard to Neve Shalom, the 10 year anniversaries of Ohev Shalom's and Adath Israel's mergers are now arriving and soon to arrive. This means that dues will be increasing for those on fixed incomes. Therefore, former members of Ohev Shalom and Adath Israel may choose to become unaffiliated or join other congregations which may be more affordable and/or

²²⁴ American Jewish Committee (eds.) *American Jewish Year Book*. New York: American Jewish Committee and Jewish Publication Society. 1985. 190 and Sheskin. 18.

²²⁵ Goldstein. 144.

closer to their homes in the event they have already moved out of Northern Middlesex County. As such, it can be assumed that participation and membership at Neve Shalom will decrease more dramatically in the next three years than it has in the last ten.

As for Beth Mordecai, it is the only remaining Conservative congregation identified by Neve Shalom in 1999 that has yet to merge. It has been on the verge of merger many times in the last 10-15 years.²²⁶ With large endowments and donors, Beth Mordecai was able to endure the ups and downs of a dwindling membership. However, recent financial difficulties as well as a small and elderly membership have led Beth Mordecai to start borrowing against itself.²²⁷ With such events, it remains to be seen how long Beth Mordecai will remain an attractive merger partner. Both Ohev Shalom's and Adath Israel's liquidations produced large sums. As such, the members of each congregation were able to solidify and ensure the legacies of their congregations through their mergers with Neve Shalom as well as receive the benefit of dues reductions in their new home. Yet, if Beth Mordecai's members were to exhaust the congregation's assets, it is doubtful that Neve Shalom or any other congregation would offer Beth Mordecai's members an agreement comparable to those received by Ohev Shalom's and Adath Israel's former members. With no assets, Beth Mordecai members would not be able to make the same kinds of dedications both Ohev Shalom's and Adath Israel's former members made in Neve Shalom. Instead, a scenario could be imagined where Neve Shalom or another congregation agrees only to expand its membership, accepting the remaining Beth Mordecai members without even a dues reduction.

²²⁶ Melissa Kohn Rosen. "Synagogue Spotlight: Congregation Beth Mordecai Perth Amboy." *Medinat HaGan*. Vol IV Issue 2. Winter 2007. 10-11.

²²⁷ Norman Rosen. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 18 July 2013.

In this regard, the major difference between the Ohev Shalom-Neve Shalom merger and the Adath Israel-Neve Shalom merger may provide some insight on how a Beth Mordecai merger may proceed. The Ohev Shalom-Neve Shalom merger informed the Adath Israel-Neve Shalom merger as the agreements were very similar, but despite Adath Israel's members bringing more assets, they unlike Ohev Shalom's members never earmarked any of them. Instead, the proceeds from the liquidation of the property of Adath Israel were "used by the combined congregation as determined by the board of the combined organization."²²⁸ Such may have been the result of Adath Israel being in worse financial shape than Ohev Shalom or the fact that its membership was older. Both problems Beth Mordecai is now facing.

At some point, the amount of activity that the generation responsible for constructing and/or expanding the congregations in Northern Middlesex County will reach its tipping point and will no longer, due to age, be able to provide as much time and money as they once did. Their fortitude and desire will wane meaning that they will no longer have the ability and/or desire to shape an absorbing congregation's direction. Moreover, with less members being those who were involved in constructing and/or expanding these congregations or even being the children or grandchildren of these individuals, the less attachment they may have to the absorbed congregation. As a result, they may also be less concerned with a former congregation's legacy and the merged congregation's future direction.

What will happen to Neve Shalom and Beth Mordecai in the coming years is unknown. However, much of what does happen and how such will happen is certain to be determined by the age of Neve Shalom's and Beth Mordecai's members, the socio-economic status of American

²²⁸ Congregation Adath Israel. (16 March 2006) Memorandum of Understanding.

Jewry, the economic health and attractiveness of Metuchen and Perth Amboy as well as the future practices of Judaism in America.

Appendix I Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ABSORBED SYNAGOGUE INTERVIEWEE

Pre-Consolidation

- How long had the synagogue existed?
- How old was the building? Did it require major renovations?
- Had there been any expansions before the consolidation? Had there been any previous incarnations of this synagogue? What was the history of the synagogue?
- How many employees were employed by the synagogue before the consolidation? What were their positions? Were these new positions?
- How many people were members of the synagogue before its consolidation? What was the highest and lowest amount of members? When?
- What were the demographics of the synagogue (age, socio-economic status, national origin)? Had it changed from its inception?
- How many Hebrew school students did the synagogue have before it consolidated? What was the highest and lowest amount of students? When?
- Where was the synagogue located?
- Why was this location originally selected?
- Where did the members live in relation to the synagogue
- Who were the rabbi and cantor?
- How long had they been working for the synagogue before the consolidation?
- How many individuals regularly attended services for Shabbat, morning minyan, the High Holiday Days, and for the other holidays before the consolidation? Did congregants walk or drive to synagogue?

- What was participation in synagogue events like before consolidation? What were some of the events?
- What denomination of Judaism was the synagogue (Reform, Conservative, Traditional, Orthodox)?
- What was your position on the board?
- How long had you been a member of the synagogue before you were a board member?
- Where did you live in relation to the synagogue? How long had you lived there?
- What brought you to Woodbridge?
- Why did you become a member of the synagogue and later a member of the board?
- Were you aware of the situation that led to consolidation before becoming a board member?
- How necessary was the consolidation?

Consolidation

- What were the reasons the board decided to explore the possibility of consolidating with another synagogue?
- Was there a single event which led the board to consider consolidation or was this something which was contemplated over time?
- How much time after these events was consolidation considered?
- Were there alternatives to consolidation? What were they?
- Was the rabbi consulted? Was anyone outside of the board consulted?
- How did the board identify the synagogues which would be approached for consolidation?
- Who were those synagogues?

- Did your synagogue have any relations with any of these synagogues before the consolidation?
- How were these synagogues approached? Formally or Informally?
- What were the goals of the consolidation?
- Which factors were taken into consideration when determining consolidation? What was the most important factor in consolidation? (Equalitarianism, Finances, Similar Religious Tradition, Hebrew School, Vibrancy of Social Organizations, Previous Mergers)
- How were these factors evaluated?
- Were there any red lines?
- Why was one synagogue eventually selected over the others?
- How was the internal selection process conducted?
- Were there meetings between the boards?
- How were negotiations conducted? Were there simultaneous negotiations going on?
- Did the synagogues have legal representatives?
- How long did the process take to be completed?
- Was there any time constraints?
- How was consolidation broached to the congregation as a whole?
- What were the reactions of the congregants and the clergy?
- How was the consolidation performed?
- What were the terms of the consolidation?
- How did the synagogues mark the consolidation?

Post-Consolidation

- How were the assets of the synagogue liquidated (real estate, ritual objects, other)?

- How were the congregations consolidated? Was this a merger or an absorption? What was done in order to unite the congregations?
- Was there anyone who left the congregation as a result of the consolidation?
- Whose rabbi and cantor led the consolidated synagogue? How was this decided?
- Were you a member of the board after the consolidation?
- How long before all the issues regarding the consolidation were settled?
- Are you still a member of the consolidated synagogue? Why did you leave?

Miscellaneous

- Were you a member of the congregation during its previous consolidation?
- Do you have any records concerning the consolidation?
- Do you know where I would be able to find records concerning the consolidation?
- Do you know of any other individuals who may have information concerning the consolidation?

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ABSORBING SYNAGOGUE INTERVIEWEE

Pre-Consolidation

- How long had the synagogue existed?
- What was the history of the synagogue?
- How many people were members of the synagogue before its consolidation? What was the highest and lowest amount of members? When?
- What were the demographics of the synagogue before the consolidation (age, socio-economic status, national origin)?
- How many Hebrew school students did the synagogue have before it consolidated? What was the highest and lowest amount of students? When?
- Where was the synagogue located?
- Why was this location originally selected?
- Where did the members live in relation to the synagogue
- Who were the rabbi and cantor?
- How long had they been working for the synagogue before the consolidation?
- How was Shabbat and holiday attendance before the consolidation?
- What was participation in synagogue events like before consolidation? What were some of the events?
- What was your position on the board?
- How long had you been a member of the synagogue before you were a board member?
- Where did you live in relation to the synagogue? How long had you lived there?
- What brought you to Woodbridge?

- Why did you become a member of the synagogue and later a member of the board?

Consolidation

- Did the board ever identify synagogues which were to be approached for consolidation?
- What were the reasons the board decided to explore the possibility of consolidating with another synagogue?
- How much time after these events was consolidation considered?
- Was the rabbi consulted? Was anyone outside of the board consulted?
- Did your synagogue have any relations with the other synagogue before the consolidation?
- How was the synagogues approached? Formally or Informally?
- What were the goals of the consolidation?
- Which factors were taken into consideration when determining consolidation? What was the most important factor in consolidation?
- How were these factor evaluated?
- Were there any red lines?
- How was the internal consolidation process conducted?
- Were there meetings between the boards?
- How were negotiations conducted?
- Did the synagogues have legal representatives?
- How long did the process take to be completed?
- Was there any time constraints?
- How was consolidation broached to the congregation as a whole?
- What were the reactions of congregants and the clergy? Were there any negative reactions?

- How was the consolidation performed?
- What were the terms of the consolidation?
- How did the synagogues mark the consolidation?

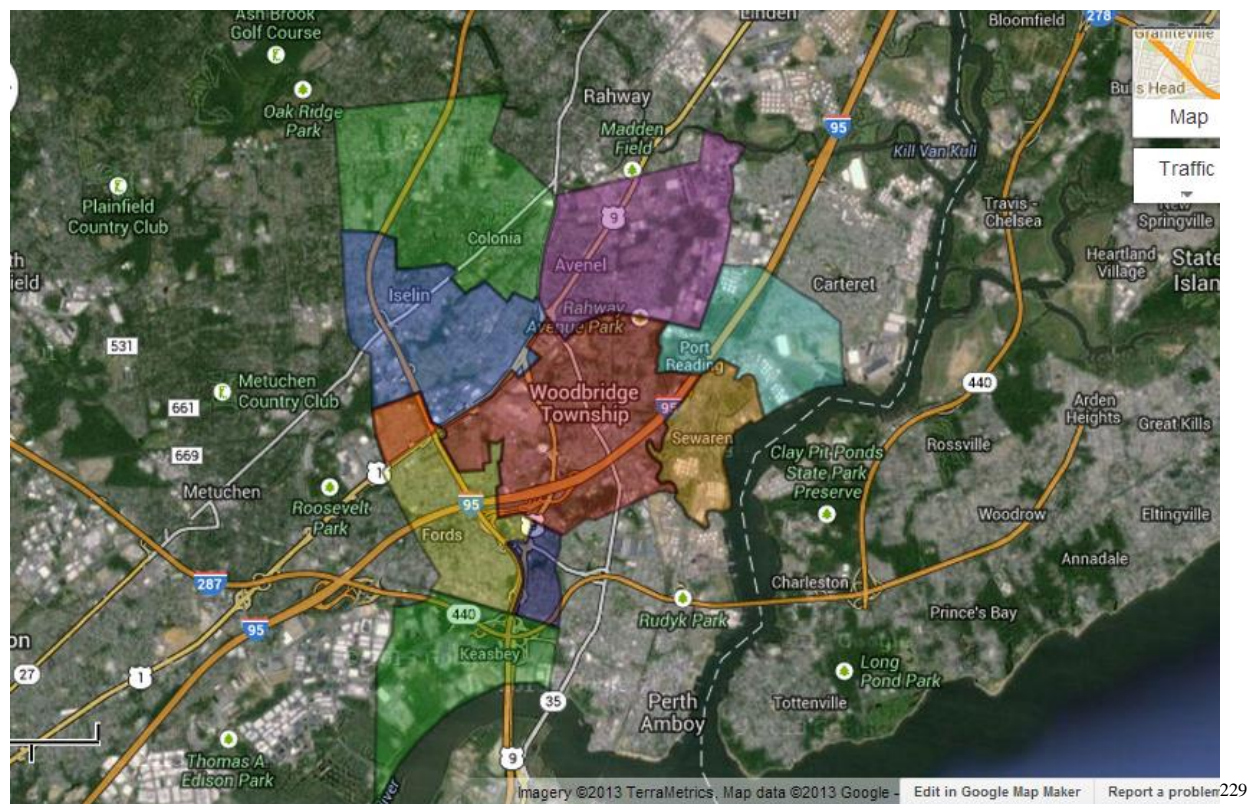
Post-Consolidation

- How were the assets of the synagogue liquidated (real estate, ritual objects, other)?
- How were the congregations consolidated? Was this a merger or an absorption? What was done in order to unite the congregations?
- Was there anyone who left the congregation as a result of the consolidation?
- Whose rabbi and cantor led the consolidated synagogue? How was this decided?
- Were you a member of the board after the consolidation?
- How long before all the issues regarding the consolidation were settled?
- Are you still a member of the consolidated synagogue? Why did you leave?

Miscellaneous

- Were you a member of the congregation during its previous consolidation?
- Do you have any records concerning the consolidation?
- Do you know where I would be able to find records concerning the consolidation?
- Do you know of any other individuals who may have information concerning the consolidation?

Appendix II Map of Woodbridge Township and Surrounding Areas



- Avenel
- Colonia
- Fords
- Hopelawn
- Iselin
- Keasbey
- Menlo Park Terrace
- Port Reading
- Sewaren
- Woodbridge proper

²²⁹ Google Maps. *Woodbridge Township*. 1 August 2013.

<https://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&t=h&msa=0&msid=110659212853617177645.00047a3946e3aca103a13&ll=40.556591,-74.283543&spn=0.054777,0.135612&z=13&source=embed>

Appendix III Relevant Ohev Shalom-Neve Shalom Merger Agreement Provisions

DUES

There shall be no dues charged for a Colonia membership for the balance of the 2002-2003 fiscal year in consideration of said members having already paid their dues to Ohev Shalom.

The dues rate for a Colonia membership shall be \$360 per household per year through the fiscal year ending June 30, 2013, except that the dues of an unmarried Colonia member over the age 65 shall be reduced to \$300 through the fiscal year ending June 20, 2008. For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2014, a Colonia member's dues shall be 50% of the regular dues charged to a member of Congregation Neve Shalom for the applicable membership classification, i.e.: couple, senior couple or senior single (provided that nothing herein shall obligate the synagogue to retain a discount for senior citizens). For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2015, a Colonia member's dues shall be 75% of the regular dues charged to a member of Congregation Neve Shalom for the applicable membership classification. For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2016, and thereafter, there shall be no special dues rates for Colonia members.

The dues rates for Colonia members shall include mandatory fees as United Synagogue dues and Repair and Replacement Fund assessments, but shall not include optional items such as contributions to the *Masoroti* Movement in Israel, Adult Education fees, activity fees or Men's Club or Sisterhood dues.²³⁰

HONORS, ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND GOVERNANCE

Ohev Shalom *yahrzeit* plaques (approximately 700) will be hung in our sanctuary. (The plaques are the identical style, and, yes, there's room). Ohev Shalom *yahrzeits* will be acknowledged in the same manner as Neve Shalom *yahrzeits*.

Ohev Shalom "Tree of Life" leaves and rocks will be integrated in the Neve Shalom "Tree of Life".

An historical tribute to the Colonia/Avenel Jewish communities will be installed in the new corridor to the new "Hayat Chapel".

Past presidents of Ohev Shalom will be considered as past presidents of the combined congregation for purposes of Board seats and High Holy Day honors.

Twenty-five percent of High Holy Day honors to be allocated to the new "Colonia members" in 5764 and 5765. (Thereafter, no distinctions between membership categories.)

²³⁰ Congregation Neve Shalom. (undated) Resolution on Merger with Congregation Ohev Shalom.

Classroom wing to be designated “Ohev Shalom Education Wing”.

Congregation Neve Shalom is surviving legal entity.

Five elected Board seats (25 percent) and two Executive Committee positions (20 percent) will be allocated to the new “Colonia members”. (Thereafter, no distinctions between membership categories.)

The two presidents will each appoint three members to a “Transition and Integration Committee” to resolve questions and issues that may arise.²³¹

²³¹ Congregation Neve Shalom and Congregation Ohev Shalom. (undated) Memorandum of Understanding.

Appendix IV Relevant Adath Israel-Neve Shalom Merger Agreement Provisions

DUES

For members of Congregation Adath Israel who enroll as members of the combined congregation prior to July 1, 2006, there shall be no additional dues charged for the balance of the 2005-2006 fiscal year in consideration of the fact that said members will have already paid their dues to congregation Adath Israel.

Woodbridge members shall pay membership dues of \$350 per household per year through the fiscal year ending June 30, 2016, except that unmarried singles under the age of 65 and married seniors over the age of 65 shall pay \$230 per year and unmarried seniors over the age 65 shall pay \$125 per year. There shall be an associate member fee of \$100 per year solely available to members who desire to receive the Congregation mailings. These special dues rates shall end at the fiscal year ending June 30, 2016, and thereafter, for the next five years with the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021, the dues will be gradually increased²³² in line with actual dues rates for members. Any child/children of a member of Adath Israel, who purchased High Holiday tickets in 2005, will be able to join Neve Shalom at the discounted rate provided said children join Neve Shalom prior to the High Holidays in 2006.

The dues rates for Woodbridge members shall not include mandatory fees such as United Synagogue dues and shall not include optional items, which shall be in the sole discretion of each member, such as contributions to the *Masoroti* Movement in Israel, Adult Education fees, activity fees or Men's Club or Sisterhood dues.

HONORS, ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND GOVERNANCE

Each past president of Congregation Adath Israel shall be deemed to be a past president of the combined congregation and, as such, shall be entitled to a seat on the Board of Directors in the same manner as a past president of Congregation Neve Shalom; and the current president of Congregation Adath Israel shall be deemed to be an immediate past president of the combined Congregation for purposes of participation in the Executive Committee of the combined congregation.

For the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 fiscal years, not fewer than two officers of the combined Congregation shall be from among those who are members in good standing of the combined congregation and who, as of March 1, 2006, had been members in good standing of Congregation Adath Israel if same are available and interested in a position. Thereafter, no distinction shall be made between those who were previously members of Congregation Adath Israel and those who were members of Congregation Neve Shalom.

²³² Dues for former Adath Israel congregants after 2016 will be increased by 20 percent each year until 2021.

Memorial (*yahrzeit*) plaques currently hanging in the sanctuary of Congregation Adath Israel shall be transferred to the *bait midrash* under construction of Congregation Neve Shalom and shall be displayed in the same manner as those of Congregation Neve Shalom.

The *yahrzeits* of Congregation Adath Israel shall be integrated into *yahrzeit* database of Congregation Neve Shalom and shall be memorialized in the same manner as *yahrzeits* of Congregation Neve Shalom.

For the purposes of the receipt and allocation of all categories of High Holiday Honors, the combined congregation shall recognize the Woodbridge members in the same manner as all members of Congregation Neve Shalom. Further, the individuals of committee of Congregation Neve Shalom authorized to assign and allocate High Holy Day honors shall, for the High Holy Days of 2006 (5767) and 2007 (5768), allocate and assign no less than twenty percent (20%) of each category of High Holy Day honors to Woodbridge members if available.

The past presidents of Congregation Adath Israel who remain members in good standing of the combined Congregation shall be given the honor of holding Torah scrolls on the *bima* of Congregation Neve Shalom during the *Kol Nidre* services of 2006 (5767) and 2007 (5768). It is understood that this qualifies as an honor for the High Holy Days.

The presidents of Congregation Adath Israel and Congregation Neve Shalom shall each designate three members to serve as a Transition and Integration Committee. Questions and issues that may arise from the combining of the two congregations shall be referred to the Transition and Integration Committee for resolution. Such committee shall be in existence for no less than two years.

All net proceeds of the liquidation of the property of congregation Adath Israel will be transferred to the combined congregation. Said proceeds shall be used by the combined congregation as determined by the Board of the combined organization.²³³

²³³ Congregations Neve Shalom and Adath Israel. (16 March 2006) Memorandum of Understanding.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books and Periodicals

“Adath Israel: 75 Years of Passing Generations.” *Our Hometown, The Premier Community Magazine*. Issue Two Volume 1 15 October 1987.

American Jewish Committee (eds.) *American Jewish Year Book*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society. 1940-41. 253.

--*American Jewish Year Book*. New York: American Jewish Committee and Jewish Publication Society. 1964. 10.

--*American Jewish Year Book*. New York: American Jewish Committee and Jewish Publication Society. 1973. 312.

--*American Jewish Year Book*. New York: American Jewish Committee and Jewish Publication Society. 1985. 190.

Mark K. Bauman. *Harry H. Epstein and the Rabbinate as Conduit for Change*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press. 1994. 120.

Harvey M. Brenner. *Merging Congregations The Exploration, Facilitation and Execution of a Synagogue Merger, and the Role of the Administrator/Executive Director in the Process*. January 2008. 11.

Barry R. Chiswick. “The Occupational Attainment of American Jewry: 1990 to 2000.” *Contemporary Jewry* 27. 2007. 112–36.

Stanley F. Chyet. “Understanding the Merger Phenomenon.” *Sh'ma a Journal of Jewish Responsibility*. 2/32. 5 May 1972. 91.

Hasia Diner. *A New Promised Land, A History of Jews in America*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2003. 96-125.

---*The Jews of the United States 1654 to 2000*. Berkley: University of California Press. 2004. 104-319.

Rabbi Paul Drazen. *Tzemed Chemed - Finding the Right Fit On Merging Congregations*. The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. 8 January 2007. 4.

Ronald L. Eisenberg. *Jewish Traditions: A JPS Guide*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society. 2004. 479.

Sidney Goldstein and Alice Goldstein. *Jews on the Move, Implications for Jewish Identity*. Albany: State University of New York Press. 1996. 41-149.

Samuel C. Heilman. *Portrait of American Jews: The Last Half of the Twentieth Century*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. 1995. 10-141.

Michael Hoberman. *How Strange it Seems: The Cultural Life of Jews in Small-town New England*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press. 2008. 133.

Irving Howe. *World of Our Fathers*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc. 1976. 614-15.

Dorothy F.D. Ludewig. *Fords, Yesterday and Today*. Fords. 1964. 27-60.

Maxine N. Lurie and Marc Mappen. "Edison." *Encyclopedia of New Jersey*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 2004. 240.

Kenneth T. Jackson. *Crabgrass Frontier, The Suburbanization of the United States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1985. 231-71.

David. T. Miller Sr. *Colonia a Tercentenary Community*. Colonia: St. George Press. 1971. 33-91.

Tex Perry and David T. Miller Sr. *A History of Iselin, New Jersey*. Iselin: St. George Press. 1975. 26-81.

Melissa Kohn Rosen. "Synagogue Spotlight: Congregation Beth Mordecai Perth Amboy." *Medinat HaGan*. Vol IV Issue 2. Winter 2007. 10-11.

Myron Schoen. "Suddenly Synagogues are Merging" *Sh'ma a Journal of Jewish Responsibility*. 2/32. 5 May 1972. 89-91.

Edward S. Shapiro, *A Time for Healing: American Jewry Since World War II*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press. 1992. 51-156.

John P. Snyder. *The Story of New Jersey's Civil Boundaries: 1606-1968*, Bureau of Geology and Topography; Trenton, New Jersey. 1969. 173-74.

Daniel B. Syme. *The Jewish Home: A Guide for Jewish Living*. New York: URJ Press. 2004. 12.

Virginia Bergen Troeger and Robert J. McEwen. *Woodbridge New Jersey's Oldest Township*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing. 2002. 19-140.

Chaim I. Waxman. *America's Jews in Transition*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 1983. 82-145.

Lee Shai Weissbach. *Jewish Life in Small-Town America*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2005. 36-164.

Ruth Wolk, *The History of Woodbridge*, New Jersey. Woodbridge, New Jersey. 1970.1-151.

Newspapers and Newsletters

“Adath Israel Picks Rabbi Milton Kula.” *Jewish Voice*. 9 September 1977.

“Avenel Congregation, Sons of Jacob to Build Synagogue.” *The Woodbridge Leader*. 21 January 1927. 1.

“Dedication.” *News Tribune*. 15 August 1977.

“Federation, ‘Y’ Plans Move to Avenel Soon.” *The Jewish Voice*. 9 September 1977. 1, 4.

“Record Enrollment Noted for Beth Sholom School.” *Leader Press*. 23 September 1970. 12.

“To Burn Mortgage.” *Leader Press*. 3 December 1970. 2.

“Township's 1810 Population Greater Than in 1880, Census Shows.” Editorial. *The Woodbridge Leader*. Ed. 29 May 1930. 1.

Penelope Bassett. “Congregation Adath Israel Marking 75th Anniversary.” *The News Tribune*. 20 November 1987. 25.

Kristin Boyd. “Bittersweet Welcome for New Beginning, Celebrations Mark Area Synagogues’ Merger.” *Home News Tribune*. 22 May 2006. A1-A2.

Alan Blank. “President’s Message.” *Adath Israel Community Voice*. Volume 39 issue 8 Passover 2005.

Rena Kasper. “Woodbridge Congregation to Mark Anniversary.” *Central Jersey News Tribune*. 27 March 1978.

Rabbi Milton Kula. “Reflections from the Rabbi.” *Adath Israel Community Voice*. January 2006 Volume 40 Number 3.

Rick Malwitz. “Adath Israel Shutting its Doors.” *Home News Tribune*. 17 May 2006. A1-A2.

Paul Nelson. “Decline in Membership Temple’s Future in Doubt.” *Home News*. 7 March 2002.

Norm Oshrin. “Shuls Merge with Tears, Memories and Hopes.” *The Jewish State*. 23 May 2003. 13.

Ron Ostroff. “Woodbridge and Metuchen Synagogues Plan to Merge.” *The Jewish State*. 31 March 2006. 1, 34-35.

Debra Rubin. "Woodbridge's Last Synagogue Merges with Metuchen's Neve Shalom." *New Jersey Jewish News*. 30 May 2006. 1, 19.

Jonathan Tamari. "Congregations Mark Merger." *Home News Tribune*. 19 May 2003. A1-A2.

Interviews

Marc Bressler. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 14 August 2013.

Rabbi Diane Cohen. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 13 August 2013.

Adam Glinn. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 20 June 2013 and 17 July 2013.

Priscilla Winn Glinn. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 12 November 2008.

Sandy Spector Goldberg. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 16 January 2009.

Sandy Spector Goldberg. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 6 June 2013.

Al Kapit. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5 August 2013.

Estelle Marcus. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 12 June 2013.

Norman Rosen. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 18 July 2013.

Phil Schreiber. Interview with Brenda Velasco. 29 January 2009.

Phil Schreiber. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 5, 7 June 2013.

Rabbi David Steinhardt. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 13 August 2013.

Robert and Sandy Zimmerman. Interview with Jason Gosnell. 27 July 2013.

Archival Records

Congregation Adath Israel. (14 March 1964) 50th Anniversary Journal.

Congregation Adath Israel. (17 January 1980) Board of Directors Meeting.

Congregation Adath Israel. (23 January 1980) Correspondence.

Congregation Adath Israel. (3 April 1980) Board of Directors.

Congregation Adath Israel. (3 April 1980) Executive Committee.

Congregation Adath Israel. (17 April 1980) Board of Directors.

Congregation Adath Israel. (30 April 1980) Merger Committee.

Congregation Adath Israel. (30 October 1980) General Congregation Meeting.

Congregation Adath Israel. (20 November 1980) Board of Directors Meeting.

Congregation Adath Israel. (17 September 1981) Board of Directors Meeting.

Congregation Adath Israel. (15 October 1981) Board of Directors Meeting.

Congregation B'nai Jacob. (1963) Brochure.

Congregation Beth Sholom. (22 December 1976) Board of Directors.

Congregation Beth Sholom. (16 January 1977) Special Congregation Meeting.

Congregation Beth Sholom. (23 May 1979) Special Congregation Meeting.

Congregation Beth Sholom. (23 April 1980) Board of Directors.

Congregation Beth Sholom. (13 May 1980) Correspondence.

Congregation Beth Sholom. (16 May 1980) Board of Directors.

Congregation Beth Sholom. (23 July 1980) Financial Statement.

Congregation Beth Sholom. (7 September 1980) Board of Directors.

Congregation Beth Sholom. (undated) Merger File.

Congregation Beth Sholom and Congregation Adath Israel. (undated) Areas of Agreement.

Congregation Beth Sholom and Congregation Adath Israel. (undated) Merger Agreement.

Congregation Ohev Shalom. *Dedication Program*. 14 August 1977.

Congregation Ohev Shalom. (undated) Brochure.

Congregations Neve Shalom and Adath Israel. (16 March 2006) Memorandum of Understanding.

Congregation Neve Shalom. (undated) Resolution on Merger with Congregation Ohev Shalom.

Congregation Neve Shalom. (undated) Resolution on Merger with Congregation Adath Israel.

Congregation Neve Shalom and Congregation Ohev Shalom. (undated) Memorandum of Understanding.

Censuses

Department of Planning and Development. "Income Characteristics of the Population." *A Statistical Abstract of Woodbridge, New Jersey*. 1974.

Ira M. Sheskin. *The 2008 Greater Middlesex County Jewish Community Study*. Jewish Federation of Greater Middlesex County. January 2009. 17-69.

New Jersey Department of Labor Albert G. Kroll, Commissioner Division of Labor Market and Demographic Research. *NJSDC 2000 Census Publication New Jersey Population Trends 1790 to 2000*. New Jersey State Data Center. 2001. 40.

Northern Middlesex County Regional Conservative Religious School. (22 January 1979) Founders Agreement.

US Census Bureau. "Summary of Economic Characteristics, for Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, Urbanized Areas and Urban Places of 10,000 or More." *1960 Census of Population Character of the Population*. Table 33.

--"General and Social Characteristics for Towns and Townships of 50,000 or More." *1980 Census of Population General Social and Economic Characteristics New Jersey*. Tables 71 and 124a.

--"Social and Economic Characteristics – Places and in Selected States County Subdivisions [10,000 or more Persons.]" *1990 Census of Population Social and Economic Character New Jersey*. Tables 28 and 177.

The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01 Strength, Challenge And Diversity In The American Jewish Population. New York: United Jewish Communities. 2003. 5-7.

Woodbridge Redevelopment Agency, Victor Gruen Associates, Larry Smith & Company *Woodbridge –Tomorrow, A Community Renewal Program*. Woodbridge: Woodbridge Redevelopment Agency. 1962. 13-29.

Websites

Congregation Neve Shalom. *Our History* 13 February 2013.
<<http://www.neveshalom.net/about/our-history/>>

Google Maps. *Woodbridge Township*. 1 August 2013.
<<https://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&t=h&msa=0&msid=110659212853617177645.00047a3946e3aca103a13&ll=40.556591,74.283543&spn=0.054777,0.135612&z=13&source=embed>>

U.S. Department of Commerce. United States Census Bureau. “Woodbridge CDP, New Jersey.” *State & County QuickFacts*. 16 June 2013.

<<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/34/3481950.html>>

U.S. Department of Commerce. United States Census Bureau. “Metuchen (borough), New Jersey.” *State & County QuickFacts*. 16 June 2013.

<<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/34/3445690.html>>

U.S. Department of Commerce. United States Census Bureau. “Colonia CDP, New Jersey.” *State & County QuickFacts*. 16 June 2013.

<<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/34/3414380.html>>