

# LEOH Trip

## Congregation Beth Yeshurun The Mollie & Louis Kaplan Museum of Judaica

May 18, 2023







The synagogue, at its current location, 4525 Beechnut St. in Meyerland, was dedicated in 1962.

At 80,000 square feet, it was planned to meet the religious, educational, administrative, and social needs of more than 1,500 congregation families. It is the oldest continually active conservative Jewish congregation in Texas, and one of the largest in the world.

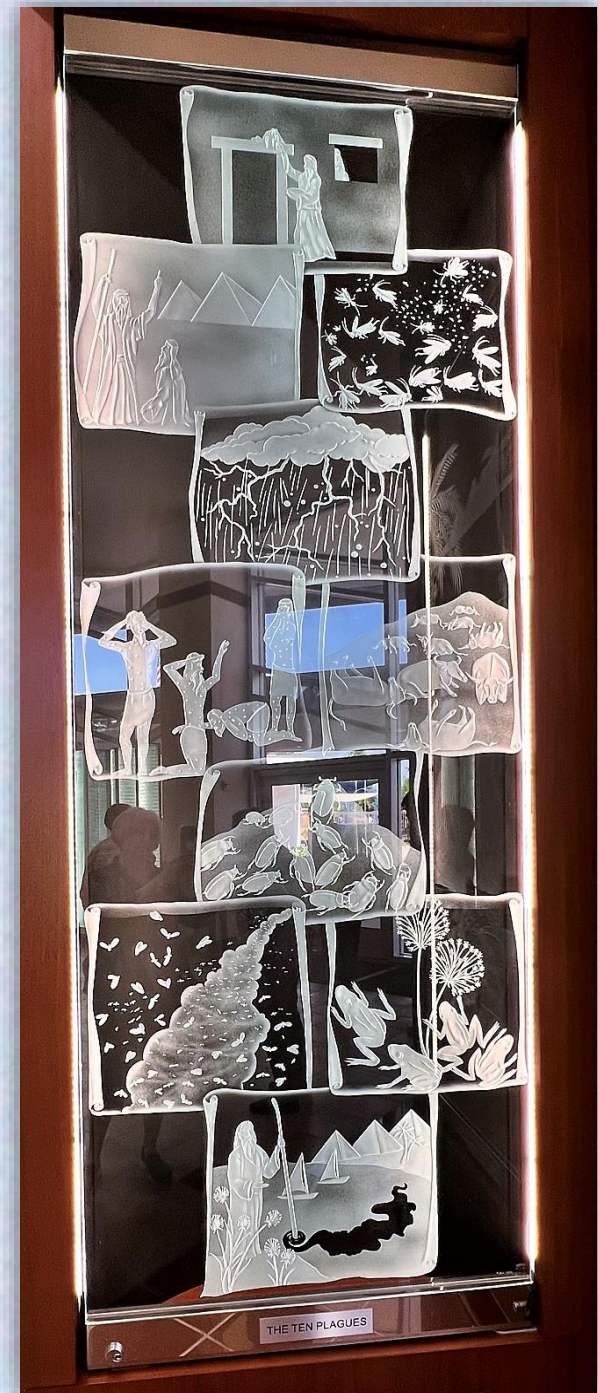
The synagogue was designated as a Texas Historic Landmark in 2019.

From the parking area of the synagogue, LEOH members walked past a lovely landscaped garden, to enter the synagogue for a visit to the Mollie & Louis Kaplan Museum of Judaica.





Upon entering the lobby, several very large glass panels were displayed, each beautifully etched with a depiction of a religious theme/event. On the left, "Creation", and on the right, "The Ten Plagues". These photos, unfortunately, could not do these panels justice, as they captured reflections, rather than the clear glass on each panel. The very large and beautiful crystal "Creation Menorah", above, was also on display in the lobby.







The synagogue's museum docent, Carolyn, began the tour by elaborating on the history of the museum.

Following WWII, Rabbi Isaac Toubin of New York traveled throughout Europe with the Jewish War Board, helping to relocate Jewish refugees. He was also able to rescue many works of Judaica, some from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, that otherwise might have been discarded, or melted down for the metal.

During the 1950's and 1960's, he continued his travels throughout Europe, as well as to Israel and the US, enlarging his collection. He came to be regarded as an authority on Judaica, and at one point served as consultant to the Jewish Museum in New York.

In 1972, the Educational Director of Congregation Beth Yeshurun learned that Rabbi Toubin might sell his vast collection. He discussed this with former Beth Yeshurun president Louis Kaplan and wife Mollie.

The Kaplan brothers, Louis and Irvin, and their wives, generously donated the funds to purchase the collection.

These numerous items form the core of what is now called the Kaplan collection. The Congregation chose to name the museum after Mollie and Louis Kaplan.

Hundreds of items have been added to the collection since that time.



*Hanukah* commemorates the heroic resistance of the Maccabees. Modeled on the 8-day festival of Sukkot, the Jewish victory was commemorated in the Temple by lighting menorot (7-branched candelabra). The story of a lamp that miraculously burned for 8 days became the basis for the hanukiyah (hanukah menorah), the earliest of which consisted of 8 clay oil lamps arranged in a semi-circle. Over the years, hanukiyot became increasingly beautiful and ornate. Many are made to hang outside on doors, or to display in windows, to publicize the miracle of Hanukah.



Above, this highly elaborate hanukah menorah (Austria, 1820), of silver and gilt, displays vines, griffins, and other animals. Lions with hinged heads serve as oil holders. The wall mirror shows the elaborate etching on the back. Side candle holders are for Sabbath candles.



Menorahs were on display from Poland, Syria, Jerusalem, Holland, Ukraine, and England, just to name a few of the countries represented. They were made from a variety of materials, such as brass, silver, glass, pewter, bronze, copper, and ceramic. Menorahs became more ornate over the years. The example, above right, is silver plated and contains gold, rubies, and diamonds.





Carolyn describes another museum piece, above left. Next to that exhibit is a small exhibit of “Miniatures & Curiosities”. Some of the items include 6 ivory figurines of Jewish merchants in Germany; two porcelain bobblehead men sitting side by side in Germany; and wax seals for documents, made of silver and gold.





Sabbath lights were lit in ancient times, with specific types of oil and wicks to be used. Today the more modern custom is for a couple to light two candles, plus one for each child. Other customs have the girls light a single candle until their bat mitzvah, after which they light two, or have boys and girls each light one. There are many beautiful candlesticks and candelabras from Europe on display in the museum.





*Sukkot*, called “The Festival”, was one of three during which the ancient Israelites were commanded to go to Jerusalem to make sacrifices to God. It was also the time of the final harvest. Commandments of the *Sukkot* included taking palm branches with boughs of myrtle and willow (the *lulav*), and “the fruit of a goodly tree” (the *etrog*) and to rejoice before the Lord. Above is a *Sukkot* Kiddush cup, and two receptacles for the *etrog*.



To the left is a tallit (prayer shawl). This particular one (c. 1900) is made of wool and decorated with silver. There are specific instructions as to how they are to be made.

The observant Jew  
prays three times  
each day, wearing the  
tallit during the  
morning prayer, and  
during all prayers on  
Yom Kippur.



*Passover* commemorates the exodus of the Israelites from ancient Egypt. A festive meal (seder) is celebrated. Seder plates display foods used in the service. Unleavened bread (matzah) may be in trays underneath the seder plate or on separate plates.

To the right is a matzah dough roller, possibly from the 1930's. As soon as matzah dough is flattened, it must be perforated by the roller and immediately placed in the oven to ensure rapid baking that will prevent accidental leavening.



To the left are stainless steel kosher slaughtering knives.

Handles were generally made of bone or wood, and the knives were stored in wooden or leather cases.

These are from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.





Above is a Yiddish typewriter, c. 1910, which belonged to a bookkeeper who served as the secretary for Congregation Beth Israel, an Orthodox synagogue in Los Angeles, beginning in the 1920's.

Yiddish is a West Germanic language. It originated in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, historically spoken by Ashkenazi Jews. Yiddish is primarily written in the Hebrew alphabet.



The large tapestry to the left is a parochet (ark covering), made of silk brocade and velvet with gold thread, from Bohemia, 1798.

To the right is a model of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century synagogue ark of brass, silver, and copper, from either Palestine or Iran. Arks are used to house Torahs.







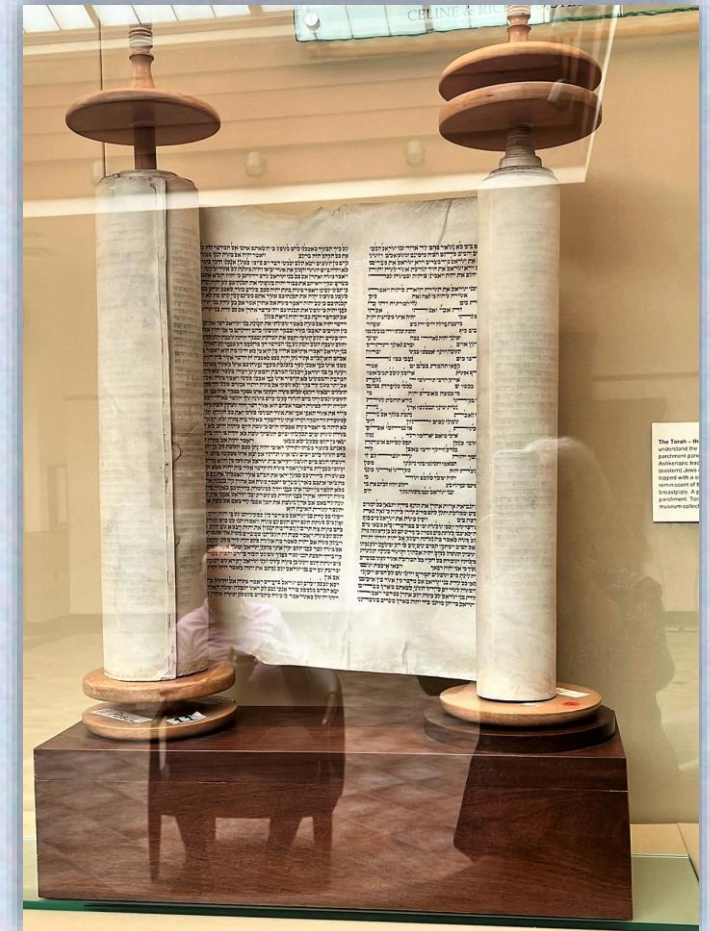
The Torah is comprised of the first five books of the Hebrew bible.

It is the centerpiece of Jewish life.

Traditional Jews believe that the Torah is God's words to Moses at Sinai.

Words are handwritten in columns on parchment panels that are stitched together, with the ends secured on wooden staves and then rolled. Ashkenazic tradition calls for the scrolls to be covered with ornamental fabric mantles. The staves are topped with a single crown or individual finials. Sephardic and Mizrahi (eastern) Jews enclose the Torah scrolls in silver or decorated wooden cases.

A pointer (yad) shaped like a hand, allows the reader to follow the text without touching the parchment. Torahs, along with their yads, finials, etc, are housed in the synagogue arks.







### *Megillot* (Scrolls of The Book of Esther)

The museum has several scrolls, including the beautiful *Megillat Esther* scroll displayed on the wall; it was hand-written in ink on parchment, and illustrated by Abraham Yakin in 1996.

The Book of Esther has been a source of artistic inspiration at least since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Jewish artists enjoyed drawing scenes directly onto scrolls. These *Megillot* may indicate that Esther was felt to be a relatively secular book.





Following the museum tour, our docent guided us to the main sanctuary entrance, and then inside, where we were struck by its size and beauty.

Since the synagogue is located very near the bayou, it experienced significant flooding during Hurricane Harvey. Thankfully, the synagogue was successfully restored.







Following the tour, Fadi's beckoned, just a short distance away in Meyerland!

For those who had never eaten at Fadi's, it was a little overwhelming, with many, many non-Luby type choices in a cafeteria style setting.

Everyone enjoyed delicious food at a large table of reserved seating, and many will no doubt make a return trip to Fadi's in the future, to sample more of their dishes.

Thanks, as always, to trip coordinator Ann Fairchild, for planning a great outing!

