

Oral History Interview
Priscilla Winn Glinn
WH022

(written transcript and digital audio)

On November 12, 2008, at 2:30 P.M., Priscilla Winn Glinn was interviewed at the Henry Inman Library by Brenda Velasco.

1. Identify individual-name, section, date of birth.

My name is Priscilla Glinn. I live in the Colonia section of Woodbridge. I was born August 13th, 1939.

2. How long have you live in Woodbridge?

I've lived in Woodbridge for 45½ years.

3. Why did you or your family originally move to Woodbridge?

I came to Woodbridge because my sister and brother-in-law and family moved to Iselin in 1953 and when we were looking for a house we liked the area and we decided to move here. At the time we moved here, I was teaching. My first teaching was in School #21 on Inman Avenue in Colonia. So we bought a house in Colonia and have been here, I'm in my third house in Colonia.

Brenda Velasco: That says a lot for Colonia then; you're not moving out. One question, where did you move from?

Priscilla Glinn: I was born and bred in the Weequahic section of Newark.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you moved from Newark and this was after your sister moved here 1953, so this was in the post-World War II era.

Priscilla Glinn: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: When there was a move to suburbia and this was one of the areas. So, what exact year did you move in then?

Priscilla Glinn: We moved here in May of 1963 and we had looked for houses all over. My husband was working in Parsippany at the time. He was a teacher, also, and we looked there but the homes here were much more affordable for us; not only the house price but the taxes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, thank you.

**4. What changes have occurred over the years in the area you lived?
-houses of worship?**

a) Shuls: b) Location: c) Date: d) Rabbis: e) Famous Cantors

Brenda Velasco: Now, one of the reasons I really wanted to interview you is because you are part of the Jewish community and we had several synagogues and I would really like to know the history. We've had a vibrant Jewish community for many years. So, I'm going to ask you to talk about some of the different synagogues in Woodbridge.

Priscilla Glinn: Well the oldest synagogue, which if it were still in existence, would be about 101 years old now. It's Congregation Adath Israel of Woodbridge which left its premises three years ago and I will explain what happened. The next oldest was Congregation B'Nai Jacob of Avenel which was established in 1912. In the mid-1950s, Congregation Beth Shalom, which was located on Cooper Avenue in Iselin, was born and then in the late '50s Temple Beth Am of Colonia came into existence: that was on Temple Way. What happened was, about 30 years ago, Congregation Beth Shalom of Iselin could no longer sustain itself so it merged with Congregation Adath Israel of Woodbridge. In 1977, Congregation B'nai Jacob of Avenel and Temple Beth Am of Colonia merged and became Temple Ohev Shalom. So that left, within the town, Adath Israel and Ohev Shalom: down from five synagogues to two.

Brenda Velasco: Approximately, what year was this?

Priscilla Glinn: 1977 was the merger that created Ohev Shalom.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Priscilla Glinn: In 2003, Temple Ohev Shalom merged with Congregation Neve Shalom of Metuchen and in 2005 Congregation Adath Israel of Woodbridge also merged with Congregation Neve Shalom of Metuchen and now there are no synagogues in Woodbridge Township.

Brenda Velasco: Which is unfortunate because this was from a very vibrant community that made contributions to the development of Woodbridge as well. Now, how come when you had the merger of Congregation B'nai Jacob and Temple Am, you took on a different name?

Priscilla Glinn: Yes, because when we went into that merger we went in with equal amounts of congregants and we decided to start a new (temple) and give it a new name. The Avenel building was sold, B'nai Jacob was sold, and we moved into the Beth Am building. We had a contest among the Hebrew school children and they submitted names. In fact, not that long ago I found my husband had kept the envelope with all the entries; and we thought of all of them, Ohev Shalom was the most appropriate for two synagogues merging. Ohev Shalom means people of peace. My husband, Terry Glinn, was the first president of the new synagogue. He had already been president of B'nai Jacob a few times and he was elected president of the new synagogue.

Brenda Velasco: Now, as I said, Terry was also on the Planning Board, Chairman of.....

Priscilla Glinn: Yes, for many years.

Brenda Velasco: Many years?

Priscilla Glinn: About 9 or 10 years, yep.

Brenda Velasco: He was vital to our community. First president of the new synagogue and with all the responsibilities that came with that and he was also a teacher.

Priscilla Glinn: Yes, and he was chairman of the Business Department at Colonia High School. He had taught at Kennedy for many years and then he became the Colonia High School Business Department Chairman. He was there, at least 20 years. I taught Woodbridge too; I retired after almost 30 years. I retired eight years ago.

Brenda Velasco: And enjoying it.

Priscilla Glinn: Loved it, loved every minute of it, I really do.

Brenda Velasco: And now you're a grandmother.

Priscilla Glinn: Now I'm a grandmom.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, then let's get some of the information. You gave us the names of the shuls, you gave us the locations and basically the dates. Were there any rabbis that you recall?

Priscilla Glinn: I will tell you, I remember, although I was not a member of Adath Israel in Woodbridge, the early rabbi who was there for many years, Rabbi Neuberger, who was a wonderful, wonderful leader. Following Rabbi Neuberger, Rabbi Kulla was there for about 35 or 40 years, I mean, a very long period of time. When Ohev Shalom came into being, I told you it was the merger of B'nai Jacob and Beth Am, the rabbi from B'nai Jacob got Rabbi Phillip Brand. He was the first Rabbi for me here in this town when I joined B'nai Jacob. He was just wonderful. He came with us and he stayed for four years and then he retired. He had been in town way over 20 years, maybe 25 or 26 years, as our rabbinical leader and he was really very special, very loved. Children adored him. He also was principal of the Hebrew school and until this day my kids, all the kids then, were under the tutorage of Rabbi Brand, who are now all in their 40s and older, have never forgotten him. He was just a very special person.

Brenda Velasco: Memorable person, yea.

Priscilla Glinn: Yes, he was. We also had a cantor in Ohev Shalom who had been with Beth Am and who probably was cantor between Beth Am and Ohev Shalom about 35 years; Cantor Royal Rothman, who, not only had a magnificent voice but was knowledgeable and had a wonderful personality. And you would sit in services and listen to this man sing and you could close your eyes and just be so inspired because of the spirit and the feeling and the magnificence of his voice; he was wonderful. I always missed him. He retired in 1999 and we had another cantor after him for a couple of years and then decided we just could never find a voice like this.

Brenda Velasco: He was unequaled.

Priscilla Glinn: He was absolutely unequaled, absolutely. He is now in retirement. He's about 85. He lives in Monroe in one of the adult communities. He's remarried but he just a special person.

Brenda Velasco: I remember him as well at many of our Township functions and when he sang.....

Priscilla Glinn: Magnificently, magnificently.

5. How many congregants were there in the various shuls or synagogues?

I can only tell you when Beth Am and B'nai Jacob merged we wound up with somewhere around 300 units. By a unit I mean it could be a family or it could be a senior or it could be a single, or it could be a couple, you know. We came in with about 150, something like that, families so, you know, and the Hebrew school was quite large in those years. That's how you know the future by the viability of its Hebrew school. When my oldest son was in Hebrew school, in B'nai Jacob, there were 12 kids in his class. When my other kids were in Hebrew school and they merged synagogues: in one there were 36 in his class and the other one there was like 28 in their class, you know.

Brenda Velasco: Quite a difference.

Priscilla Glinn: Very big difference and it's a good thing because it's better. First of all they all went to public school together, so why shouldn't they be in Hebrew school together? It was wonderful.

Brenda Velasco: And that made a big difference.

Priscilla Glinn: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Combining the resources of both.

Priscilla Glinn: Now the other thing I can't answer for, except that as years went on, the congregations just dwindled. When Ohev Shalom merged with Neve Shalom, five years ago, we're now in our 6th year, we went with about 80 units, that's, as I said, it could be singles, it could be seniors. We're only, maybe, three families with children, that's it; and of those three families with children, who are still in this area, two were my sons and their wives and children and there was another couple that had a young child. Otherwise, we had no Hebrew school, we hadn't had a Hebrew school for a number of years. Ours kids were going to Scotch Plains Hebrew school, actually. The same thing happened when Adath Israel came to us. I don't know if it was 2005 or 2006 that Adath Israel came: 2005, I guess. They had, maybe, about 80 units that came with them, most of whom live in Florida and just maintain membership, you know, out of loyalty to the synagogue. Very few and most of them are extremely, extremely elderly. Unfortunately, many have passed on in the last couple of years. So, this is what happened. You know, we all moved to the suburbs 40 years ago and, you know. I have two kids living here, one in Edison right over the border, and one in Colonia. But my other two kids moved to East Brunswick. If I talk to any of my friends all of their kids are down in Manalapan or East Brunswick or Howell or Jackson, you know.

Brenda Velasco: It's the mobility of our population, especially in New Jersey.

Priscilla Glinn: Yes, absolutely.

Brenda Velasco: We don't stay. I mean, you grew up in Newark, the Weequahic section. You came here and your daughter lives in East Brunswick now and there are different reasons why you move. Affordability, school system.

Priscilla Glinn: Yes, absolutely, absolutely.

Brenda Velasco: Which is unfortunate for us.

Priscilla Glinn: Yes, it is, but this is the way it is, this is what happens.

6. What services did the shuls provide for your family?

Well, spiritual services, first of all, education, socialization, various kinds of social events, civic events, we would host interfaith services. Or we would have political and during elections we would have political forums, adult education, that included not only religious themes but, you know, it could be political, it could be anything, you know, and a gathering place. A synagogue, I think like any religious institutions, I think all religious institutions, whatever the domination,

offer various kinds of services and everyone takes advantage of that which he or she would like and not everyone does everything, you know, and same with the synagogues.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, what were some of the activities for the kids?

Priscilla Glinn: Hebrew school, youth groups. Youth groups started for kids 11 through 13 years old and then the older kids were in a teenage youth group till they graduated from high school, which meant weekly, which had a program every week for the kids. They do a lot with something called tikkun olam, which means repair of the world. They volunteer, for instance, kids would volunteer at the Jewish Home for the Aged on Christmas and Easter so that the non-Jews would have days off or they would go to Old Age Homes and sing for them, you know. When kids are bar mitzvahed it is put forth upon them to do some kind of charitable, in Hebrew it's tzedekah, and it's a charitable project. For instance, my granddaughter collected old eyeglasses and gave them to the Lions Club for the needy. So children are encouraged to do this. So a lot of that kind of thing went on, you know, through the synagogue. The kids, in these youth groups, had dances, conventions; one of my granddaughters is going to Washington at the end of December because there's a national convention for the youth groups. The youth groups sponsor trips around our country, to Israel, to Poland, to the concentration camps, things like that, to give the kids more knowledge and more hands on kind of thing.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, and they also provided Purim carnivals?

Priscilla Glinn: Oh, Purim carnivals, yes, and the kids had to run it. The kids ran it. They were wonderful. We had a Men's Club, they volunteered, they did the kitchen for the kids; but the kids had to set up everything, run everything, and the money was donated to charity. Sometimes it went to the synagogues; sometimes it went to whatever charity they decided it would go to, really, really interesting.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and you just mentioned the Men's Club, what do they specifically do?

Priscilla Glinn: The Men's Club was in charge of.....

Brenda Velasco: Because your husband was the head of it for a number of years.

Priscilla Glinn: The Men's Club?

Brenda Velasco: And then your son.

Priscilla Glinn: My husband and my son were congregation presidents, they weren't Men's Club president.

Brenda Velasco: Oh.

Priscilla Glinn: They were members of the Men's Club.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Priscilla Glinn: The Men's Club had two or three purposes. First of all, they provided a lot of social events. The second thing they did is they worked for the synagogue. For instance, they were the ones in charge of setting up chairs for the High Holidays where you get a thousand people coming to services. The Men's Club would set up a chuppah (canopy under which the bride and groom stand at the marriage ceremony); anything that had to be done physically, in the synagogue. For instance, we used to run bingo in Ohev Shalom and the tables got pretty ratty, so every so often the Men's Club would call all the guys down on a Sunday and that was the day

they were revamping all the tables for bingo. They were a service organization. They would provide ushers for the High Holidays and for special events that drew high crowds. If you needed ushers, they provided ushers. If they raised any money, they weren't in existence really to raise money, but if they ran a project and they made money they donated it to the shul. Then there was a sisterhood, and all synagogues have sisterhoods, which I was a past president and I'm active in the sisterhood now in my new synagogue. The sisterhood raises money for the synagogue and when the synagogue needs something they come to sisterhood and say, gee we need new sliding doors or we need a new this or that, and the sisterhood provides. We do that by various fundraisers, but I guess like all organizations have, and a lot of times we help out the Hebrew school children with providing things for the school. We had social events too but we're really mainly a fundraising art.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and when we look at the Hebrew school, when was the kid first enrolled in the Hebrew school?

Priscilla Glinn: Mandatory is age 8. They start what's called the aleph class. Aleph is the first letter, it's the first year. They must go for five years in order to become bar or bat mitzvah, a child of the commandment, which is when they are considered to be an adult and they have to take on all the adult responsibilities religiously that an adult does. We begin, generally, when they are about 3 or 4, they have Sunday school for them where they do arts and crafts, you know, relating to religious things but done, you know, for a youngster. So there's classes for 3 and 4 year olds, for kindergarten age and for 1st and 2nd grade children on Sundays; it's all on Sundays. By 2nd grade, if they're enrolled, they come one day a week and on a Sunday, but the mandatory is at least age 8; but today, truthfully, most of them start when they're 3 and 4 years old. The parents start them in Sunday school.

Brenda Velasco: And they're learning Hebrew in the process?

Priscilla Glinn: Yea, they learn how to identify the letters. My kids started when they were, you know, around 5 years old. I started sending them to Sunday school because I just thought it was something they should do and in those years they loved it. See, it's only when they get older and they have to come home and do homework and then go to Hebrew school, then they're not so thrilled.

Brenda Velasco: The attitude changes.

Priscilla Glinn: Let me tell you something I had kids that would say to me, oh Mrs. Glinn I don't know if I can do my homework tonight, I have CCD. Mrs. Glinn, I don't know if I can do my homework tonight, I have Hebrew school. You know, kids are kids.

Brenda Velasco: Yes they are and you heard it all as a public school teacher.....

Priscilla Glinn: Yes, so, you know, I understand.

Brenda Velasco: In Woodbridge Township.

Priscilla Glinn: We also have a huge amount of adult education and we also have Hebrew high school which they go through age 16 and then they have confirmation.

Brenda Velasco: So at 16 they would have a confirmation and were the classes segregated or were they mixed?

Priscilla Glinn: Mixed, co-ed, yep.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, co-ed class.

Priscilla Glinn: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Were any of the synagogues or shuls that you mentioned were they.....

Priscilla Glinn: Adath Israel was non egalitarian meaning women were not permitted to do anything ritually. They could sit together with their families but they were non egalitarian. Beth Shalom, in Iselin, I do not know; but I don't think they were egalitarian because they merged too long ago. B'Nai Jacob was not egalitarian but when it merged with Beth Am, which also was not egalitarian, and after Rabbi Brand, whom I mentioned before left we got a new young rabbi and we became an egalitarian.....

Brenda Velasco: So when you merged?

Priscilla Glinn: Well, about two years afterwards, which was really very, very nice. Egalitarian meaning women had as much of a role in ritual as males. I mean I wear a tallit. When we were looking to merge, Ohev Shalom, we would only look at a synagogue that gave women the equal rights which is why we wouldn't go to Adath Israel, which was also in town. One would think we would have done that but we couldn't do that; and every other synagogue we looked at except for the one in Woodbridge, was egalitarian. It's at least 28 to 30 years since most of the synagogues in the area allowed both equal rights for men and women so, you know.

Brenda Velasco: I come from a background where I did teach at a conservative shul so that was egalitarian where the girls were trained in the spiritual role just as much as the boys and also reflects American society and movement. Religion has to reflect a culture.

Priscilla Glinn: Oh, yes, absolutely.

7. What did you like about living in your section of Woodbridge-Colonia?

Well, first of all as I mentioned this is my third house in Colonia. First of all, it's a kind of a small town feeling, even though it's part of a larger township. I mean, I can go into the market here and there isn't a time that I go in there that I meet somebody that I know. I also like the fact that there are so many conveniences here. If I don't have a car, I can walk to the bank, I can walk to the drugstore and I can walk to the supermarket or to the cleaners. Whatever, you name it. Living in this area, also, is phenomenal in terms of travel. You are right near the Parkway, Route #1, or the Turnpike. If I want to go into the city, I just park my car at Metro Park and I take the train in. I mean, I think the location wise; truthfully I would like to sell my house now because I just don't want to own a house anymore. Problem is, I don't want to leave the area because it's so convenient. One of my sons moved to Colonia, bought the house about 10½ years ago, and one of the reasons he wanted this area was because he's a rep for a building supply company; he needs to be near major highways because his territory is like anywhere from Connecticut to Pennsylvania and, you know, all points in between. He says, Mom I'm not moving.

Brenda Velasco: No, this is the perfect location.

Priscilla Glinn: Location is wonderful and his children are in the school system. He has two that are twins that are in 7th grade in Colonia Middle School and one that's in 5th grade in School #27, where I taught. They laugh all the time because they are all in the room that I taught in School #27 and in the room that I taught in Colonia Middle School.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Priscilla Glinn: That's my room, I tell them, all the time. Anyway, and he says no, that's it, he's staying. One of my other sons lives in walking distance from here, right over the borderline, in Edison. In fact, his office is in Colonia.

Brenda Velasco: I noticed that. That's Adam we're talking about?

Priscilla Glinn: Yes, Adam, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Which is great for you?

Priscilla Glinn: Oh, it's wonderful. When I have to make copies on a copy machine I walk up to his office and say, could you make a copy of this for me.

Brenda Velasco: Mothers can do that.

Priscilla Glinn: There you go.

Brenda Velasco: Mothers can do that. Alright, now, let's look at the location of the houses that you lived in in Colonia.

Priscilla Glinn: First house I lived in was 28 Thelma Court which was right off Inman Avenue right next to School #21 which is where I taught at the time that I moved there. The second house that I lived in was 21 Beechwood Court which was off of Raven Drive and Devon Road. We had decided we were going to stay there, our kids were all out of the house, and were going to do some updating and we were going to stay because we loved living in this area. You see I don't want to move to an adult community, this is my problem. So we were going to stay and then what happened was my husband became ill and I had to get him out of that house because it was a four level split level and I needed to stay in this area to be near the doctors, plus we didn't want to leave the area, so I found this little ranch house on Carson Drive. I live now at 151 Carson Drive and he passed away the week we were due to take title and I thought about it and thought about it. I was able to get him there to see it and decided, you know what, I think I can do this and I think I'm going to do this because if I was alone what did I need this huge 10 room house, well it was ridiculous. So I'm in my third house in town and, while I really don't want a house anymore just because of the bother, the thing is where am I going to go? I want this area. I just don't want to leave.

Brenda Velasco: Well, I'm glad you didn't move away.

8. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so we've covered basically "what did you like about your section" and your section is Colonia, you've lived in Colonia throughout.

Priscilla Glinn: Always, yes, all the time, yes.

Brenda Velasco: And you like it today because it's still location.

Priscilla Glinn: Yea, we had looked at houses in Woodbridge Proper when we were looking. I mean, it wasn't that we didn't look. We looked in Iselin. I almost bought a house in Iselin. It was a brand new house, as this was the first house, and then my brother-in-law passed away at a very young age and he left my sister and her older son was 13 and the others were 9 and 7. So the house on Thelma Court, it was a group of 13 houses, brand new, and I was able to get the house, as I mentioned, the yard abutted each other and so we moved in there to be near my sister. I've never regretted it, you know, I just love the area.

9. Do you have family members still living in Woodbridge today?

Well, my one son is in Colonia with his wife and his three children. He lives on Kilmer Drive right off of Lake Avenue actually. The other son is about a mile away in Edison and two in East Brunswick and I'm in East Brunswick in a half hour. I go there at the drop of a hat. If they need me I will. I'm going there tomorrow to take one to the orthodontist.

Brenda Velasco: You're a grandmother.

Priscilla Glinn: That's right.

Brenda Velasco: You're a grandmother, you're a good grandmother. Okay, is there anything else that you wanted to mention that we may not have covered? How about procuring the food for the high holy days? Where were you able to get the food to observe kashrut?

Priscilla Glinn: We also observe kashrut. When I first moved here I used to go to Linden. There were several kosher butchers in Linden, which is a hop, skip and a jump. One of them would deliver so I would call them up and he would deliver. Then after a number of years they weren't there anymore but there was a kosher butcher on Route #27 right next to Bagel Bazaar in that strip mall there. I went to him for a number of years and then he went out of business, he retired. Either you can go into Highland Park on Route #27 which in 15 minutes I'm there. I shoot right down Route #27, it's very easy, but 99 percent of the time I have a butcher whose butcher shop is in Millburn, it's called Maple Kosher, and he's right opposite Menorah Chapels, in that strip mall there; he delivers to Colonia and I call him up and he's wonderful. I only go there to pick up my fresh killed turkey around the holidays. We have no problems.

Brenda Velasco: That's great he delivers.

Priscilla Glinn: Yes and when the Shop Rite was right over here in Edison, I would run in there in between. Unfortunately, they don't have that anymore. If I want to go, I go to the Shop Rite in East Brunswick where I am a lot.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Priscilla Glinn: A lot of people from around here go to the Shop Rite in East Brunswick on Route #18. They have a fabulous kosher meat department, wonderful.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, I can't think of anything else. It was a pleasure interviewing you. I didn't have to pull out the answers because you're a former teacher, that's why.

Priscilla Glinn: 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,

you know, in and around Colonia, plus we have some in Fords and Woodbridge, I mean, they're still around.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, I know.

Priscilla Glinn: And when my kids went to the Middle School they meet a lot of other Jewish kids there from other schools.

Brenda Velasco: Right, okay, well I thank you very much.

Priscilla Glinn: My pleasure.

Brenda Velasco: I enjoyed interviewing you and finding out about your family and the contributions they've made to Colonia as well as Woodbridge Township because it wasn't just Colonia.

Priscilla Glinn: No, no, no.

Brenda Velasco: Everybody benefited.

Priscilla Glinn: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: But, thank you very much.

Priscilla Glinn: My pleasure, any time.

Brenda Velasco: We're concluding this about 2:42 P.M. and we started the interview about 2:10 P.M., so we did good.