



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:  
Laura Roberts  
203-259-1598

New Exhibit At Fairfield Museum Celebrates Fairfield's Jewish Community

FAIRFIELD, CT (March 27) Trace the histories of Jewish settlement and synagogues in our area and you will uncover fascinating stories of immigration and adaptation dating back to the early 1700s, and see the distinctive traditions and important contributions woven into the fabric of this community. Jewish immigration and settlement in Bridgeport and Fairfield are a microcosm of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century American history, following the same patterns that occurred in large cities and their suburbs across the country. These topics, along with precious objects of Judaica representing holiday traditions, home observance, and synagogue worship, form the subject of a new exhibit in the Ruth Carlson Horn Gallery at the Fairfield Museum and History Center— *Celebrating Our Cultural Legacies: Fairfield's Jewish Community*.

The exhibit, which runs from April 6 through May 11, 2008, follows the fascinating story of Jewish settlement in our area, including the arrival of German Jewish immigrants in the early 1850s and those from Eastern European countries who came in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, fleeing persecution. Reaching back further, the exhibit highlights the story of Andris Trubee, a merchant believed to be Fairfield's first Jewish resident, who settled here around 1716 – 1718.

The founding of local synagogues and social service organizations is also explored. After World War II many of Bridgeport's Jewish residents migrated from the city to suburban areas, including Fairfield's east side and neighborhoods along the Fairfield-Bridgeport border. Today, Park Avenue, Stratfield Road and Fairfield Woods Road are home to several synagogues, as well as the Jewish Community Center and Jewish Family Service. Congregation B'nai Israel is the oldest, tracing its roots to 1855 when a plot of land was purchased in Fairfield for a Jewish cemetery. Ahavath Achim, founded by Hungarian Jews in 1905, built a new synagogue in Fairfield in 1963, the same year Congregation Beth El, Fairfield's conservative synagogue, also dedicated their new building.

In addition to local history, Fairfield Museum's exhibit features objects related to Jewish holidays, home observance, and religious practices. Loaned by local families, organizations, and synagogues, these artifacts highlight the beauty of Jewish ceremonies and tradition. The earliest objects, two Shabbat candelabrams, most likely date to the late 1700s. A hand-carved box, used to hold a lemon-like etrog at Sukkot (the harvest festival), is the newest object, made by Fairfield resident Harvey Paris in 2007.

"We are so appreciative of the community's generosity in sharing their history and precious artifacts," said Mike Jehle, Executive Director. Museum Curator Adrienne Saint-Pierre added, "Several of these objects are quite rare because so much early Judaica was destroyed or lost. Many of the Jewish people who came to America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, fleeing persecution and the destruction of their homes, brought only the most essential items with them. In the 1930s and 40s, Jews escaping Nazi-controlled Europe were forced to leave behind many family treasures."

Antique items of Judaica in the exhibit represent many of the countries from which these groups emigrated: Russia, Poland, Holland, Morocco, and Germany, while a number of the contemporary items come from Israel. Highlights include a Russian silver Tzedakah box from 1860 used to collect money for charity; a German Seder towel dated 1853; silver *yads* or pointers for reading the Hebrew text of Torahs, and a Torah crown. Holiday items include a hand-carved etrog box made by Fairfielder Harvey Paris; a Moroccan brass Passover Seder plate; a Megillah Esther scroll for reading at Purim; and a selection of Hanukkah menorahs and dreidels representing a variety of styles from different countries. Objects associated with life cycle events include a marriage certificate, or *Ketubbah*, by artist and calligrapher Susan Guttman; a hand-decorated linen *wimpel* or swaddling cloth from 1929; and an elaborate ceremonial wedding ring.

A reception for the exhibit, *Celebrating Our Cultural Legacies: Fairfield's Jewish Community* will be held at the museum on Thursday, April 10 from 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm. Immediately following the reception there will be a special presentation, *Scroll Survivor: The Kladno Torah Research and Restoration Project* by Ellin Yassky, Ph.D., a consultant for the exhibit, along with members of Congregation Beth El. Yassky will reveal the remarkable story of a Holocaust Torah, now in the care of the Fairfield synagogue, and the process of tracing its roots to the small city of Kladno in the Czech Republic. The evening's events are free of charge and all are encouraged to come and celebrate the history of Fairfield's Jewish community. An intricately-carved Tzedakah box made and donated by Harvey Paris will be auctioned. Programming is generously supported by the Meshberg family.

Fairfield Museum and History Center is located at 370 Beach Road in Fairfield, behind Old Town Hall. For more information about this important exhibit, please visit [www.fairfieldhs.org](http://www.fairfieldhs.org) or call 203-259-1598.

**Photos to accompany this release:**

**Menorah.jpg**

Caption: Contemporary menorah, antique style, made in Israel. Collection of Jeffrey and Laurie Gross of Westport.

**Wooden Box 1.jpg**

Caption: Etrog Box (basswood) made by Harvey Paris, 2007. Collection of Harvey and Barbara Paris of Fairfield.

# # #