

REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN ARCHIVES

The original manuscript of the sermon that the Rev. M. Edgar N. Lindsay, pastor of South Britain Congregational Church in Southbury, wrote in 1937 to denounce the establishment of a Nazi camp in Southbury and his Corona typewriter were donated by Lindsay's family to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

## Lindsay held on to history of sparking a town to act

It's been 85 years  
since Southbury  
halted German bund

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REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

**W**hat a relief. The Rev. M. Edgar N. Lindsay was a pack rat.

Lindsay, the Protestant minister who encouraged Southbury residents to stop a German bund from establishing a camp in town 85 years ago this month, "saved everything," said Rabbi Eric Polokoff of B'Nai Israel in Southbury. That meant that when Polokoff first learned about Lindsay's stirring sermon exhorting Southbury to stand up to the Nazi-affiliated group, there was a wealth of material from which to draw.

"He was a bit of a pack rat," Polokoff said. "He kept everything. He kept the sermon that he delivered in November before Thanksgiving in 1937. He had the sermon and the typewriter ribbon he typed it on all in a safe deposit box." The typewriter on which he wrote the sermon that spurred parishioners to oppose the bund is now in the collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

This weekend, Southbury will

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# BUND: Southbury celebrates halting the Nazis

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commemorate the 85th anniversary of its successful fight to get the German American Bund, or alliance, to abandon plans for the camp and leave town. It will feature screenings of the 2012 film "Home of the Brave: When Southbury Said No to the Nazis," a question-and-answer session with director Scott Sniffen; a panel discussion among area clergy; and the dedication of a permanent marker at South Britain Congregational Church to com-



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The Rev. M. Edgar N. Lindsay, pastor of South Britain Congregational Church, in a 1937 photo.



Visit [rep-am.com](http://rep-am.com) for more archive photos on the 85th anniversary of Southbury blocking the Nazis from building a local camp.

memorate the town's victory over the bund. The film references the moment in 1937 when Wolfgang Jung purchased 178 acres in Southbury for the German-American Bund, intent on building a Nazi training camp. Similar camps were popping up around the nation to promote an antisemitic and pro-Nazi agenda.

Since the 2012 debut of "Home of the Brave," local historians, clergy and other academics have learned more about the details and context of the historic event, said Ed Edelson, Southbury's former first selectman.

Ten years ago, Edelson said, the town's main objective was to capture oral histories of those who had been present in 1937.

"We want to keep the story alive in people's minds," he recently said. "We have a lot of people who've moved into Southbury. We've learned so much ourselves. There's been so much more scholarship done of this story. Our history has gotten a lot deeper and richer on this."

Melinda K. Elliott, president of Southbury Historical Society, is among those who have added archival material. Next year, she will release "No Swastikas in Southbury" (Fonthill Media), a chronicle of the nearly monthlong episode. She will lead a panel discussion at Pomperaug High School this weekend titled "Historical Insights: Southbury vs. the Bund."

Elliott said because of time constraints, the movie did not reveal many of the details of ordinary citizens who reacted to the bund when it first arrived on Nov. 7, 1937. Five years ago, when Elliot began working at the historical society, she began to ask more questions about

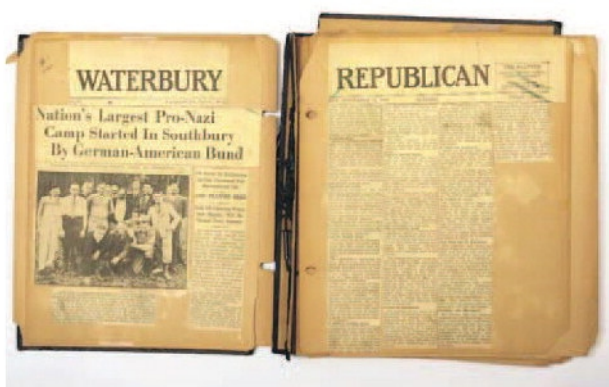
public participation.

"I became obsessed by it. I wanted to know who was here? Who were the characters? It wasn't easy for them at the town. I became interested in the people besides Rev. Lindsay, the other heroes of the event," Elliott said. "This is a group of people that decided to do something their own way and, as a group, were able to make a difference."

The bund, or the Amerikadeutscher Volksbund, had been formed in 1936 as "an organization of patriotic Americans of German stock" with a goal to empower German-American citizens to spread Nazi ideology in the United States and to create an American alliance with the Nazi Party in Germany, according to the National World War II Museum. It eventually founded and operated about 20 to 22 youth and training camps, where children learned the Nazi salute and marched in formation. Among the American bund camps were the 100-acre Camp Norland at Sussex Hills, N.J., and Camp Siegfried on Long Island.

On Feb. 20, 1939, the bund held an "Americanization" rally in New York's Madison Square Garden, denouncing Jewish conspiracies, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and others. The rally was attended by 20,000 supporters.

Just two years earlier, in November 1937, the 1,600 largely rural residents of Southbury, organized



The scrapbook that the Rev. M. Edgar N. Lindsay kept to document the town of Southbury's fight to keep a Nazi camp from being built in 1937.

by the Rev. Felix Manley, First Selectman Ed Coer, Lindsay and others, had managed to turn the bund away with an innovative method: It established a zoning commission whose first ordinance forbade land usage in the town for "military training or drilling with or without arms except by the legally constituted armed forces of the United States of America." The ruling effectively closed Southbury to the bund. It was the only government that stood up to the bund.

Leading the charge were Lindsay and Manley, two Yale Divinity School graduates. Lindsay had researched the bund, discovering, according to Yale, that requirements to bund admission included signing an oath that they were of Aryan descent and would follow the philosophy of Adolf Hitler. On Nov. 21, both Protestant ministers preached against the bund.

"That sort of spurred looking deeper into the story, and the more you looked, the more great it became," Polokoff said. "When we talk about not being disinterested and not being a bystander, here's an example of not being a bystander."

Southbury's story was included in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum 2018 exhibit, "Americans and the Holocaust." The museum is in Washington, D.C.

In 2012, when Polokoff and other residents began researching the episode in earnest, he came across a Xerox copy of Lindsay's pivotal 1937 sermon, which had been published on the front page of *The Republican*.

"The thrust of Lindsay's sermon was to prove that the Nazism and the German American bund were part of the anti-Christ," Polokoff said. "He immediately said that because they are antisemitic, they are anti-Christ. In 1937, that was really something."

In the same sermon, Lindsay referenced Martin Niemöller (1892-1984), the prominent Protestant

pastor who emerged as an outspoken public foe of Hitler and spent the last seven years of Nazi rule in concentration camps. Niemöller is perhaps best remembered for the quotation: "First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out ..." That indicated to Polokoff that more Americans knew what the Nazis were doing to Jews in Germany — even before World War II officially began in 1939.

Fifteen years ago, the synagogue had its first commemoration of Southbury's successful effort to repel the bund.

"This isn't just the synagogue," Polokoff said of the celebration. "This is the town. This has been Ed Edelson's work and (former South Britain Congregational Church minister) Shannon Wall's work. This quickly extended beyond the Jewish community. The town has been so supportive."

"This story underscores the importance of not being indifferent and it underscores the importance of allyship and of taking a stand. With various prejudices, the path forward definitely requires allyship. ... At a time when others were thinking it's OK to get along to go along, (Lindsay) was so clear in his message that Nazism posed a great threat to Christianity and the United States."

Polokoff said although he had heard bits and pieces of the story, he did not know the details of the event until he read the full story in an article in the *Republican-American* 15 years ago.

Lindsay died in 1987. "Think of all the time that passed and yet this guy knew that he had done something amazing," Polokoff said. "Could he ever have imagined that there would be a rabbi in Southbury who reads these words all these years later?"

To learn more about the Rev. M. Edgar N. Lindsay, visit [bit.ly/3E3G1tw](http://bit.ly/3E3G1tw).