

Sinai Temple Records, 1867 – 1976

COLLECTION 1

Provenance

The vast majority of the Sinai Temple Records are from a 1987 deposit by Stanford Sholem. The collection was then rounded out by records deposited in 2006 by Allen Avner. The photocopies of the Ahavath Achim and B'nai Brith organizations are courtesy of the American Jewish Archives at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Access

The records are accessible to the public within applicable copyright restrictions and limited to use at the Champaign County Historical Archives of The Urbana Free Library.

Physical Description: 2 boxes (1.0 linear ft.)

Organizational History

The Sinai Temple, the Reformed Jewish Congregation of Champaign-Urbana, was formed on February 7, 1904 at the Grand Army of the Republic Hall in Champaign. Twenty-six members were present, as well as Rabbi George Zeppin, a representative of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now known as the Union of Reform Judaism), who insured that the meeting and congregation met the standards of the Union. The first services were held on February 23, 1904 in the Elks Auditorium. In 1905, the Jewish Ladies Social Circle, an active philanthropic organization of Jewish community leaders, formed the Sabbath School. The first Seder in Champaign-Urbana was held on March 29, 1907, with 92 members of the congregation present. In those early years the congregation shared Rabbis with other local congregations or brought in rabbinical students from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. It was not until 1923 that the temple hired its first part-time Rabbi, Benjamin Frankel, who also founded the Hillel Foundation at the University of Illinois. After a series of part-time Rabbis, Bernard Martin became the first full-time Rabbi for the congregation in 1950.

As the congregation grew, the need for a permanent home became obvious. The congregation voted unanimously to purchase a lot on the southwest corner of Clark and State Streets. After some debate about the site (some in the congregation advocated a location closer to the university), funds were raised for building construction, and the temple building was formally dedicated on January 31, 1918. In the interim, the congregation formally became the Sinai Congregation in 1914. The new temple would serve as the home for the congregation until 1971, when it was partially destroyed by fire. The congregation was forced to find temporary facilities for services such as the Sunday School rooms, the Hillel Foundation at the university, or donated space from local churches. Finally, on April 11, 1975, a new temple located on the corner of Windsor and Duncan Roads in Champaign, was dedicated and remains the gathering place for the congregation to this day.

Scope and Content

Sinai Temple Records, 1867 – 1976

COLLECTION 1

The Sinai Temple Records at the Champaign County Historical Archives document the early life of the congregation as well as the Jewish community in Champaign-Urbana. The materials span the time period from the early years of the congregation to the dedication of the new temple in 1975. Records of note include the minutes of the founding meeting of the congregation and the first constitution. The construction of the first temple is well-represented, as well as the fund-raising project for the original pipe organ. Additionally the social organizations that are integral to the Jewish community in Champaign are represented, including the Jewish Ladies Social Circle, from which the Sinai Temple Sisterhood descended. Photocopies of the early records of the Ahavath Achim (“Brotherly Love”), the first Jewish social organization in Champaign-Urbana, are present, as well as the Grand Prairie Lodge Number 281 of B’nai B’rith (with which Ahavath Achim eventually merged in 1887). The notes of Asa Rubenstein, then a graduate student of history, documenting the history of the congregation are also located within the collection. Additionally, there is a series of interviews with various congregation members recorded on audiotape in 1976.

Arrangement

The Sinai Temple records are arranged in the following series:

Series One: Publications – this series includes publications such as brochures, invitations and programs that highlight the social and religious life of the temple congregation. Also included is a Union Prayer Book that was in use through 1980. These records are organized chronologically and by record type.

Series Two: Financial and Real Estate Records – this series includes reports, contracts, and correspondence detailing the fiscal life and financial decision-making process of the congregation. These records are organized chronologically and by function.

Series Three: Historical Research Records – this series includes notes, correspondence, and drafts of speeches and articles detail the efforts of Jerome Sholem and Asa Rubenstein to research and detail the history of the Sinai Temple congregation. These records are organized chronologically by researcher.

Series Four: Membership and Organizational Records – this series includes minutes books, by-laws, constitutions, and correspondence documenting the administration and organization of the congregation. The series is arranged chronologically by document type.

Series Five: Affiliated Social Organization Records – this series includes minutes books, by-laws, and financial reports of the social organizations most closely affiliated with the congregation, including Ahavath Achim, B’nai B’rith, and the Jewish Ladies Social Circle of Champaign-Urbana. These records are arranged chronically by organization and function.

**Sinai Temple
Records, 1867 – 1976**

COLLECTION 1

Subject Terms

Names

B'nai B'rith. Grand Prairie Lodge 281
Rubenstein, Asa
Sholem, Jerome J.
Sinai Temple (Champaign, Ill.)
Sinai Temple (Champaign, Ill.). Ladies' Social Circle

Subjects

Jews--Champaign
Jews--History
Jews--Societies, Etc.

Container List

Box 1

Series 1: Publications

Folder 1: Brochure – “Welcome to Sinai Temple” Brochure, ca. 1965
Folder 2: Brochure – Sinai Temple New Building Brochure, 1972
Folder 3: Invitation – Dedication Service of Sinai Temple, 1918
Folder 4: Invitation – Confirmation Class Services, 1975-1976
Folder 5: Program – Dedication Service of Sinai Temple, 1918
Folder 6: Program – Fortieth and Fiftieth Anniversary Activities, 1944, 1954
Folder 7: Program – Dedication of New Sanctuary Programs, 1975-1976
Folder 8: *Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship*, 1962
Folder 9: Donation Book for New Temple Construction, 1975 [slides]

Series 2: Financial and Real Estate Records

Folder 9: Miscellaneous Financial Reports and Records, 1905-1944
Folder 10: Pipe Organ Purchase, Clark Street Temple, 1913-1924
Folder 11: Real Estate Records, Clark Street Temple, 1913-1924
Folder 12: Contractor Records, Clark Street Temple, 1917-1959
Folder 13: Purchase of 303 West Clark Street, 1955-1956

Series 3: Historical Research Records

Folder 14: Jerome Sholem Historical Research Notes and Drafts, 1937-1975
Folder 15: Asa Rubenstein Notes and Research, 1954-1976

**Sinai Temple
Records, 1867 – 1976**

COLLECTION 1

Series 4: Membership and Organizational Records

Folder 16: Sinai Temple Minutes Book [includes Constitution, By-laws, and Certificate of Incorporation), 1904-1947

Folder 17: Correspondence and Membership Lists, ca. 1920-1972

Folder 18: Fiftieth Anniversary Records, 1954

Series 5: Affiliated Social Organizations Records

Folder 19: Meeting Minutes – Ahavath Achim, 1867-1887 [photocopy]

Folder 20: Meeting Records and By-laws – Independent Order of B'nai B'rith, Grand Prairie Lodge, 1877 [photocopy]

Folder 21: Membership Applications – International Order of B'nai B'rith, Grand Prairie Lodge, 1877, 1910

Box 2

Series 5: Affiliated Social Organizations Records (Cont'd.)

Folder 1: Meeting Minutes – Jewish Ladies Social Circle, 1897-1904

Folder 2: Meeting Minutes – Jewish Ladies Social Circle, 1904-1911 [photocopy]

Folder 3: Meeting Minutes – Jewish Ladies Social Circle, 1911-1915

Folder 4: Meeting Minutes – Jewish Ladies Social Circle, 1915-1920 [photocopy]

Folder 5: Treasurer Reports – Jewish Ladies Social Circle, 1889-1902 [photocopy]