

Collection #
M 0804
BV 3496–3502
OMB 0096

CONGREGATION BETH-EL ZEDECK RECORDS, 1899–2002

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Processed by

Paul Brockman
18 May 2004

Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org

COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	18 document cases; 7 bound volumes; 1 oversize box; 2 boxes of photographs; 2 bins of slides; 3 video cassettes; 1 reel film; 4 artifacts
COLLECTION DATES:	1899–2002
PROVENANCE:	Congregation Beth-El Zedeck, Indianapolis, Indiana, 12 March

2003

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Indiana Jewish Historical Society Collection (M 0743); Jewish Community Center (M 0349); Jewish Welfare Federation of Indianapolis (M 0463)

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2003.0279

NOTES:

HISTORICAL SKETCH

Congregation Beth-El Zedeck was formed in March 1927 from the merger of two conservative congregations: Beth-El, formed in 1915 in the area of 16th and Illinois streets in Indianapolis, and Congregation Ohev Zedeck, a community from the center of the city made up of Hungarian immigrants. In 1925 Beth-El built a new synagogue designed by the firm of Vonnegut and Bohn which was located at 34th and Ruckle Streets. The merged congregations used this new facility until 1958.

Rabbi Milton Steinberg (1903–50) served as the congregation's first spiritual leader and was instrumental in defining left-wing Conservative Judaism in Indianapolis. Jack A. Goodman was the congregation's first president, a position he had held with Beth-El. Cantor Myro Glass joined the congregation at the same time as Rabbi Steinberg and remained in that position for twenty-eight years. Mrs. Jack Goodman was the first Sisterhood president in 1928 and a Men's Club was formed in 1933 with Max Plessner as president.

Rabbi Steinberg left Beth-El Zedeck for the Park Avenue Synagogue in New York City in 1933 and he was succeeded by Rabbi Elias Charry. During the 1930s the congregation grew to over 300 families and 200 religious school attendees. Rabbi Charry remained in his position as spiritual director until 1942 when he left to become head of the Germantown, Pennsylvania, Jewish Center and was succeeded by Rabbi Israel Chodos. Four years later Rabbi Chodos was replaced by Rabbi William P. Greenfeld. Under Rabbi Greenfeld's direction the congregation more than doubled in size, the religious school outgrew its structure, and a number of liberal changes were made such as the introduction of an organ for services.

On 31 August 1958 the congregation moved to its new \$1.25 million building on the city's then far north side at 65th Street and Spring Mill Road. Rabbi Greenfeld died in 1960 and the congregation selected Rabbi Sidney Steinman as its leader. Since 1977 Rabbis Dennis C. and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (husband and wife) have directed the congregation's spiritual matters. Both Sassos were graduates of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and continued the congregation's liberal direction, which is associated with both the Conservative and Reconstructionist movements.

Sources:

Endelman, Judith. *The Jewish Community of Indianapolis*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984. (General Collection F534.I55 E5 1984)

50th Anniversary Congregation Beth-El Zedeck, 1978.

Information in collection.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The records comprise the operations and activities of Congregation Beth-El Zedeck, its members, and related organizations, 1899–2002. The collection is divided into ten series.

Series 1 contains minutes, papers, and programs. Among the items are by-laws and name-change petition from 1927; by-law changes and amendments, 1932–43; meeting minutes, 1936–71; and historical correspondence and papers, 1899–1902. Also included are programs and activities held by the congregation such as the new temple dedication, 1958; the congregation's 50th and 65th anniversaries, 1977 and 1992; the installation and anniversaries of the Rabbis Sasso, 1977–2002; the Keshet Program, 1980s; and the Roots and Wings fundraising program, 1996–99.

Series 2 deals with the newsletters and other publications produced by Beth-El Zedeck. There is one copy of *The Scroll* from 1928 and a nearly complete set of *Beth-El Speaks* and its successor title, *Besamim*, from August 1949 through October 1991.

Series 3 contains newspaper articles and printed items, including a scrapbook of Jewish Community History, 1941–1942, and the 29 August 1958 Temple Dedication Issue of the *Indiana Jewish Chronicle*. Most of the information in this series involves events and people in the Jewish community.

Series 4 includes financial and building records mostly involving the property and mortgage records from the current facility on Spring Mill Road from 1962 and 1975. There is also some general financial correspondence from 1929–1960.

Series 5 deals with the congregation's membership records and lists, 1920s–2001. Among the items in this series is a brochure from the 1920s and lists/directories from 1932 and 1965–2001.

Series 6 contains records pertaining to Beth-El Cemetery, 1940s–1980s. These records include burial permits, ledgers, and accounts listing the location of individual burial sites.

Series 7 comprises the correspondence and papers of Cantor Robert Zalkin who assumed the congregation's musical direction in 1961. His correspondence dates from 1961–1972 and primarily involves his role as the congregation's musical director.

Series 8 through 10 contain the records of the Beth-El Zedeck Sisterhood, 1950–2002. Series 8 is made up of operational records such as board minutes, 1973–2001; membership records, 1961–1998; and the secretary's records, 1986–1992. Series 9 involves the programs and conference activities, 1962–2002. These include fund-raising activities, public service programs, and their connection with Women's League for Conservative Judaism. Series 10 comprises the organization's financial records. These records include budgets from 1967–1998 and audit reports from 1986–1997.

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