

Collection #
M 0362

INDIANAPOLIS B'NAI B'RITH LODGE NO. 58 RECORDS, 1923–1944

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF
COLLECTION: 2 boxes

COLLECTION
DATES: 1923–1944

PROVENANCE: B'nai B'rith Lodge # 58, Indianapolis, Indiana, August, 1981

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NOTES:

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The B'nai B'rith was founded in New York in 1843 with the purposes of intensifying and raising the level of Jewish community life. As a fraternal organization, its interests are cultural, philanthropic, political and social. The name means "Sons of the Covenant." The B'nai B'rith Abraham Lodge No. 58 was founded in Indianapolis in 1864; the Esther Lodge No. 323 was established in the 1880s. The two groups merged in 1907-1908 to form the Indianapolis Lodge. The Women's Auxiliary Lodge began in 1940. Of all the local Jewish organizations established during the 1860s and 1870s, only the B'nai B'rith remains active today.

The lodge played an important role in philanthropic activities, and supported numerous cultural, community and social programs for Jews and non-Jews alike. It gave to various charitable organizations, both local and national in scope, including the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Sunshine Mission, the Infantile Paralysis Fund, the Jewish Education Association, and the Cleveland Jewish Orphans' Home. Early in the century, it began sponsoring English and naturalization classes for Jewish immigrants, and continued this work in the 1930s with citizenship rallies to encourage Jewish aliens to gain their American citizenship. The lodge sought to find employment for immigrants, and provided baby and child care clinics for newly-arrived mothers.

From about 1910 on, the organization extended its social programs to include conducting religious services and Passover seders for Jewish inmates and military men. The lodge also provided education for the Jewish and non-Jewish community by providing speakers for lodge meetings and speeches that were open to the public. Topics addressed contemporary Jewish problems, including European refugees, the Zionist movement, anti-Semitism, and the Nazi movement. In 1925, the B'nai B'rith nationally took on the sponsorship of the Hillel Foundation (an international college student organization) and the Aleph Zadek Aleph (later the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization). The local lodge supported a large and very active A.Z.A. chapter and generously funded the Hillel Foundation at Indiana University.

The B'nai B'rith took a leading role in the political life of the city's Jewish population as well. The lodge was the only local Jewish organization to adopt an anti-Klan program (1925), and continued to play a major part in organized efforts to fight anti-Semitism. The Anti-Defamation League, created by the national B'nai B'rith in 1913, became very active in Indianapolis during the 1930s and 1940s through the strong backing of the lodge. The lodge worked with other Jewish organizations to fight anti-Semitism through education and publicity. A special concern of the B'nai B'rith was the elimination of unethical business practices and improper behavior in the Jewish community as a way of reducing anti-Semitism.

Sources:

Endelman, Judith E. *The Jewish Community of Indianapolis, 1949 to the Present*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Encyclopedia Americana, 1980 ed. S.v. "B'nai B'rith," by Rabbi Jay Kaufman.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection is comprised of minutes dating from 1923 to 1944, originally filed in seven notebooks. The minutes include records of regular and executive meetings, budgets, financial reports, officer lists, committee lists, new member lists, presidential reports, correspondence, and by-law amendments. Topics include the A.Z.A., the Hillel Foundation, the Americanization and employment of refugees, gifts to charitable organizations, social service activities, an anti-Klan program, and the organization's fight against anti-Semitism. The records prior to 1926 are incomplete. The minutes for the remaining years are fairly complete although some are more detailed than others depending upon the secretary in office.

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CATALOGING INFORMATION

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