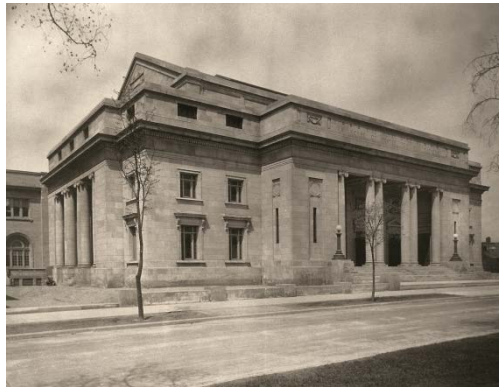




THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

**A Finding Aid to the
Chicago Sinai Congregation (Chicago, Ill.)
Records**

Manuscript Collection No. 56



Collection Summary

Title	Chicago Sinai Congregation (Chicago, Ill.) Records
Dates	1861-1976
Collection Number	MS-56
Repository	The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives
Creator	Chicago Sinai Congregation (Chicago, Ill.)
Extent	4.8 linear feet (12 Hollinger boxes)
Language of the Material	English

Administrative Information

Biographical Sketch

Sinai Congregation was founded in 1861, to serve the more religiously liberal German Jews on the south side of Chicago. While the Jewish population numbered less than 1500 in 1860, the existing two congregations could not satisfy the more progressive Jews who disdained their Orthodox rites. Among the founders of Sinai Congregation were the Greenebaum brothers (Elias, Jacob, and Henry), Isaac Greensfelder, Bernhard Felsenthal, Julius Rosenthal, and Simon Florsheim.

The first rabbi, Bernhard Felsenthal, and other leading members of the Sinai Congregation believed they should not stand on tradition, and felt that forms and institutions could be changed to meet modern conditions. For example, the individualistic businessmen of Sinai Congregation viewed Rabbi Felsenthal not as their leader but as a ministerial representative of the congregation. Also, in the synagogue, men and women sat together and were seen as coequals in religious matters.

Felsenthal resigned in 1864 because he wanted to be more than a ministerial representative of the congregation. He was succeeded by Isaac Low Chronik, a rabbi imported from Germany. Chronik lasted only seven years because he had contempt for the overriding materialistic aims of his congregation; he was a rational idealist who was more concerned with the social and moral ills of the community--and found little support among his congregation.

In 1871 Sinai Congregation lost its first synagogue at Plymouth Court and Van Buren Street because of the great Chicago Fire. In the same year, they hired Kr. Kaufmann Kohler as their new rabbi. He preached at Sinai's first Sunday service in January, 1874 in Martin's Hall which the Congregation had rented for the occasion. Two years later, Sinai built its second temple at 21st and Indiana Avenue because they hoped a physical structure would keep the congregation together. Kohler was constantly complaining that the congregation was not a very cohesive unit.

In 1879 Kohler left Sinai and went to Congregation Beth El in New York because he was tired, as Felsenthal had been, of being a ministerial representative of the Sinai Congregation. He was furious at his congregation because they rarely attended his sermons, invited Felix Adler of the Ethical Culture Society to speak at Sinai, (much to his horror), and also because they wanted to reduce his salary.

Emil G. Hirsch, formerly of a Louisville pulpit, was invited to the Sinai Congregation in 1880. Hirsch came from a great rabbinical tradition; his father, Rabbi Samuel Hirsch, was a seminal thinker in Reform Judaism and his father-in-law, David Einhorn, was also a great rabbi.

In his first two decades at Sinai, Hirsch faced similar difficulties to those faced by his three predecessors. Hirsch, who was also a professor of Semitic languages at the University of Chicago, did not want to take his spiritual cues from his congregation. The rabbi was outraged by the annual presidential report of Bernard Lowenthal in 1885 because the members sought to make changes in the ritual without consulting Hirsch. Hirsch saw his position as a supreme rabbi and a reformer who would have the power to criticize the traditions of Judaism and develop an all-embracing philosophy of life for his congregation.

When the Congregation removed the Ark from the synagogue in 1898 and ignored Hirsch's pleas to bring more young people into Sinai, the rabbi decided to quit and go to Temple Emanu-El in New York City. After his announcement on April 25, the Congregation decided to accept Hirsch's dominant role in order to keep him at Sinai. They believed their future as a congregation lay with Hirsch, who had become one of the leading social, religious, and economic reformers in Chicago and the United States. Hirsch was proclaimed rabbi for life in 1900. He also worked very closely with Progressive reformers such as Jane Addams, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, and Graham Taylor on important social questions of the times.

In 1911, on the 50th anniversary of its founding, Sinai built a new temple and dedicated it in March, 1912. This was done because of the great increases in congregational membership, influenced, no doubt by Hirsch's magnetic style and personality. In 1952, Sinai moved once more to its present Hyde Park address at 54th and South Shore Drive.

In 1923, Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch died and was succeeded by Dr. Louis L. Mann, previously rabbi of Congregation Mishkan Israel in New Haven, Connecticut and lecturer in Comparative Ethics at Yale University. Like Hirsch, Mann was intensely interested in the areas of social service and social justice because he believed that his religion could not be divorced from every day life. In 1962, after 40 years at Sinai, Mann retired and was succeeded by Dr. Samuel E. Karff. In 1976, Dr. Philip N. Kranz became the senior rabbi.

While Sinai Congregation no longer represents the most influential Jews of Chicago, because many people have moved from the south side of Chicago to the northern suburbs, it remains a leading center for the discussion of the main problems of the day. Sinai's sixty-five year old lecture program attracts many people to Sunday services at the temple. Sinai Congregation today remains a viable center of Reform Jewish life in Chicago.

Scope and Content	Consists of correspondence, minutes, reports, membership lists, addresses, and pamphlets that record the founding and major activities of Chicago Sinai Congregation.
Arrangement	Organized into four (4) series: A. General, 1863-1976; B. Board of Directors Minutes, 1871-1928; C. Miscellaneous Topics, 1861-1921; D. Financial Reports, 1874-1887.
Terms of Access	The collection is open for use; no restrictions apply.
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Preferred Citation	Footnotes and bibliographic references should refer to the Chicago Sinai Congregation (Chicago, Ill.) Records and the American Jewish Archives. A suggestion for at least the first citation is as follows: [Description], [Date], Box #, Folder #. MS-56. Chicago Sinai Congregation (Chicago, Ill.) Records. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.
Provenance	Received from Philip N. Kranz, Chicago, Ill., 1977-1978.
Processing Information	Processed by Mark Cowett, July 1978.

Index Terms

Subjects	Jews -- Illinois -- Chicago / Reform Judaism / Synagogues -- Illinois -- Chicago
Corporate Names	Chicago Sinai Congregation (Chicago, Ill.)
Media	Minutes / Speeches

Series A. General, 1863-1976

Extent 3.4 linear feet (8.5 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note Consists of correspondence, reports, addresses, and pamphlets of Sinai Congregation. Among the important correspondents and reporters are: Emil G. Hirsch, Stephen S. Wise, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Kaufmann Kohler, Richard J. Daley, and Adlai E. Stevenson. Significant to historians are the collections of material written by Hirsch and other rabbis about the development of liberal Reform Judaism.

Arrangement The series arranged chronologically.

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Series B. Board of Directors Minutes, 1871-1928

Extent 0.8 linear feet (2 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note Consists of the minutes of the Board of Directors meetings at Sinai Congregation.

Arrangement The series is arranged chronologically.

Box and Folder Listing

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Box 11. Folder 5. Board of Directors minutes, 1897-1899

Series C. Miscellaneous Topics, 1861-1921

Extent 0.4 linear feet (1 Hollinger box)

Scope and Content Note Consists of various topics concerning Sinai Congregation including the constitutions and by-laws, the 25th Anniversary of Sunday Services, pew books, and a manual of the Jewish Training School.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 11. Folder 6. 25th anniversary of Sunday services, 1899

Box 11. Folder 7. Constitution and by-laws, 1861, 1895, 1911, 1916

Box 11. Folder 8. Pew books, 1892

Box 12. Folder 1. Manual of the Jewish Training School, 1921

Series D. Financial Reports, 1874-1887

Extent 0.2 linear feet (0.5 Hollinger box)

Box and Folder Listing

Box 12. Folder 2-3. Financial Ledgers, 1874-1887



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Subject Tracings

Note: The following list of subjects is a selective index to many of the topics and individuals in the GENERAL series of the CHICAGO, ILLINOIS--SINAI CONGREGATION RECORDS. It is selective in that it only attempts to draw attention to the more significant items in the collection. It does not attempt to list every subject or individual nor does it try to indicate all places that a listed subject or individual appears in the collection. When used in conjunction with the Box and Folder List, the Subject Tracings should help the researcher locate topics. References are to boxes and folders: e.g. 1/6 means Box 1 Folder 6.

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