A Finding Aid to the
Ferdinand M. Isserman Papers

Manuscript Collection No. 6
Collection Summary

Title  Ferdinand M. Isserman Papers
Dates  1870-1971 (bulk 1919-1967)
Collection Number  MS-6
Repository  The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives
Creator  Isserman, Ferdinand Myron, 1898-1972
Extent  15.4 linear feet (26 Hollinger boxes and 4 oversize boxes)
Language of the Material  English

Administrative Information

Biographical Sketch

Ferdinand M. Isserman was born on March 4, 1898 in Antwerp, Belgium. His family immigrated to the United States in 1906, settling in Newark, New Jersey, Isserman attended schools in both Antwerp and Newark, graduating from Newark's Central High School in June 1914.

In September 1914, Isserman entered Hebrew Union College (HUC) where, in conjunction with the University of Cincinnati, he studied for his bachelor's degree while training for the rabbinate. In 1917, he received a Bachelor of Hebrew Letters degree from HUC. In 1919, Isserman completed the requirements for a bachelor's degree from the University of Cincinnati and three years later (June 1922) he was ordained a rabbi. While in school, Isserman participated in various extra-curricular activities. He was on both the University of Cincinnati and the HUC basketball teams (lettering in basketball at the University of Cincinnati), he served as president of the HUC Literary Society in 1920-1921, and in 1921-1922 he was president of the HUC student body.

Upon ordination, Isserman became Assistant Rabbi under Rev. Dr. Harry W. Ettelson at Rodeph Shalom Congregation in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He remained in this position for three years, during which he studied at the University of Pennsylvania, receiving a Master of Arts degree in comparative religion in 1924.

In 1925, Isserman assumed the position of rabbi of the Toronto Hebrew Congregation ("Holy Blossom") in Canada. In Toronto, Isserman distinguished himself by arranging Canada's first pulpit exchange between a Christian minister and a Jewish rabbi.

In 1929, Isserman became rabbi of Temple Israel in St. Louis, Missouri, where he remained through 1963. Isserman visited Nazi Germany three times (in 1933, 1935 and 1937) and participated in many civic as well as Jewish oriented organizations. Some of his more prominent activities included: conducting weekly Jewish programs on local radio stations (1932-1963), holding an annual Institute on Judaism for the Christian Clergy at Temple Israel (1937-1962), serving as president of the University of Missouri Jewish Student Foundation (1940-1947), spending one year overseas during World War II with the American Red Cross (1943), serving as first president of the combined Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Alumni Association (1950-1951), chairing both the American Jewish Tercentenary Committee of St. Louis and the American Jewish Tercentenary Committee of Missouri (1954), serving as the American chairman of the World Union for Progressive Judaism (1955-1956), and chairing the Thomas C. Hennings Jr. Memorial Committee (1960).

Rabbi Isserman's participation in the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) deserves special note. He was very active with the CCAR's Commission on Justice and Peace from 1942 through 1950, serving as chairman from 1942 through 1945. In 1942, Isserman helped organize and presided over the Commission's American Institute on Judaism and A Just and Enduring Peace, in 1945 he organized the Commission's Institute on Judaism and Race Relations, and in 1950 he helped organize the CCAR's Institute on Reform Jewish Theology Today.

Isserman died in March, 1972.

Scope and Content

Contains correspondence, minutes, reports, addresses, sermons, lectures, photographs, newscuttings, and miscellaneous items which trace the career and activities of Ferdinand M. Isserman.

Arrangement

Terms of Access
The collection is open for use; no restrictions apply.

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Preferred Citation
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[Description], [Date], Ferdinand M. Isserman Papers, MS-6, Box [#], Folder [#]. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Provenance
Received from Ruth Isserman, St. Louis, Mo., August 1971.

Processing Information
Processed by M. Carolyn Dellenbach, March 1977.

Index Terms

Subjects
Jews -- Missouri -- Saint Louis / Rabbis / Reform Judaism

Personal Names
Isserman, Ferdinand M. (Ferdinand Myron), 1898-1972

Corporate Names
Central Conference of American Rabbis / Temple Israel (Saint Louis, Mo.)

Media
Lectures / Minutes / Photographs / Scrapbooks / Sermons

Series A. General, 1870-1971

Extent
3.8 linear feet (9.5 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note
Series A contains correspondence, minutes, reports, lectures, addresses and miscellaneous items, which reflect Isserman's rabbinic career (particularly at St. Louis Temple Israel) and his participation in the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the American Jewish Tercentenary celebrations, the HUC-JIR Alumni Association, the University of Missouri Jewish Student Foundation along with many other Jewish and civic organizations.

The series is alphabetically arranged by correspondent, organization or subject of correspondence.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 1. Folder 1. A, General.
Box 1. Folder 2. American Red Cross, 1942-1946, 1967
Box 1. Folder 3. American Jewish Tercentenary Committee of Missouri, 1953-1954 August
Box 1. Folder 4. American Jewish Tercentenary Committee of Missouri [correspondence, addresses], 1954 September
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Box 1. Folder 6. American Jewish Tercentenary Committee of Missouri [minutes, reports], 1954
Box 1. Folder 7. American Jewish Tercentenary Committee of St Louis, 1953-1954 May
Box 1. Folder 8. American Jewish Tercentenary Committee of St Louis, 1954 June-July
Box 1. Folder 9. American Jewish Tercentenary Committee of St Louis, 1954 August
Box 1. Folder 10. American Jewish Tercentenary Committee of St Louis, 1954 September-October

Box 4. Folder 15. Hebrew Union College, 1919-1922


Box 5. Folder 5. Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Alumni Association [constitution; reports; form letter], 1949-1951

Box 5. Folder 6. Heller, James G., 1943-1944


Box 5. Folder 8. Hong Kong, 1963-1965

Box 5. Folder 9. Hong Kong Ohel Leah Synagogue, 1963-1965

Box 5. Folder 10. I, General.

Box 5. Folder 11. Isserman family, 1942-1965


Box 5. Folder 15. Lazaron, Morris S., 1926, 1942-1943


Box 5. Folder 17. Ma, General.

Box 6. Folder 1. Mann, Louis L., 1926-1927, 1942-1943

Box 6. Folder 2. Marcus, Jacob Rader, 1923-1971

Box 6. Folder 3. Mark, Julius, 1926-1971


Box 6. Folder 5. Missouri State Library Commission [correspondence, minutes], 1965-1969


Box 6. Folder 12. Philadelphia, Pa. - The Jewish Chautauqua Society Lesson plans ("Methods of Teaching the Prophets"), 1919
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Box 7. Folder 2. St Louis, Mo., 1930-1967
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Box 8. Folder 2. St Louis, Mo. - Temple Israel, 1942-1944
Box 8. Folder 3. St Louis, Mo. - Temple Israel, 1945 January-June
Box 8. Folder 4. St Louis, Mo. - Temple Israel, 1945 July-1963
Box 8. Folder 5. St Louis, Mo. - Temple Israel [re: Isserman's 25th anniversary at Temple Israel], 1955
Box 8. Folder 6. St Louis, Mo. - Temple Israel [re: Isserman's 30th anniversary at Temple Israel], 1960
Box 8. Folder 7. St Louis, Mo. - Temple Israel [re: Temple Israel's 75th anniversary], 1961-1962
Box 8. Folder 8. St Louis, Mo. - Temple Israel [re: Isserman's retirement from Temple Israel], 1963
Box 8. Folder 9. St Louis, Mo. - Temple Israel [re: dedication of Temple Israel's Isserman Auditorium], 1963
Box 8. Folder 10. St Louis, Mo. - Temple Israel [Board of Trustees, congregational committees, minutes, membership lists], 1940-1955
Box 9. Folder 1. St Louis, Mo. - World Court Committee [correspondence, reports, pledge ], 1927-1931
Series B. Sermons and Addresses, 1922-1968

Extent 6.4 linear feet (16 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note This series consists of notes for, and typescript and manuscript copies of, many of Isserman's sermons and addresses. Rabbi Isserman's views on the world, national and local politics, contemporary literature, and controversies are often seen through these writings.

Arrangement The series is divided into two (2) subseries: 1. General, and 2. Radio Sermons and Addresses.

Subseries 1. General, 1922-1968, undated

Extent 4.6 linear feet (11.5 Hollinger boxes)

Arrangement This subseries is arranged chronologically.
Box and Folder Listing

Box 10. Folder 10. Indices [not complete], 1929-1962
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Box 21. Folder 7. Sermons and addresses, 1963 September-December
Box 21. Folder 9. Sermons and addresses, undated
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Subseries 2. Radio Sermons and Addresses, 1932-1966, undated

Extent 1.8 linear feet (4.5 Hollinger boxes)

Arrangement This subseries is arranged chronologically.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 22. Folder 1. Indices [Not complete], 1940-1962
Box 22. Folder 2. Radio sermons, 1932
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Series C. Photographs, 1922-1965, undated

Scope and Content Note  Series C consists of one folder of photographs depicting Isserman, his colleagues, and some of the activities with which he was involved.

Box and Folder Listing


Series D. Miscellaneous, 1914-1968, undated

Extent  5.2 linear feet (0.5 Hollinger box and 5 oversize boxes)

Scope and Content Note  Series D contains personal and biographical material and five oversize boxes of scrapbooks concerning Rabbi Isserman's activities.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 26. Folder 6. Class notes, undated
Box 26. Folder 7. Class notes, undated
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Box X-286. Scrapbooks of activities and editorials in The Modern View, 1923-1948
Box X-287. Scrapbooks of activities and editorials in The Modern View, 1923-1948
Box X-288. Scrapbooks of activities and editorials in The Modern View, 1923-1948
Appendix A: Index to General Sermons

Note: The following list is an index to the titles of the sermons, addresses, and lectures contained in Series B. Sermons and Addresses, Series 1. General Sermons. The list is arranged alphabetically. All spellings of Hebrew words are Isserman’s. Untitled sermons, addresses and lectures are not included in the list. References are to boxes and folders, i.e. 9/1 = Box 9, Folder 1.

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