



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

**A Finding Aid to the
Louis Wolsey Papers**

Manuscript Collection No. 15



Collection Summary

Title	Louis Wolsey Papers
Dates	1866-1948 (bulk 1942-1948)
Collection Number	MS-15
Repository	The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives
Creator	Wolsey, Louis, 1877-1953
Extent	2.4 linear feet (6 Hollinger boxes)
Language of the Material	English

Administrative Information

Biographical Sketch

Louis Wolsey was born in Midland, Michigan on January 8, 1877. He was educated at public schools in Clare (Michigan), Chicago, and Cincinnati, graduating in 1895 from Cincinnati's Hughes High School. Wolsey then entered Hebrew Union College where, in conjunction with the University of Cincinnati, he studied for his bachelor's degree while training for the rabbinate. In 1899, Wolsey received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Cincinnati and, in that same year,

received ordination from Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise.

Upon ordination, Wolsey became rabbi at Congregation B'nai Israel in Little Rock, Arkansas. He remained there eight years, during which time he served as Chaplain General of the Arkansas State Guard, was a member of the Little Rock Board of Education (1906-1907), and co-founded Little Rock's Carnegie Library.

In 1907, Wolsey went to Cleveland, Ohio to serve as rabbi at Congregation Ansche Chesed (Euclid Avenue Temple). In Cleveland, Wolsey directed the building of a new synagogue for his congregation, served as a member of the Cleveland Charter Commission (1920) and was president of the Cleveland Society of Sociology (1922-1923). During this time, Wolsey also served one term as president of the HUC Alumni Association (1913-1914).

Although Wolsey was awarded a life contract at Congregation Ansche Chesed, he was released from it in 1925 so that he could serve as rabbi of Congregation Rodeph Shalom in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Wolsey functioned as senior rabbi at Congregation Rodeph Shalom from 1925 through 1947, when he became Rabbi Emeritus. He remained in this position until his death in 1953. As rabbi of Congregation Rodeph Shalom, Wolsey directed the building of a new synagogue in 1927, served as a member of the Executive Board of the Philadelphia Federation of Jewish Charities and chaired the Philadelphia Vice and Crime Commission.

After 1925, Wolsey became actively identified with many national Jewish organizations and movements. He was a member of the Executive Board of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), CCAR president from 1925 through 1927 and chairman of the CCAR Committee on the Union Hymnal which, under his supervision, published a new edition of the Hymnal in 1946. Wolsey was chancellor of the Jewish Chautauqua Society (1925-1938), a charter member of the World Union for Progressive Judaism (1926) and a member of the HUC Board of Governors. He served on the Executive Board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) and was chairman of the UAHC Commission on Jewish Education (1925). Wolsey was also an active Republican: in 1940, he was on the Republican Party's National Program Committee and several times he acted as Jewish chaplain at Republican conventions. In 1939, Wolsey received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from HUC in recognition of his post graduate work at the University of Chicago, Western Reserve University (Cleveland) and the University of Pennsylvania.

In February 1942, at its annual convention in Cincinnati, the CCAR passed a pro-Zionist resolution favoring the establishment of a Jewish army in Palestine. Wolsey, who was committed to Reform principles of Judaism which saw Judaism as a universal religion and not a nationality, was adamantly opposed to "political Zionism" and outraged at this CCAR resolution. Soon after the convention, he, along with sixteen other Reform rabbis, addressed letters to CCAR members concerning the formation of a "non Zionist" association. The non-Zionists met in Atlantic City, New Jersey June 1 and 2 and created a Statement of Principles, which was released to the press in August 1942. On December 7, at another meeting of non-Zionist Jews, the American Council for Judaism (ACJ) was founded with a Constitution and Articles of Incorporation. By the end of that year, a national headquarters for the Council was established in Philadelphia with Elmer Berger as its Executive Director. The ACJ also established a Lecture Bureau as well as hiring Sidney Wallach, a public relations expert.

Finally, the ACJ began publication of The Information Bulletin as a means of presenting its point of view.

Through 1943, Wolsey continued his active and intense involvement with the ACJ. As one of the people instrumental in the founding of the Council, he was regarded among its spiritual leaders. In 1943, he was elected vice-president of the ACJ and helped form the Cincinnati and San Francisco branches of the Council. In December 1943, he advocated that the ACJ establish its own College for Reform Judaism since the established schools "had been sabotaged [by the Zionists]."

Beginning in the fall of 1944, however, Wolsey began to experience a sense of alienation from the anti-Zionist movement. He felt that Berger and Wallach ran the ACJ in an "undemocratic fashion" and that they overemphasized ACJ's anti-Zionist aspects rather than its Reform principles. As a result, Wolsey resigned as vice-president in December 1945 and thereafter became totally inactive in the ACJ.

In 1948, upon the creation of the State of Israel, Wolsey formally withdrew as a member of the American Council for Judaism. In a statement released to the press, he called for the dissolution of the Council and pleaded for an effort to heal all wounds in order to strengthen Israel by creating a united spiritual front of American Jews. Wolsey's recognition of the realities of the situation and his willingness to state his changed position in public won him much acclaim.

Rabbi Louis Wolsey died March 4, 1953 in Philadelphia. Wolsey had married Florence Helen Weiner in Cleveland and they had had two sons, Jonathan L. and Allon. In February 1941, Mrs. Wolsey and Jonathan L. Wolsey died. In 1943, Wolsey married Mrs. Helen Frank Myers. Upon his death in 1953, he was survived by his second wife and his remaining son Allon. Rabbi Wolsey is also survived by two grandchildren from his son Allon: Daniel Allon Wolsey and Frances Wolsey Kiradjian.

Scope and Content

Contains correspondence, minutes, addresses, ACJ records, newspaper clippings and nearprint which reflect Wolsey's rabbinic career and activities, especially his involvement in the founding and organizing of the American Council for Judaism.

Arrangement

Organized into two (2) series: A. Correspondence, 1866-1948; B. Nearprint, 1925-1948.

Copies

Available in microfilm; Available in repository and via inter-library loan.

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Preferred Citation

Footnotes and bibliographic references should refer to the Louis Wolsey Papers and the American Jewish Archives. A suggestion for at least the first citation is as follows:

[Description], [Date], Louis Wolsey Papers, MS-15, Box [#], Folder [#]. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Provenance

Received from Louis Wolsey, Philadelphia, Pa., 1947-1952.

Processing Information

Processed by M. Carolyn Dellenbach and Kevin Proffitt, May 1987.

Index Terms

Subjects	Jews -- Pennsylvania -- Philadelphia / Rabbis / Zionism
Personal Names	Wolsey, Louis, 1877-1953
Corporate Names	American Council for Judaism / Congregation Rodeph Shalom (Philadelphia, Pa.)
Media	Minutes / Speeches

Series A. Correspondence, 1866-1948

Extent 1.6 linear feet (4 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note The material prior to 1942 is sparse. It consists of a few historical items concerning Philadelphia's Congregation Rodeph Shalom (dating back to 1866) and correspondence (1923-1941), which reflect Wolsey's rabbinic career and activities and show his early aversion to Zionism. The material after 1941 deals almost exclusively with the American Council for Judaism. Through 1943, Wolsey, as one of the founders and spiritual leaders of the ACJ, was kept informed of all Council developments. Thus the files in this series contain many copies of the correspondence of ACJ leaders such as William Rosenau, Abe Shusterman, Morris Lazaron and Elmer Berger. The American Council for Judaism materials, 1942-1946, consists of minutes, membership lists, form letters, reports, and financial records. Although there is complete coverage of the June 1-2, 1942 Atlantic City meeting along with some other meetings, the records, in general, are scarce, especially the ACJ financial material.

Arrangement This series is arranged alphabetically by name of the correspondent.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 1. Folder 1. A-B, General.

Box 1. Folder 2. American Council for Judaism (ACJ), 1942 March-May

Box 1. Folder 3. American Council for Judaism (ACJ) [meeting of Non-Zionist rabbis in Atlantic City, N.J.], 1942 June 1-2

Box 1. Folder 4. American Council for Judaism (ACJ) [meeting of Non-Zionist rabbis in Atlantic City, N.J.], 1942 June 1-2

Box 1. Folder 5. American Council for Judaism (ACJ), 1942 June-December

Box 1. Folder 6. American Council for Judaism (ACJ), 1943-1948

Box 1. Folder 7. American Council for Judaism (ACJ), undated

Box 1. Folder 8. American Council for Judaism (ACJ) [financial records], 1942-1943

Box 1. Folder 9. Berger, Elmer, 1942

Box 2. Folder 1. Berger, Elmer, 1943

Box 2. Folder 2. Berger, Elmer, 1944-1946

Box 2. Folder 3. C-E, General.

Box 2. Folder 4. Calisch, Edward N., 1922-1923, 1942-1944

Box 2. Folder 5. F, General.

Box 2. Folder 6. Fineshriber, William H.

Box 2. Folder 7. Foster, Solomon, 1942-1943

Box 2. Folder 8. Franklin, Leo M., 1942-1944, 1948

Box 2. Folder 9. Frisch, Ephraim, 1942-1943

Box 2. Folder 10. G, General.

Box 3. Folder 1. Goldenson, Samuel H., 1942-1945

Box 3. Folder 2. H-K, General.

Box 3. Folder 3. Heller, James G., 1942-1943, 1946

Box 3. Folder 4. Holtzberg, Abraham, 1942-1945

Box 3. Folder 5. L-O, General.

Box 3. Folder 6. Landman, Isaac, 1924, 1942-1943, 1946

Box 3. Folder 7. Lazaron, Morris S., 1942

Box 3. Folder 8. Lazaron, Morris S., 1943-1945, undated

Box 3. Folder 9. Marcuson, Isaac E., 1942-1944

Box 3. Folder 10. Morgenstern, Julian, 1924, 1942-1943

Box 3. Folder 11. P-R, General.

Box 4. Folder 1. Philipson, David, 1926, 1942-1945

Box 4. Folder 2. Reichert, Irving F, 1942-1946

Box 4. Folder 3. Rosenau, William, 1942-1943

Box 4. Folder 4. Rosenblum, William F., 1942-1943, 1948

Box 4. Folder 5. Rosenwald, Lessing J., 1943-1948

Box 4. Folder 6. S, General.

Box 4. Folder 7. Schachtel, Hyman J., 1942-1947

Box 4. Folder 8. Shusterman, Abraham, 1942-1948

Box 4. Folder 9. T-V, General.

Box 4. Folder 10. Union of American Hebrew Congregations - Committee on Social Justice [minutes], circa 1925

Box 4. Folder 11. W-Z, General.

Box 4. Folder 12. Wise, Jonah B., 1942-1943

Box 4. Folder 13. Unidentified, 1866-1899, 1941-1948, undated

Series B. Nearprint, 1925-1948

Extent 0.8 linear feet (2 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note This series consists of two folders and 5 loose-leaf scrapbooks of pamphlets, articles, Bulletins and newsclippings concerning Zionism and/or the American Council for Judaism. Since the Zionist Organization of America and the ACJ each felt that they represented the "silent majority" of American Jews, membership recruitment and publicity were an important part of both of their campaigns. Copies of many of the newspaper advertisements and the various propaganda-oriented publications are found in this subseries. Wolsey compiled "Tables of Contents" for each scrapbook and these are found at the beginning of this section. Most of scrapbook number 2 is missing.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 5. Folder 1. Nearprint, 1928-1948

Box 5. Folder 2. Nearprint, undated

Box 5. Folder 3. Scrapbooks, "Tables of Contents" [MF-1647].

Box 5. Folder 4. Scrapbook number 1.

Box 5. Folder 5. Scrapbook number 1.

Box 5. Folder 6. Scrapbook number 1.

Box 5. Folder 7. Scrapbook number 1.

Box 5. Folder 8. Scrapbook number 1.

Box 5. Folder 9. Scrapbook number 2.

Box 5. Folder 10. Scrapbook number 3.

Box 6. Folder 1. Scrapbook number 3.

Box 6. Folder 2. Scrapbook number 3.

Box 6. Folder 3. Scrapbook number 3.

Box 6. Folder 4. Scrapbook number 4.

Box 6. Folder 5. Scrapbook number 4.

Box 6. Folder 6. Scrapbook number 4.

Box 6. Folder 7. Scrapbook number 4.

Box 6. Folder 8. Scrapbook number 4.

Box 6. Folder 9. Scrapbook number 5.