



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE  
**AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES**

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**A Finding Aid to the  
Congregation Beth Adam (Cincinnati, Ohio)  
Records**

**Manuscript Collection No. 696**



## Collection Summary

<b>Title</b>	Congregation Beth Adam (Cincinnati, Ohio) Records
<b>Dates</b>	1980-2013
<b>Collection Number</b>	MS-696
<b>Repository</b>	The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives
<b>Creator</b>	Congregation Beth Adam (Cincinnati, Ohio)
<b>Extent</b>	1.2 linear feet (3 Hollinger boxes)
<b>Language of the Material</b>	English

## Administrative Information

### Biographical Sketch

In the fall of 1979, a small nucleus of people gathered to discuss their common views of Judaism in an ever-changing and modern world. It was through these discussions with rabbinic student Robert Barr that the participants recognized their desire for an alternative form for their Jewish expression. Based upon this, these individuals took a historic step and decided to organize a religious school for their children and to sponsor High Holiday services. These ambitious plans were accomplished with the help of Rabbi Barr working as a rabbinic-intern with the Society of Humanistic Judaism.

The response from the community to the first High Holiday services was greater than anticipated and many of those who attended expressed a desire to become actively involved in the congregation's future. Thus the membership and religious school expanded while they continued to offer Shabbat services and holiday observances.

The congregation incorporated in 1980 and shortly thereafter elected its first Board of Trustees. In the spring of 1981, Robert Barr was ordained from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and elected as Beth Adam's first Rabbi. Barr is an active member of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Beth Adam is a Humanistic congregation. Some basic tenets of Humanistic Judaism are that each Jew has the right to create a meaningful Jewish lifestyle free from supernatural authority and imposed tradition and that the goal of life is personal dignity and self-esteem. They also hold that the secular roots of Judaism are as important as the religious ones and they believe that the survival of the Jewish people requires a reconciliation between science, personal autonomy and Jewish loyalty. The most important aspects of life to Humanistic Jews are communal life, the celebration of holidays and ceremonies, the education - not indoctrination - of both children and adults and the ethical training of all congregants. Contrary to common belief, Humanistic Judaism, "...does not preclude one's having a concept of God. In fact, there are many concepts of God that are compatible with Humanistic Judaism... [and] there are many Humanistic Jews who have a concept of God, but not a God that intervenes and manipulates the events of the world... Neither would this God act in a way that would contradict, or be inconsistent with natural law or scientific truth... Humanistic Jews who have a concept of God affirm their Jewish identities in services which focus upon human beings' strengths and weaknesses, hopes and fears."

Beth Adam continued to grow as a congregation and eventually moved into a new temple in 2001 in Symmes Township, near Cincinnati.

### Scope and Content

Collection contains documentation of the founding of Congregation Beth Adam (Cincinnati, Ohio) Though this is a small collection, there is a wealth of valuable information contained within. The information regarding the architectural plans is quite interesting in that a clear line of reasoning is found in how the congregation and Rabbi Robert Barr attempted to have a building that reflected the philosophy of the congregation and the feel of an American synagogue (1/1). The newspaper clippings and promotional materials are also quite valuable in tracing the history, both social and devotional, of the congregation (1/3-4). The services included in this collection offer the best insight into the ethos of the congregation and the value that they place upon participation, understanding and the mental and social comfort of the congregants (1/5-6). The newsletters are also a window into the life of the congregation (2/3-4, 3/1-4).

Perhaps the most interesting part of this collection are the two files regarding Beth Adam's application for membership in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) (2/1-2). Beth Adam was the first humanistic congregation to apply to join the UAHC. The response of the UAHC (1/7) to Beth Adam is also quite telling in that the UAHC seems to have struggled with the application and came up with a response especially tailored to Beth Adam. Acceptance into the UAHC requires that "any Jewish congregation in the United States of America, Canada or their Territories or Possessions, upon approval by the Board of Trustees, may become a member of this Union by subscribing to its Constitution and by-laws." The UAHC also addressed congregational autonomy; "Nothing contained in

this Constitution or By-Laws shall be construed so as to interfere in any manner with the mode of worship, the school, the freedom of expression and opinion, or any of the other congregational activities of the constituent congregations of the Union."

Though the UAHC found that Beth Adam did not meet their requirements for membership, it was based upon several factors which were highly debated. One factor was whether Beth Adam would "foster the development of Liberal Judaism" as required in the UAHC's constitution. There was also concern about liturgy which omits the word "God". The essence of this debate led the UAHC to reevaluate what it means to be a part of the Reform movement. As Rabbi Gunther Plaut replied to this issue, "...Reform Judaism cannot be everything, or it will be nothing."

Since this application was rejected and those involved wish to remain unknown, these files are restricted.

- Arrangement** The collection is arranged in two (2) series: A. Correspondence and Subject Files; B. Newsletters.
- Access Restrictions** Box 1, Folder 8 and Box 2, Folder 1 and 2 are restricted.
- Preferred Citation** Footnotes and bibliographic references should refer to the Congregation Beth Adam (Cincinnati, Ohio) Records and the American Jewish Archives. A suggestion for at least the first citation is as follows:  
[Description], [Date], Box #, Folder #. MS-696. Congregation Beth Adam (Cincinnati, Ohio) Records. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.
- Provenance** Received from Robert B. Barr, Cincinnati, Ohio, May 1995 and 2002. Additional material received from Jennifer Winegeart, Communications Coordinator of Congregation Beth Adam, Cincinnati, Ohio, July 2012 and November 2013.
- Processing Information** Processed by Christine A. Crandall, April 2003.

## Index Terms

- Subjects** Humanistic Judaism / Synagogues -- Ohio -- Cincinnati
- Personal Names** Barr, Robert B., 1955-
- Corporate Names** Congregation Beth Adam (Cincinnati, Ohio)

## Series A. Correspondence and Subject Files, 1980-2013

**Extent** 0.6 linear feet (1.5 Hollinger boxes)

**Arrangement** The series is arranged alphabetically.

### Box and Folder Listing

Box 1. Folder 1. Architectural plans.

Box 1. Folder 2. Board minutes, 2009-2012

Box 1. Folder 3. By-laws and incorporation.

Box 1. Folder 4. Newspaper clippings, 1980-2002

Box 1. Folder 5. Promotional brochures and mission statement.

Box 1. Folder 6. Services.

Box 1. Folder 7. Services.

Box 1. Folder 8. Union of American Hebrew Congregations qualifications for admissions [RESTRICTED], 1990

Box 2. Folder 1. Records and correspondence. Union of American Hebrew Congregations application (part 1) [RESTRICTED], 1990-1992

Box 2. Folder 2. Records and correspondence. Union of American Hebrew Congregations application (part 2) [RESTRICTED], 1990-1992

## **Series B. Newsletters, 1980-2002**

**Extent** 0.6 linear feet (1.5 Hollinger boxes)

**Arrangement** The series is arranged chronologically.

### **Box and Folder Listing**

Box 2. Folder 3. Newsletters, 1980-1986

Box 2. Folder 4. Newsletters, 1985-1987

Box 2. Folder 5. Newsletters, 1988-1990

Box 3. Folder 1. Newsletters, 1991-1993

Box 3. Folder 2. Newsletters, 1994-1996

Box 3. Folder 3. Newsletters, 1997-1999

Box 3. Folder 4. Newsletters, 2000-2002