



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

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**A Finding Aid to the  
Philip L. Seman Scrapbooks  
Manuscript Collection No. 578**



## Collection Summary

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| <b>Title</b>                    | Philip L. Seman Scrapbooks                                    |
| <b>Dates</b>                    | 1897-1957   |
| <b>Collection Number</b>        | MS-578  |
| <b>Repository</b>               | The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives |
| <b>Creator</b>                  | Seman, Philip Louis, 1881-1957                                |
| <b>Extent</b>                   | 10 linear feet (10 record cartons)                            |
| <b>Language of the Material</b> | English and Yiddish   |

## Administrative Information

### Biographical Sketch

Philip Louis Seman was born in Warsaw, Poland on November 11, 1881. His parents, Louis and Salka (Giezler) Seman moved their family from Poland to the United States in 1892 when Philip was age 12. He had a brother, Dr. Samuel M. Seman (of Brooklyn, New York). Philip studied social service work at Adelphi College in Brooklyn, New York, graduating in 1902 with a Bachelor of Science degree. In 1908 he earned an LLB from the Law School of Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri. In 1932 he received an honorary PhD from the Liberal Church of America.

Seman's career in social work and education began in New York City. From 1897-1900 he served the Educational Alliance as head of the club department. From 1900-1902 he taught at the Orphan Asylum of the Hebrew Sheltering and Guardian Society (where he met his future wife). From 1902-1905 he was club director of the Hebrew Sheltering and Guardian Society

In 1905 Seman moved to St. Louis, Missouri, to become Superintendent of the Jewish Educational and Charitable Association (or Jewish Educational Alliance). The Alliance sponsored concerts, lectures, and clubs (such as the Mothers' Club, Progressive Literary Society, and Dancing Club). Seman remained in St. Louis until 1910. While there he joined the faculty at the School of Social Economy of Washington University. And he actively participated in many civic organizations, including as Vice President of the St. Louis Pure Milk Commission.

In 1910 Seman returned to New York to become Executive Director of the Federation of Brooklyn Jewish Charities, serving there until 1912. From 1912-1913 he served as Associate Director of the Industrial Removal Office in New York City.

In 1913 Seman moved to Chicago to become General Director of the Chicago Hebrew Institute (later renamed Jewish People's Institute or JPI). During the 32 years in which Seman led the organization, the JPI grew tremendously in size and importance from serving the needs of immigrants to serving the Americanized community of the 1940s. During the height of immigration JPI sponsored an accredited elementary and high school. And during the depression, when community colleges were closing from lack of funds, JPI opened People's Junior College.

While in Chicago Seman continued his work of teaching in local institutions of higher learning. He lectured on sociology at Hebrew Theological College (1935-1945) and on Bible at Garret Biblical Institute of Northwestern University (1930-1935). He also helped to found the Hillel Foundation in 1923 and was an active member of the Hillel Foundation Commission from 1930-1947.

After retiring from the JPI in 1945 and Chicago Recreation Commission in 1946 Seman moved to Los Angeles, California, where he continued to further educational and social welfare efforts as a consultant to social service and educational organizations, including: Los Angeles Recreation Commission, Los Angeles Bureau of Education and Jewish Welfare Board. As an educator he served on the faculty and the board of overseers of the University of Judaism beginning in 1949.

Throughout his life Seman was an active member of many local and national civic and social welfare organizations, including: Chicago Recreation Commission (chairman and co-founder), the Jewish Welfare Board (executive commission), National Association of Jewish Community Center Workers (president), Recreation Commission of the Chicago Board of Education (chairman), President Hoover's Commission on Child Health Protection, The Educational and Recreational Program of Cook County (Chicago, Ill.) Jail, National Conference of Jewish Social Service (vice president), Chicago Council of Social Agencies (director), National Association of Jewish Community Center Secretaries (president) and Chicago Recreation Commission (Executive Committee). Letterheads in his scrapbooks document Seman's involvement in many other organizations.

Seman was a prolific writer and lecturer. He contributed to numerous periodicals and wrote nine books, including: *Jewish Community Life* (1924), *Program of a Jewish Community Center* (1926), *Problem of the Leisure Hour* (1927), *Training for Leadership* (1928), *Social Orientation* (1930), *Community Culture in an Era of Depression* (1932). The majority of his writings dealt with social

welfare or conquering anti-Semitism and prejudice.

On July 28 1907 Seman married Beatrice R. Prigozen. They met while working at the Orphan Asylum in New York City. She was Supervisor of the Girls' Department for three years during the time he was director of club work. They had three children: Jacob Philip, Louise Salka, and Gertrude Rose.

Philip L. Seman died in 1957, at the age of 76.

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|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Scope and Content</b>      | Papers describe the career of Philip L. Seman as an organizational executive, social worker and educator and also describes his public appearances and community involvement. The collection contains 59 scrapbooks. Materials in the scrapbooks include newspaper and magazine articles, invitations, programs, pamphlets, correspondence, reports, speeches and photographs. Many of the items are glued onto scrapbook pages. |
| <b>Arrangement</b>            | The collection is divided into three (3) series: A. New York, St. Louis, and Return to New York; B. Chicago; C. Los Angeles.   |
| <b>Terms of Access</b>        | The collection is open for use; no restrictions apply.   |
| <b>Preferred Citation</b>     | Footnotes and bibliographic references should refer to the Philip L. Seman Scrapbooks and the American Jewish Archives. A suggestion for at least the first citation is as follows:<br><br>[Description], [Date], Box #, Folder # . MS-578. Philip L. Seman Scrapbooks. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.  |
| <b>Provenance</b>             | Received from Mrs. Phillip L. Seman, Los Angeles, Calif., March 1958.  |
| <b>Processing Information</b> | Processed by Kathleen L. Spray, June 1999.   |

## Index Terms

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| <b>Subjects</b>        | Jews -- California -- Los Angeles / Jews -- Illinois -- Chicago   |
| <b>Personal Names</b>  | Seman, Philip L. (Philip Louis), 1881-1957  |
| <b>Corporate Names</b> | Bureau of Jewish Education (Los Angeles, Calif.) / Chicago Hebrew Institute / Jewish People's Institute (Chicago, Ill.) / University of Judaism |
| <b>Media</b>           | Photographs / Scrapbooks  |

## Series A. New York, St. Louis, and Return to New York, 1897-1913

**Extent** 1.5 linear feet (1.5 record cartons)

**Scope and Content Note** Photos are contained in scrapbooks 1/1 (2 photo strips of 3 unidentified young women from early 20th century), 1/2 (one photo of an entertainment of the Jewish Educational Alliance in St. Louis) and 1/3 (2 photos of a dinner meeting in the 1940s-possibly a 1948 meeting of the Washington University Alumni Association in Los Angeles).

## Box and Folder Listing

Box 1. Folder 1. "1897...on St. Louis events"- news articles, programs and photos, includes: Seman Progressive Circle, Jewish Educational Alliance, 1897-1905

Box 1. Folder 2. Programs, announcements of events and 1 photo- includes: Jewish Educational Alliance of St. Louis, acknowledgement of gift of thesis to New York Public Library(1898), United Jewish Educational and Charitable Association of St. Louis, Bezalel Society of St. Louis, Pure Milk Commission, 1898-1910

Box 1. Folder 3. Correspondence and miscellaneous- includes: Educational Alliance of New York (job references), speech, 2 photos (glued in), 1899-1948

Box 1. Folder 4. Letterheads, correspondence, and miscellaneous from various organizations for which Seman served or belonged, 1899-1952

Box 1. Folder 5. News articles and miscellaneous- Jewish Educational Alliance, St. Louis, 1906-1908

Box 1. Folder 6. Correspondence and miscellaneous, 1907-1910

Box 2. Folder 1. Scrapbook "Vol. I"- articles (bulk by Seman) re: Jewish charity, Educational Alliance (St. Louis), 1906-1919

Box 2. Folder 2. News articles- Jewish Educational Alliance, St. Louis, 1908-1912

Box 2. Folder 3. Correspondence and writings, 1910-1912

## **Series B. Chicago, 1913-1945**

**Extent** 6 linear feet (6 record cartons)

**Scope and Content Note** Following are some notable items in the scrapbooks: Folder 2/4 and 3/1 contain reports regarding Chicago Hebrew Institute and Jewish People's Institute, as well as five of Seman's books. Folder 4/3 contains material concerning Nazis in the United States, 1933-1934. Although the bulk of material in Folder 4/6 pertains to 1935-1940, it also contains items dated as early as 1912 and includes a list of publications by Seman. And Folder 6/6 contains material pertaining to recreation during wartime for both World Wars, although the bulk of material refers to the later wartime.

### **Box and Folder Listing**

Box 2. Folder 4. News articles re: Seman's activities, including: speaking engagements, Milk Commission/Milk Station, Chicago Hebrew Institute (general and new gymnasium building), offices held by Seman, peace movement, meetings and reports, 1910-1916

Box 2. Folder 5. Correspondence and programs re: speaking engagements, 1911-1928

Box 2. Folder 6. Programs, brochures, letterheads, correspondence, 1914-1929

Box 3. Folder 1. Reports by Seman (bound), including: Chicago Hebrew Institute Superintendent's Reports, 1915-1918; Jewish People's Institute General Director's Reports, 1921-1922; Reprints from Observer, published by Jewish Community Centers of Chicago: The Community and Its Leisure: How to Fill the Gap, 1923; Jewish Community Life: A Study in Social Adaptation, 1924; The Jewish Community Center: A Basic Program in Civic Education, 1925; Program of a Jewish Community Center: An Adventure in Community; Cooperation, 1926; The Problem of the Leisure Hour-A Challenge, 1927, 1915-1927

Box 3. Folder 2. News articles, speeches- includes: Chicago Hebrew Institute, Jewish People's Institute, Lawn Building, National Conference of Jewish Social Service, 1917-1932

Box 3. Folder 3. Correspondence, programs and notices re: speaking engagements, 1925-1956

Box 3. Folder 4. Printed Matter- articles, programs, pamphlets, 1926-1931

Box 3. Folder 5. News articles by or about Seman and miscellaneous, 1931-1933

Box 3. Folder 6. 50th and 60th birthday greetings and congratulations for receiving Boy's Club honor, 1931, 1941-1942

Box 4. Folder 1. Programs and notices for speaking engagements, 1932-1934

Box 4. Folder 2. News articles: includes Jewish People's Institute, 1933-1934

Box 4. Folder 3. "Pelkup Liberation Magazine" contains typed copies of anti-semitic articles and speeches, correspondence (many B'nai B'rith and ADL), reports on Nazis in U.S. and on a Nazi meeting in Chicago, speech on combating anti-semitism (none by Seman), 1933-1934

Box 4. Folder 4. Activities, news articles, 1933-1936

Box 4. Folder 5. Printed Matter- programs, reports, announcements, bulletins and articles, 1934-1936

Box 4. Folder 6. Correspondence, articles by or about Seman, programs, re speaking engagements, list of articles by Seman for publication (1909-1921), and personal items,, 1912-1940 (bulk 1935-1940)

Box 4. Folder 7. Programs, notices and reports, publicity brochures, articles and pamphlets by Seman, 1936-1937

Box 5. Folder 1. News articles- including: Jewish People's Institute, speeches, day camp and Chicago Recreation Commission, 1936-1937

Box 5. Folder 2. News articles, 1937-1938 May

Box 5. Folder 3. Correspondence (bulk re: speaking engagements), radio address (N, 1939 re: desire for peace for Thanksgiving), programs, 1927, 1937-1956

Box 5. Folder 4. Programs and announcements, report on Chicago Voluntary Associations, 1935-1938 (bulk 1938)

Box 5. Folder 5. Printed matter- includes: Anti-Defamation League, Works Progress Administration, Jewish People's Institute, Los Angeles Recreation Commission, 1938-1942 (bulk 1939)

Box 5. Folder 6. Newspaper articles, includes: Jewish People's Institute, recreation, 1938-1940 February

Box 5. Folder 7. "Articles by and about Dr. Seman"- newspaper articles and miscellaneous, 1938-1944

Box 6. Folder 1. Programs, articles, miscellaneous- including: Jewish People's Institute, speeches, articles, offices held, 1939-1940

Box 6. Folder 2. Programs and announcements, 1939-1941

Box 6. Folder 3. Articles, bulletins, programs, includes: youth, Jewish Welfare Board, Jewish People's Institute, recreation, women's clubs, 1940

Box 6. Folder 4. News articles by or about Seman- including: speaking engagements, refugees, education, youth, women's clubs, Jewish Welfare Board, recreation, Jewish People's Institute High School, 1940 February-1941 January

Box 6. Folder 5. Printed matter- programs, journals and pamphlets, 1940-1942

Box 6. Folder 6. "Dr. Seman Programs, 1942-1945"- pamphlets, program, newspaper articles, bulletins, including: wartime recreation, Chicago Council of Social Agencies, National Conference of Community Centers, Boy's Clubs, Jewish People's Institute, Recreation Congress, Chicago Recreation Commission, adult education, Hillel, Jewish Welfare Board, 1917-1945 (bulk 1942-1945)

Box 7. Folder 1. Get Well Messages, 1941

Box 7. Folder 2. News articles by or about Seman, Jewish People's Institute radio talks, adult education, Los Angeles, Works Progress Administration, recreation,, 1941-1942 April

Box 7. Folder 3. "Recreation Commission"- talks and activities, news articles, programs, announcements, 1943 April-1944

Box 7. Folder 4. "Printed Matter, Programs" includes: Jewish People's Institute, National Jewish Welfare Board, Jewish Agricultural Society, 1943-1944

Box 7. Folder 5. "By and about Dr. Seman"- news articles and miscellaneous, 1943 May-1944 February

Box 7. Folder 6. Seman's 30th Anniversary at Jewish People's Institute- correspondence and news articles, 1943-1944

Box 7. Folder 7. News articles and miscellaneous, 1944 February-November

Box 7. Folder 8. News articles, pamphlets, programs, bulletins and talks- Chicago Recreation Commission (Chairman), Jewish People's Institute, 1944-1945

Box 8. Folder 1. News articles, pamphlets, programs and bulletins- Recreation Commission, 1944-1948 (bulk 1944-1945)

Box 8. Folder 2. "Messages Sent to Dr. Philip L. Seman upon his retirement as General

Director of the Jewish People's Institute, November 1, 1945" included correspondence, dinner program, list of dinner guests, articles re: career (dated 1907-1946) and retirement, 1907-1946 (bulk 1945-1946)

## **Series C. Los Angeles, 1946-1957**

**Extent** 2.5 linear feet (2.5 record cartons)

**Scope and Content Note** Although the bulk of material in this series refers to Seman's activities in Los Angeles, a significant number of items reflect the fact that he continued to receive news from and associate with Chicago and national organizations.

### **Box and Folder Listing**

Box 8. Folder 3. "Programs" and miscellaneous (Printed Material)- Chicago and Los Angeles, 1944-1949

Box 8. Folder 4. News articles by or about Seman, including: community centers, Recreation Commission, 1945-1949

Box 8. Folder 5. News articles (bulk), programs and minutes- includes, education, Hillel, Jewish Welfare Board, Recreation Commission, University of Judaism, 1935-1950 (bulk 1948)

Box 8. Folder 6. Articles by or about Seman, programs, pamphlets- including: education, social work and Seman's activities, but includes miscellaneous material, 1908-1953 (bulk 1949-1950)

Box 9. Folder 1. Articles and programs, 1950-1951

Box 9. Folder 2. News articles and printed matter- including: education, Jewish history, 1952

Box 9. Folder 3. News articles and miscellaneous- including: Jewish history, recreation, social service, 1952-1954

Box 9. Folder 4. Articles and programs (and one 1907 article from St. Louis re: urban migration to farms), 1907, 1953-1954

Box 9. Folder 5. Reports and articles by or about Seman, 1954-1957

Box 10. Folder 1. News articles and printed matter- including: education, Jewish history, 1954-1957

Box 10. Folder 2. News articles and printed matter- including: Jewish Agricultural Society, Jewish Community Centers of Chicago, 1956-1957