



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

**A Finding Aid to the
Beth Israel-West Temple (Cleveland, Ohio)
Records**

Manuscript Collection No. 784

Collection Summary

Title	Beth Israel-West Temple (Cleveland, Ohio) Records
Dates	1910-2008
Collection Number	MS-784
Repository	The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives
Creator	Beth Israel-West Temple (Cleveland, Ohio)
Extent	2.8 linear feet (7 Hollinger boxes)
Language of the Material	English

Administrative Information

Biographical Sketch

Beth Israel The West Temple was organized by twenty-five families, led by Abe Silverstein, in April 1954, to provide a religious center for Reform Jews living on the west side of Cleveland, Ohio. The congregation's first service, Rosh Hashanah, was held September 27, 1954 at the First Universalist Church in North Olmsted. For the next three years, services were held either at the Universalist Church or at the North Olmsted Community Club House. Following a merger with the West Side Jewish Center in 1957, the Temple moved into its current building on Triskett Road.

The West Side Jewish Center was organized as B'nai Israel in 1910 by ten Orthodox families. The center was the second Jewish congregation founded on Cleveland's west side. As the West Side Jewish Center congregation grew to over one hundred twenty families in the 1920s, a succession of structures were acquired. By 1919, the congregation had affiliated with the United Synagogue of America, the national umbrella organization for Conservative Judaism, and hired its first rabbi, Harry Cohen. The Depression led to a decline in its membership and loss of its building in 1937. A small house was purchased three years later. During the period 1939-1957, membership averaged fifty-five families and rabbis served for only six of the eighteen years. In 1955, with more hope than financing, construction was begun on a two-story building on Triskett Road. The building was completed and occupied in early 1957. However, with an overwhelming debt and imminent loss of the building, the Center merged with Beth Israel The West Temple on October 25, 1957. This merger took the one-time Orthodox congregation into the Reform movement.

For its first seven years, Beth Israel was served by a succession of six student rabbis from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. One of these, Daniel Litt, became Beth Israel's first full-time rabbi, serving from 1961-1965. Since 1965, eight rabbis have occupied Beth Israel's pulpit: Fred Grosse (1965-1970), Donald Heskins (1970-1973), Eric Hoffman (1973-1977), David Rose (1977-1988), Susan Stone (1988-1994), Ariel Walsh (1996-1998), Enid Lader (1998-2000), and Alan Lettovsky (2000-). Sally Priesand, a graduate of Beth Israel's religious school, became, in 1972, the first woman ordained to the rabbinate in the U.S. at HUC-JIR in Cincinnati.

Beth Israel draws its members from Cleveland's west side and the western suburbs. It expanded its facilities in 1965 with the construction of a new eight room, two-story wing. In 1965 and 1985, the Cleveland Foundation awarded the congregation library grants to enlarge its collection. The library and its volunteer staff have provided services for the congregation as well as for schools, colleges, and churches in western Cuyahoga County. From 1964-1978, Beth Israel provided office space for the Cleveland Council on Soviet Anti-Semitism. As an outgrowth of the temple Social Action Committee, several members founded the Cleveland Council on Soviet Anti-Semitism. Lou Rosenblum, one of the founders, became a leader in the national movement to assist Soviet Jewry.

A noted feature of this congregation is its volunteerism. For the first forty-five years of its history, all posts and jobs, with the exception of the rabbi, were staffed by volunteers. This included the principal, administrator, teachers, and aides of the religious school; the librarians, office managers and secretaries; youth group advisors; and interfaith and community education coordinators and presenters. Another fifteen per cent of the congregation volunteered periodically throughout the year serving as choir director, choir members, and music accompanist; worship leaders and cantors; bulletin editors; and building and repair maintenance workers. Since 1999, there has been a paid part-time educational director and a part-time office manager. The other jobs continue to be served by volunteers from the membership.

-- Adapted from "Records of Beth Israel The West Temple," and "Brief History of the Cleveland West Side Jewish Center-B'nai Israel," by Evy Rosenblum, 2008.

Scope and Content

The Beth Israel The West Temple (Cleveland, Ohio) records consist of board meeting minutes, correspondence, reports, handbooks, membership lists, and a temple history. This collection contains awards, courses, and curriculum for the religious school and details of the Temple's many interfaith programs. This collection also contains the records of the West Side Jewish Center before it merged

with Beth Israel The West Temple (Cleveland, Ohio) in 1957. This collection is particularly strong in its documentation of the interaction between the Temple and the community on Cleveland's West Side through its social action committee and its many interfaith programs with local churches, schools, clubs, and community groups who were curious about Judaism.

Arrangement This collection is arranged in two (2) series: A. General Records; B. The West Side Jewish Center.

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

Preferred Citation Footnotes and bibliographic references should refer to the Beth Israel-West Temple (Cleveland, Ohio) Records and the American Jewish Archives. A suggestion for at least the first citation is as follows:

[Description], [Date], Box #, Folder #. MS-784. Beth Israel-West Temple (Cleveland, Ohio) Records. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

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Processing Information Processed by Michelle Wirth, January 2011.

Index Terms

Subjects Jewish women -- Ohio -- Cleveland / Synagogues -- Ohio -- Cleveland
Personal Names Priesand, Sally
Corporate Names Beth Israel-West Temple (Cleveland, Ohio) / West Side Jewish Center (Cleveland, Ohio)
Media Minutes / Speeches

Series A. General, 1954-2008

Extent 2.68 linear feet (6.7 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note Consists of general records that document the activities of the Temple through board meeting minutes, correspondence, membership lists, interfaith programs, a history of the temple, social action, Temple library, and religious school.

Arrangement The records are arranged alphabetically.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 1. Folder 1. Adult education, 1954-1999
Box 1. Folder 2. Anniversary and celebration events, 1965-1992
Box 1. Folder 3. B'nai mitzvah, 1956-2006
Box 1. Folder 4. Board correspondence, 1950-1980
Box 1. Folder 5. Board minutes, 1959-1967
Box 2. Folder 1. Board minutes, 1982-1985
Box 2. Folder 2. Board minutes, 1986-1989
Box 2. Folder 3. Board minutes, 1990-1991
Box 2. Folder 4. Board minutes, 1992-1999
Box 2. Folder 5. Cemetery, 1958-1997
Box 2. Folder 6. Choir, 1968
Box 2. Folder 7. Circle of Friends, 1996-2000

Box 2. Folder 8. Confirmation, 1958-1983

Box 3. Folder 1. Congregation directory, 1955-2005

Box 3. Folder 2. Congregation meetings, 1955-2007

Box 3. Folder 3. Constitutions, 1955-1999

Box 3. Folder 4. Finances, 1956-1999

Box 3. Folder 5. Fine arts, 1955-1999

Box 3. Folder 6. Galas, 1974-2000

Box 3. Folder 7. History, 1954-1958

Box 3. Folder 8. History, 1960-2004

Box 4. Folder 1. Holiday/lifecycle events, 1956-2000

Box 4. Folder 2. Interfaith programs, 1956-1994

Box 4. Folder 3. Interfaith programs. Lists, 1968-1989

Box 4. Folder 4. Interfaith programs. Questions, 1966-1969

Box 4. Folder 5. Interfaith programs. Requests, 1970s

Box 4. Folder 6. Interfaith programs. Thank yous, 1968-1999

Box 4. Folder 7. Interview with founders, 1992

Box 4. Folder 8. Library, 1964-1997

Box 4. Folder 9. Library. Grant applications, 1971-1985

Box 4. Folder 10. Membership list, 1978-1986

Box 4. Folder 11. Nursery school, 1966-1967

Box 5. Folder 1. Obituaries, 1960-2008

Box 5. Folder 2. Original productions, 1954-2004

Box 5. Folder 3. Personalities. Members of Beth Israel, 1968-2007

Box 5. Folder 4. Priesand, Sally, 1960-1993

Box 5. Folder 5. Public Schools. Anti Jew bias report, 1966

Box 5. Folder 6. Rabbis, 1957-1999

Box 5. Folder 7. Radio program, 1965-1968

Box 5. Folder 8. School. Awards, 1965-1985

Box 5. Folder 9. School. Courses, 1964-1981

Box 5. Folder 10. School. Curriculum, 1954-2007

Box 6. Folder 1. School. Handbook, 1978-1979

Box 6. Folder 2. School. High school, 1965-1994

Box 6. Folder 3. School. Interview with founder, 1996

Box 6. Folder 4. School. Staff course, 1978-1979

Box 6. Folder 5. School. Staff and student information, 1957-2008

Box 6. Folder 6. Sisterhood, 1956-1985

Box 6. Folder 7. Social action, 1966-2008

Box 6. Folder 8. Social events, 1956-2008

Box 7. Folder 1. Vandalism, 1997

Box 7. Folder 2. Walsh, Ariel. Transition Committee, 1996-1998

Box 7. Folder 3. Western Reserve Historical Society programs by Beth Israel, 1994-1995

Box 7. Folder 4. Worship, 1954-2007

Box 7. Folder 5. Youth groups, 1958-1980

Series B. The West Side Jewish Center, 1910-1992

Extent 0.12 linear feet (0.3 Hollinger box)

Scope and Content Note Consists of minutes, bulletins, correspondence, membership lists, and a complete history of the Center.

Arrangement These records are arranged alphabetically.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 7. Folder 6. History, 1910-1992

Box 7. Folder 7. Records, 1946-1956