

Collection #
M 0915

TEMPLE BETH-EL CONGREGATION, MUNCIE, INDIANA RECORDS, 1971–1999

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Processed by

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Indiana Historical Society
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Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	Manuscript Materials: 2 document cases Visual Materials: 1 color photograph, 2 videotapes.
COLLECTION DATES:	1971–1999
PROVENANCE:	Judy Koor, Carmel, Indiana, October 2000

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Indiana Jewish Historical Society. *Collection, 1845-1998*. Manuscript Collection: M 0743. Temple Beth-El Congregation (Muncie, Ind.). *Directory of Temple Beth-El Congregation*. Muncie, Ind.: Temple Beth-El Congregation. General Collection: BM225.M942B47. *The Middletown Jewish Oral History Project II*. Fort Wayne, Ind.: Indiana Jewish Historical Society, 2005. General Collection: F535.J5 I5 no.37

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2001.0012

NOTES: M 0915 is addition to M 0743 Indiana Jewish Historical Society Collection, 1845–1998.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

Muncie, Indiana the location of Temple Beth El sits in Delaware County in the central eastern part of the state. Conflicting dates are given as to when the first Jews arrived in Muncie. Temple Beth El claims that the first Jews recorded in Muncie or Munseetown, as it was called at the time, came in 1828. No citation is provided. Dwight D. Hoover, Ball State University historian and author of “To be a Jew in Middletown: A Muncie Oral History Project” approximates that the date was closer to the 1850s and cites Alexander L. Shonfield’s “Preface to the History of the Jewish People and a Sketch of Muncie.” There is no disagreement that Jews came to Muncie primarily for economic reasons, to establish a business and make a living. Family connections made the establishment of a business and home viable.

By 1854, the city officially adopted the name of Muncie. Two years earlier a religious service was held at Frank Leon’s home, owner of Leon’s Famous, a clothing store (most Jews in the area operated dry good stores at the time) in downtown Muncie and a respected member of the community. Leon founded the local Knights of Pythias chapter, the Muncie Choral Society, the Citizen’s Enterprise Company which promoted industrial and commercial development in the city, and the Home Missionary Society which offered charitable relief and Christian education! That such a service took place meant that enough Jews lived in Muncie to form a congregation which they officially did in 1895 (they named themselves Beth El and became a Reform congregation); the next step was the establishment of a temple. This occurred in 1922 when the Temple Beth El was dedicated on W. Jackson Street where it is still located.

Before the establishment of Beth El the Reform congregation met at a Masonic lodge from 1891 until 1896 when they moved to the Hebrew Temple at Adams and High Streets. By 1912 the official place of worship occurred on the second floor of a business building on 120 ½ East Main Street. Services were held at the front room, the middle room had tables for food and card games. The kitchen was in the back room. The place was still used as a social club after Temple Beth El was opened.

The Jews of Muncie were never a monolithic group. Some only showed for temple for High Holidays seldom joining congregations. Eastern European Jewish immigrants who were mostly Orthodox resisted a Reform congregation and

large financial gifts were offered in exchange for a change in philosophy. This never occurred and Temple Beth El continues to identify as a Reform congregation.

When the temple was built the KKK was at its height in the state. Jews were low on their priority list, targeting instead African Americans and Catholics. In 1929 or 1930 mortgage of the temple was finally paid off thanks in part to George A. Ball's (original Ball brother founder of Ball Brothers Glass Manufacturing Company) contribution of \$5,000. In the 1930s Temple Beth El shared rabbi, Hirsch Freund with the communities of Marion and Anderson. Mostly, the temple relied on (and continues to rely on) student rabbis from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.

Due to the small (even at its height the population never exceeded 200 people) and transient Jewish community of Muncie a full time rabbi has not been attainable. In 1985 the congregation celebrated its centennial year and on December 7, 1997 the Temple celebrated its 75th anniversary. In 1999 the Temple added a new 4,000 square addition to the building. The new space includes a new community room, vestibule, kitchen, elevator and restrooms for the disabled.

Sources:

"Delaware County." ai.org/dnr/historic/jewish/bin/delaware.pdf. Last accessed 19 July 2007.

Hoover, Dwight W. "To be a Jew in Middletown: A Muncie Oral History Project" *Indiana Magazine of History* 81 (June 1985): 131-158.

Materials in the collection.

Rottenberg, Dan, ed. *Middletown Jews: The Tenuous Survival of an American Jewish Community*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997

Schwartz, Martin, C. Warren Vander Hill, Dr. Anne Eliades, et. al. "The Middletown Jewish Oral History Project II." *Indiana Jewish History* no. 37. Fort Wayne, Indiana: The Indiana Jewish Historical Society, 2005.

Temple Beth El. "Directory of Temple Beth El Congregation: 1998–1999."

Wikipedia. "Muncie, Indiana." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muncie%2C_Indiana. Last accessed 19 July 2007.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

Most of the materials in this collection span the 1980s through the 1990s decade.

The records contain the constitution of the Temple along with subsequent revisions (1996). The largest files in this box contain board meeting minutes, correspondence to and from the Temple, committee reports, and treasurer reports. Temple Beth El congregants formed a handful of committees including the Membership Committee, the Religious Committee, The Finance Committee, The Religious School Committee, and the Social, Cultural, and Education Committee. All of these committees' reports as well as the Temple Sisterhood and house chairman reports are combined into one file. Agendas come mostly from board meetings. Memorandums are mostly directed to congregants or committee and board members. Calendars chronicle planned events. A congregation membership list as well as a potential members list from 1985–1986 is held in this box. President materials consist of President and Vice-President Reports. Facilities usage refers to guidelines set out for the use of Temple facilities for an approved event and Temple custodian responsibilities.

Additional materials include congregation and board policies, bulletins (incomplete), bids from contractors, membership surveys, student rabbi evaluations, directories, officer lists, and materials from Historic Landmarks which records attempts to establish Temple Beth El as a historic landmark. No documentation is provided detailing the

results of this effort. The directories are incomplete. They begin with years 1986–1987 through 1988 and skip to 1992–1993. From 1993–1994 it skips to 1996–1997 and the last directory is for the year 1998–1999. A membership directory and donor report from Hadassah the Women’s Zionist Organization of America, Inc. Anderson–Muncie Chapter from 1995–1996 is included. The officers’ list consists of Temple officers and Committee Chairpersons from 1986–1987, Board Nominations from 1995, and the names of Board and Committee Chairs (1996-1998). Religious education as opposed to education materials refers to all materials relating to the Temple’s Sunday school. Education materials refer to educational materials used to educate congregants on Jewish terms and committee members on the basics of parliamentary procedure. Rabbinic materials consists mostly of student rabbi evaluations also included is a list of student rabbis from 1957–1981 and expectations and responsibilities of student rabbis. Three membership surveys are also in this box. The earliest dates to 1982 the latest is from 1996 and the third is not dated. Surveys as well as questionnaires are included and at least one report on the survey results. The bulletins in this collection begin in 1971 and end in 1996. The bulk of the bulletins are from 1974 from 1976 the bulletins skip to 1995. Programs are from cultural events sponsored by the Temple. Academic calendars from Ball State University, the Burriss School, and the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion from 1986–1987 are included in this box. Outreach relates to youth congregational assistance grants offered by the Temple. There are five newspaper clippings, beginning in 1976 and ending in 1999. Miscellaneous materials include letterhead and envelope from the Temple, a clipping from B’nai B’rith News, and a statement by Richard Lugar on the Jordan Arms sale from 1985.

Dates of all materials are listed in the container list below.

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New Beginnings: High Holiday Greetings, 1996	Videotape Storage Area

CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://opac.indianahistory.org/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.

3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, M 0915).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.