

Collection #  
M 0907,  
CT 2016–2025

## THE INDIANAPOLIS SEPHARDIC JEWISH CONGREGATION AND COMMUNITY: AN ORAL HISTORY ACCOUNT, 2000

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Processed by

Monica Casanova  
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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department  
William Henry Smith Memorial Library  
Indiana Historical Society  
450 West Ohio Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

[www.indianahistory.org](http://www.indianahistory.org)

### COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	1 Manuscript box and 10 audio cassettes
COLLECTION DATES:	2000
PROVENANCE:	Transferred from Public Programs, Indiana Historical Society,

June 2002

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Indiana Jewish History. Fort Wayne, Ind.: Indiana Jewish Historical Society, 2001. General Collection: F535.J5 I5 no.34

Etz Chaim Sephardic Congregation History, 1906–1997. SC 2812

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2002.0602

NOTES:

## HISTORICAL SKETCH

Over twenty Sephardic Jews arrived in 1654 to the new American colony of New Amsterdam but faced resistance and harassment from colony officials like the governor of New Amsterdam Peter Stuyvesant who petitioned the Board of Governors of the West India Company to have them removed. The request was denied and the Jews were allowed to stay.

This kind of persecution marked the Sephardic Jews who had been expelled from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1497. Sephardic Jews refers to the Jews originating from the Iberian Peninsula. Jews had lived in Spain since the Roman occupation (218–202 B.C.E.). Sephardic Jews speak a Spanish-Judeo language called Ladino.

After their expulsion from Portugal they dispersed through the Ottoman Empire (modern-day Turkey, Greece, Southwest Asia, North Africa and the Balkans) and eventually the Americas.

The first recorded Sephardic Jews to immigrate to Indianapolis were Jacob and Rachel Safarti Toledano from Monastir (now Bitola in Macedonia) in 1906. Others followed and a chain migration occurred where men boarded together, saved, and later on brought their wives and families. Most Sephardic Jews in Indianapolis were employed by Kahn Tailoring Company owned by Henry Kahn.

The Sephardim settled on the south side of Indianapolis near the 500–600 block of South Illinois Street. By 1913 the Sephardic community had grown enough to organize their own synagogue Congregation Sepharad of Monastir. Services were held at the Jewish Federation Communal building on 17 West Morris Street.

By 1919 the Sephardim community numbered over 200. That year also marked the purchase of a new building and the foundation of a new synagogue Etz Chaim formerly the Congregation Sepharad of Monastir.

Although a large well established community of Jews existed prior to the Sephardim their arrival was met with suspicion and ostracism. The Sephardim were not considered real Jews because they did not speak Yiddish. This division marked relations between the Ashkenazim (German and Eastern European Jews) and the Sephardim. The Sephardim reacted by organizing their own synagogue and social clubs such as the Young Men's Sephardic Club. Tensions eased enough that by the early 1930s the first intermarriage between Ashkenazim and Sephardim occurred.

By the 1960s most Sephardic Jews had moved to the north side of Indianapolis. In 1963 the congregation purchased

the Pleasant View Lutheran Church on 64<sup>th</sup> and Hoover Road. In 2005 the congregation moved to a new building now 6939 Hoover Road.

Sources:

Endelman, Judith E. *The Jewish Community in Indianapolis: 1849 to the Present*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984. General Collection: F 534 .I55 E5 1984

Etz Chaim Sephardic Congregation website. <http://etzchaimindy.org/index.htm>. Last accessed 13 June 2007.

Indiana Jewish History. Fort Wayne, Ind.: Indiana Jewish Historical Society, 2001. General Collection: F535.J5 I5 no.9 and 34

Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) Language website. <http://www.orbilat.com/Languages/Spanish-Ladino/index.html>. Last accessed 13 June 2007.

Materials in the collection.

“Sephardi Jews.” Wikipedia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sephardi\\_Jews](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sephardi_Jews). Last accessed 13 June 2007.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

In the year 2000 the Indiana Jewish Historical Society conducted an oral history project called “The Indianapolis Sephardic Jewish Congregation and Community: An Oral History Account.” The project was headed by Irit Erez-Boukai and funded by a 1999 Indiana Heritage Research Grant from the Indiana Historical Society. Erez-Boukai interviewed six Etz Chaim members in 2000: Silvia Nahmias Cohen, Anne Calderon, William Levy, Rachel and Harry Nahmias, and Jack Cohen.

Five oral history accounts comprise the collection. All transcriptions along with consent forms are stored in one manuscript box. Ten audio cassettes are included with the collection and stored separately.

## CONTENTS

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Sylvia Nahmias Cohen Transcript, 2000	Box 1, Folder 1
Sylvia Nahmias Cohen Taped Interview, 2000	CT 2016–2017
Harry and Rachel Nahmias Transcript, 2000	Box 1, Folder 2
Harry and Rachel Nahmias Taped Interview, 2000	CT 2018–2019
Anne Calderon Transcript, 2000	Box 1, Folder 3
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William Levy Transcript, 2000	Box 1, Folder 4
William Levy Taped Interview, 2000	CT 2022–2023
Jack Cohen Transcript, 2000	Box 1, Folder 5
Jack Cohen Taped Interview, 2000	CT 2024–2025

## 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 0907).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for

related materials.