
Guide to the Beth Israel, Congregation. San Francisco, 1863-1969

Collection number: 71/9

Western Jewish History Center

Berkeley, California

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Beth Israel, Congregation. San Francisco,

Date (inclusive): 1863-1969

Collection number: 71/9

Creator: Beth Israel Congregation

Extent: 9 1/2 boxes, 3 oversize boxes, and 1 oversize folder
(c. 5.25 linear feet)

Repository: The Western Jewish History Center.
Berkeley, California 94705

Language: English

Access

Collection is open for research by appointment only every Monday-Thursday, except for those Jewish and Federal holidays when it is closed.

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Preferred Citation

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Biography

Beth Israel was founded in 1860 as the first conservative congregation west of Chicago. Its first building was on Sutter near Stockton. The congregation was in its fourth building at Geary and Octavia at the time of the 1906 earthquake. The cornerstone had been laid for a new

building at 1839 Geary near Fillmore in 1905. The construction was almost complete when it was destroyed in the quake. After rebuilding at the same site they moved into their fifth and final building in 1908. The temple offices and religious school moved to 14th and Balboa in 1948. In 1969 Beth Israel and Temple Judea, a young Reform congregation, merged and moved into Temple Judea's buildings on Brotherhood Way. This was one of the first mergers between a Conservative and a Reform congregation. The cornerstone of the final Geary Street building and the contents of the enclosed time capsule were recovered when the building was dismantled in 1989, after a fire.

Beth Israel's benevolent society, Chebra Beth Yisrael, was organized in 1861, and the Ladies Endeavor Society, later the Beth Israel Sisterhood, was founded in 1895. The Beth Israel Men's Club was founded in 1945. Beth Israel's dedication to religious education included both Sunday School and Weekday Hebrew School programs. Post-Bar Mitzvah and post-Confirmation groups served the congregation's youth. The congregation's rabbis include M. Wolff (1860-1868), W. Weinstein (1868), A. Streisand (1875), H. Grodzinsky (1876), A. J. Messing (1878-1890), M. S. Levy (1891-1916), H. Lissauer (1916-1926), E. M. Burstein (1927-1969, emeritus 1969-1975), and M. Tutnauer (1960-?). The congregation was also served by two outstanding Cantors, Joseph Rabinowitz (1891-1943), and Josef Roman Cycowski (1947-197?).

The Beth Israel Congregation of San Francisco donated its records to WJHC in 1971 after its 1969 merger with Temple Judea. The contents of the time capsule from the 1905 cornerstone were added to the collection after its recovery in 1989. Processing was done by at least two archivists over a period of years and was completed in 1999.

Scope and Content

This collection documents over 100 years of Congregation Beth Israel's history from shortly after its founding up to the merger with Temple Judea in 1969. Official records are strongest for the earlier period (Minute Books from 1886-1950, Marriage Certificates from 1882-1935, Members/Dues Ledger 1878-1884). There are some membership and financial records for 1930-1959, and information on the congregation's Salem Cemetery (1895-1962), but the bulk of the remaining material consists of disbound scrapbooks (clippings, letters, tickets, bulletins, etc.) covering congregational news, events and activities for 1948-52. The collection also includes approximately 400 photographs of the synagogue, its religious leaders, officials and activities. Of special interest are the will of Hannah Henry, 1874 and Rabbi Aaron Messing's Catechism for Instruction in the Mosaic Religion for the Hebrew Free School, 1887 and 1900.

Also of special note is the material from the 1905 cornerstone which includes documents from B'nai B'rith, Chevra Shaare Refooah, Eureka Benevolent Society, Jewish Ladies Relief Society, Mount Zion Hospital, Pacific Hebrew Orphan Asylum, the Young Men's Hebrew Association, and Congregations Keneseth Israel, Emanu-El, and Sherith Israel.

Condition Report

The large number of deteriorating clippings have been photocopied. The marriage certificates are somewhat fragile, the bound volumes are in fair to good condition, and the photographs need attention. The former cornerstone materials are in excellent condition.

- Messing, Aaron (75/11)
- Cohen, Wolf (81/1)
- Cohn, Selma Ruth Miguel (72/5).

Corporate Records, 1886-1960

Physical Description: 7 folders and 3 oversize boxes

Scope and Content Note

This series contains minutes, by-laws, financial and historical records. The five oversize volumes include four minute books covering 1886-1950, and a ledger listing membership dues payments for 1878-1884. By-Laws include the 1904 "By-Laws and Rules of Order," an undated revision, and the "Constitution and Bylaws" for Congregation Ohabai Shalome (1864?). Other financial materials include a 1959 Audit report, various membership documents including financial appeal letters, receipts, dues forms, a breakdown of membership by location (c. 1959), and a ledger listing pledges towards furnishing the 1908 temple. Historical materials include the commemorative booklets from the congregation's 75th and 100th anniversary celebrations which include historical essays, and notes by L. Fleishmann on the 1906-1908 minute books.

Congregational Materials, 1863-1977

Physical Description: 42 folders

Scope and Content Note

This series contains a wide variety of clippings, letters, bulletins, tickets, announcements and other documents covering the full range of activities and events sponsored by the congregation (Adult Education, Bar and Bat Mitzvah, Confirmation, Holidays, Lectures, Religious School, and various clubs). Most of the material comes from three disbound scrapbooks and have been arranged alphabetically by topic. Other material includes a small leather bound scrapbook from the Beth Israel PTA (1929-1930). Folders are also included on Rabbi Elliot Maurice Burstein, Judge I. M. Golden, Rabbi Aron J. Messing (Catechism ... for the Hebrew Free School), Philip Lerner, and Cantor Joseph Rabinowitz.

Marriage Licenses and Certificates, 1882-1935

Physical Description: 26 folders

Scope and Content Note

This series contains the official marriage licenses/certificates for weddings held between 1882 and 1935 with the majority from 1898-1916. The certificates are arranged alphabetically by groom's name and include signatures and official stamps. See also the small collection of Marriage photos in the Photographs Series.

Salem Cemetery, 1895-1962

Physical Description: 3 folders and 4 volumes

Scope and Content Note

This series contains information on the Salem Cemetery owned by Congregation Beth Israel in Colma. Materials range from a 1895 plot deed (Anne Harris) to a program from a 1962 general memorial service held at the cemetery and various advertisements/informational brochures. Also included are three small books two of which are labeled "Permanent Care of Plots" containing alphabetical listings of names and plot numbers. One of the books contains dates (1915-1921) next to most of the names, and another includes addresses. The fourth volume is imprinted "Memorial Book Congregation Beth Israel" and lists names divided into male and female and dates from 1901-1957. Also of note is a booklet containing the arguments of the congregation's lawyers to the California Supreme Court in a lawsuit against the cemetery (over the type of headstone they erect) by two disgruntled family members. See also Cemetery photos in the Photographic Series, including photos from a volume commemorating the 1958 Dedication of the Salem Garden Mausoleum.

Cornerstone, 1851-1905, 1989

Physical Description: 13 folders and one oversized box

Scope and Content Note

This series contains a clipping concerning the retrieval of the cornerstone and the items placed in the original cornerstone for Beth Israel's last building at 1839 Geary. The cornerstone was laid in 1905 and retrieved in 1989. Documents include constitutions and by-laws for a number of local Jewish organizations active in 1905. Organizations include other synagogues (Emanu-El, Sherith Israel, and Keneseth Israel), social welfare organizations (Eureka Benevolent Society, First Hebrew Benevolent Society, Jewish Ladies Relief Society, and the Pacific Hebrew Orphan Asylum and Home Society), the Mount Zion Hospital Association, a list of those eligible for medical services through Chevra Shaare Refooah, the B'nai B'rith and the Young Men's Hebrew Association. The B'nai B'rith materials include the Proceedings from the 42nd Annual Session of District Grand Lodge No. 4 (San Francisco), 1905 and the Eighth General Convention held in New Orleans, Louisiana, March 19th-24th, 1905, and two other pamphlets (1897 and 1905), as well as copies of local and national constitutions and by-laws. The Benai Berith Hall Association which owned the San Francisco B'nai B'rith Buildings is also represented by its by-laws. Also preserved is the actual metal box in which these documents were found.

Other Historical Items, 1874-1916, n.d.

Physical Description: 2 folders and 1 oversized box

Scope and Content Note

This series contains two folders and one object, one containing the will of Hannah Henry (1874), the other containing several composition books and letters. The letters are to and from a Harriette Franklin of Manchester England and an Ellis Franklin (her brother?) in California. The composition books are undated and include various writings which were at one point attributed to Harriette Franklin. One of the composition books contains a clipping from a 1916 San Francisco Examiner. The object is a wooden box with a handle (approximately 12 inches by 5 inches and 8 inches high including handle), with a drawer in one end holding a number of white marbles and black cubes that can also be reached through a hole in the opposite end. Its purpose is uncertain but may have been some sort of lottery, voting, or gambling device.

Photographs, 1906-1952, n.d.

Physical Description: 22 folders, and oversize folder

Scope and Content Note

This series contains photographs of people, activities, and buildings associated with Beth Israel. The majority of the photos appear to be from the late 1940s and early 1950s, though there are also photographs showing the destruction of the newly finished building in 1906, and several early wedding photos. Of special note is the oversized panoramic shot showing delegates to the First Pacific Coast Conference of the United Synagogue of America held at Beth Israel May 3, 1932. Confirmation photos includes pictures from the early 20s through the 1950s, including several early oversize prints. There are extensive photos from two separate commemorative dinners for Rabbi Burstein, one celebrating his 25th anniversary with the congregation in 1952 and the other apparently from his 20th anniversary celebration in 1948. A large number of photos show a variety of people associated with the temple (both individuals and group shots) including a folder specifically on the Beth Israel Sisterhood's activities. Some of the photos include identification. Other photos document congregational activities including musical events and religious services in the temple building, and religious school activities including a Purim Carnival, tree planting, a Chanukah service, the 1950 graduation class, and unidentified school assemblies. The Youth Choir is represented by a number of photographs. The series also includes pictures of Beth Israel's Salem Cemetery including headstone samples, a series of snapshots of the cemetery and a photo album commemorating the dedication of the Salem Garden Mausoleum in 1958. Other photos show the dedication of the Temple house and interior and exterior shots of the temple building.

Corporate Records

Box-folder 1/1 **By-laws and Semi-Annual Meeting 1900-1904, n.d.**
Box-folder oversized 1 **Minute Book 1886-1904**
Box-folder oversized 2 **Minute Book 1904-1916**
Box-folder oversized 3 **Minute Books [2 volumes] 1916-1950**
Box-folder 1/2 **Financial -- Audit 1959**
Box-folder oversized 1 **Financial -- Members/Dues Ledger 1878-1884**
Box-folder 1/3 **Financial -- Members/Dues 187?, 1938-1959**
Box-folder 1/4 **Financial -- Subscriptions to Furnishing of New Temple 1908**
Box-folder 1/5 **History -- Diamond Jubilee (75th) Commemorative Book [signed] 1935**
Box-folder 1/6 **History -- 100th Anniversary Commemorative Book 1960**
Box-folder 1/7 **History -- Data on Beth Israel Compiled by L. Fleishmann n.d.**

Congregational Materials

Box-folder 1/8	Activities 1948-1949, n.d.
Box-folder 1/9	Adult Education 1948-1949, 1959, n.d.
Box-folder 1/10	Anniversary -- 90th [clippings] 1949-1950
Box-folder 1/11	Anniversary -- 100th [clippings] 1960
Box-folder 1/12	Bar and Bas Mitzvahs 1949-1953, n.d.
Box-folder 1/13	Bnai Israel -- Teen Group 1949-1953, n.d.
Box-folder 1/14	Bulletins [scattered] 1946-1949
Box-folder 1/15	Burstein, Rabbi Elliot Maurice 1947-1977, n.d.
Box-folder 1/16	Calendars 1951-1954
Box-folder 1/17	Confirmations 1912-1965, n.d.
Box-folder 1/18	Cycowski, Cantor Josef R. 1957-1968
Box-folder 1/19	Dedications 1891-1951
Box-folder 1/20	Gifts and Congratulations 1949-1950
Box-folder 1/21	Golden, Judge I. M. -- Memorial Tribute by Matthew Brady 1941
Box-folder 1/22	Hebrew and Religious School 1863, 1948-1960, n.d.
Box-folder 1/23	Hebrew and Religious School -- clippings 1948-1960
Box-folder 1/24	Hebrew and Religious School -- PTA Scrapbook 1929-1930
Box-folder 2/1	Holidays -- Services 1937-1950, n.d.
Box-folder 2/2	Holidays -- Clippings 1949-1953, n.d.
Box-folder 2/3	Jarzeits 1941, n.d.
Box-folder 2/4	Jewish Music Events and Services 1942-1955, n.d.
Box-folder 2/5	Kol Yakov (Jr. Congregation of the Jewish Education Society) 1948, 1950
Box-folder 2/6	Lectures 1949-1953, n.d.
Box-folder 2/7	Lerner, Philip -- Obituaries 1943
Box-folder 2/8	Marriages 1908, n.d.
Box-folder *Oversize	Marriages -- Sample Ketubah 1909
Box-folder 2/9	Men's Club and Sisterhood 1944-1948, n.d.
Box-folder 2/10	Men's Club and Sisterhood -- clippings 1948-1953, n.d.
Box-folder 2/11	Messing, Rabbi Aron J. -- Catechism for Instruction in the Mosaic Religion for the Hebrew Free school of San Francisco 1887, 1900
Box-folder 2/12	Miscellaneous 1908-1954, n.d.
Box-folder 2/13	Miscellaneous -- Non-Beth Israel 1929-1979, n.d.
Box-folder 2/14	Onegim -- Young Marrieds Group 1949-1953, n.d.
Box-folder 2/15	Other Congregations/Charities 1910, 1942-1940, n.d.
Box-folder 2/16	People 1921, 1949, n.d.
Box-folder 2/17	Rabbis -- Tutnauer and Tietelbaum 1960, n.d.
Box-folder 2/18	Rabinowitz, Cantor Joseph 1930-1943
Box-folder 2/19	Salem Memorial Park 1949, n.d.
Box-folder 2/20	Sisterhood -- Bulletins 1940-1945
Box-folder 2/21	Special Events and Activities 1944-1961, n.d.
Box-folder 2/22	Special Services 1949-1955, n.d.
Box-folder 2/23	Temple Business 1939-1956
Box-folder 2/24	Temple House 1951-1952
Box-folder 2/25	YAKS (Unmarried Young Adult Group) 1949, n.d.

Marriage Licenses and Certificates

Box-folder 3/1	"A" 1882-1935
Box-folder 3/2	"C" 1882-1935
Box-folder 3/3	"D" 1882-1935
Box-folder 3/4	"E" 1882-1935
Box-folder 3/5	"F" 1882-1935
Box-folder 4/1	"G" 1882-1935
Box-folder 4/2	"H" 1882-1935
Box-folder 4/3	"I" 1882-1935
Box-folder 4/4	"J" 1882-1935
Box-folder 4/5	"K" 1882-1935
Box-folder 5/1	"L" 1882-1935
Box-folder 5/2	"L" cont. 1882-1935
Box-folder 5/3	"M" 1882-1935
Box-folder 5/4	"M" cont. 1882-1935
Box-folder 5/5	"N" 1882-1935
Box-folder 5/6	"O" 1882-1935
Box-folder 6/1	"P" 1882-1935
Box-folder 6/2	"R" 1882-1935
Box-folder 6/3	"S" 1882-1935
Box-folder 6/4	"S" cont. 1882-1935
Box-folder 6/5	"T" 1882-1935
Box-folder 7/1	"U" and "V 1882-1935
Box-folder 7/2	"W" 1882-1935
Box-folder 7/3	"W" 1882-1935
Box-folder 7/4	"Z" 1882-1935

Salem Cemetery

Box-folder 7/5	Salem Cemetery Plot Deed 1895
Box-folder 7/6	Permanent Care of Plots --Office 1915-1921, n.d.
Box-folder 7/7	Permanent Care of Plots n.d.
Box-folder 7/8	Name, Plot and Address n.d.
Box-folder 7/9	Memorial Book -- Congregation Beth Israel 1901-1957
Box-folder 7/10	Zimmer and Kaiser v. Salem Cemetery 1926
Box-folder 7/11	Miscellaneous 1962, n.d.

Cornerstone

Box-folder 8/1 **Article on Cornerstone Recovery 1989**
Box-folder 8/2 **Program -- Cornerstone Laying 1905**
Box-folder 8/3 **Benai Berith Hall Association 1878**
Box-folder 8/4 **B'nai B'rith District Lodge No. 4 1897-1905**
Box-folder 8/5 **B'nai B'rith District Lodge No. 4. con. 1905**
Box-folder 8/6 **Chevra Shaare Refooah c. 1905**
Box-folder 8/7 **Eureka Benevolent Society 1904**
Box-folder 8/8 **First Hebrew Benevolent Society 1900, 1904**
Box-folder 8/9 **Jewish Ladies Relief Society 1901, 1905**
Box-folder 8/10 **Mount Zion Hospital Association 1887, 1904**
Box-folder 8/11 **Pacific Hebrew Orphan Asylum and Home Society 1901, 1904**
Box-folder 8/12 **Young Men's Hebrew Association 1903**
Box-folder 8/13 **Various Congregations -- Bylaws 1851-1902, n.d.**
Box-folder Oversize **Metal Cornerstone Box c. 1905**

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Other Historical Items

Box-folder 8/14 **Will -- Hannah Henry 1874**
Box-folder 8/15 **Notebooks and Correspondence -- Harriette and Ellis Franklin 1907-1916, n.d.**
Box-folder Oversize **Wooden Box n.d.**
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Photographs

- Box-folder 9/1 **Burstein, Rabbi Elliot -- 20th? Anniversary Celebration 1948?**
- Box-folder 9/2 **Burstein, Rabbi Elliot -- 25th Anniversary Celebration -- with Rabbi 1952**
- Box-folder 9/3 **Burstein, Rabbi Elliot -- 25th Anniversary Celebration -- without Rabbi 1952**
- Box-folder *Oversize **First Pacific Coast Conference, United Synagogue of America 1931**
- Box-folder 9/4 **People -- Individuals -- Identified n.d.**
- Box-folder 9/5 **People -- Individuals -- Unidentified n.d.**
- Box-folder 9/6 **People -- Group Shots -- Temple Officials n.d.**
- Box-folder 9/7 **People -- Miscellaneous Groups n.d.**
- Box-folder 9/8 **Sisterhood/Women -- People and Events n.d.**
- Box-folder 9/9 **Religious Services/Music/Building Interior n.d.**
- Box-folder 9/10 **Temple House -- Dedication, Tour 1951?**
- Box-folder 9/11 **Activities -- Passover c. 1951**
- Box-folder 9/12 **Activities -- S.O.S. Dance 1947**
- Box-folder 9/13 **Activities -- Meals and Other Events n.d.**
- Box-folder 9/14 **Religious School Events (Graduation, Purim Festival, Tree Planting, Chanukah, Assemblies) 1950-1954, n.d.**
- Box-folder 9/15 **Youth Jr. Choir 1956, n.d.**
- Box-folder 9/16 **Youth -- Confirmation c. 1920-1958, n.d.**
- Box-folder *Oversize **Youth -- Confirmation (2 mounted photos) c. 1920s**
- Box-folder 9/17 **Youth -- Miscellaneous n.d.**
- Box-folder 9/18 **Weddings 1908, c.1950, n.d.**
- Box-folder 10/1 **Roll of Honor Plaques n.d.**
- Box-folder 10/2 **Dedication of Salem Garden Mausoleum -- Photo Album 1958**
- Box-folder 10/3 **Salem Garden Cemetery n.d.**
- Box-folder *Oversize **Salem Cemetery (2 hand tinted views) c. 1920s**
- Box-folder *Oversize **Salem Cemetery (2 views mounted on one sheet) c. 1958**
- Box-folder *Oversize **Building Interiors -- Temple (3 shots) c. 1920**
- Box-folder 10/4 **Building Exteriors/Earthquake Damage 1906, n.d.**
- Box-folder *Oversize **Building Exteriors/Earthquake Damage -- "Alfred Pike Memorial Temple" 1906**