



Sinai Temple  
Records, 1867-1976

Collection 1

## Champaign County Historical Archives

**Compiled by:** Archives Staff

**Creator/Corporate Name:** Sinai Temple

**Inclusive Dates:** 1867-1976, bulk 1913-1976

**Physical Description:** 2 boxes (1.0 linear ft.)

**Language:** English

**Provenance:**

The Sinai Temple Records were donated to the Champaign County Historical Archives by Stanford Sholem in 1987. A second accession was donated by Allen Avner in 2006.

**Access:**

These records are accessible to the public within applicable copyright restrictions and limited to use at the Champaign County Historical Archives of The Urbana Free Library.

**Historical Note:**

The Sinai Temple, the Reformed Jewish Congregation of Champaign-Urbana, was formed on February 7, 1904 at the Grand Army of the Republic Hall in Champaign. Twenty-six members were present, as well as Rabbi George Zeppin, a representative of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now known as the Union of Reformed Judaism), who insured that the meeting and congregation met the standards of the Union. The first services were held on February 23, 1904 in the Elks Auditorium. In 1905, the Jewish Ladies Social Circle, an active philanthropic organization of Jewish community leaders, formed the Sabbath School. The first Seder in Champaign-Urbana was held on March 29, 1907, with 92 members of the congregation present. In those early years the congregation shared rabbis with other local congregations or brought in rabbinical students from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. It was not until 1923 that the temple hired its first part-time rabbi, Benjamin Frankel, who also founded the Hillel Foundation at the University of Illinois. After a series of part-time rabbis, Bernard Martin became the first full-time rabbi for the congregation in 1950.

As the congregation grew, the need for a permanent home became obvious. The congregation voted unanimously to purchase a lot on the southwest corner of Clark and State Streets. After some debate about the site (some in the congregation advocated a location closer to the university), funds were raised for building construction, and the temple building was formally dedicated on January 31, 1918. In the interim, the congregation formally became the Sinai Congregation in 1914. The new temple would serve as the home for the congregation until 1971, when it was partially destroyed by fire. The congregation was forced to find temporary facilities for services such as the Sunday School rooms, the Hillel Foundation at the university, or donated space from local churches. Finally, on April 11, 1975, a new temple located on the corner of Windsor and Duncan Roads in Champaign, was dedicated and remains the gathering place for the congregation to this day.



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**Scope and Content Note:**

The Sinai Temple Records document the early life of the congregation through the dedication of the new temple in 1975, as well as the Jewish community in Champaign-Urbana. This collection contains the congregation's founding meeting minutes, its first constitution, the construction of the first temple, and the fund-raising project for the original pipe organ. Additionally, the social organizations that are integral to the Jewish community in Champaign are represented, including the Jewish Ladies Social Circle, from which the Sinai Temple Sisterhood descended. Photocopies of the early records of the Ahavath Achim ("Brotherly Love"), the first Jewish social organization in Champaign-Urbana, are present, as well as the Grand Prairie Lodge Number 281 of B'nai B'rith (with which Ahavath Achim eventually merged in 1887). The notes of Asa Rubenstein, then a graduate student of history, documenting the history of the congregation, are also located within the collection. Additionally, there is a series of interviews with various congregation members recorded on audiotape in 1976.

The photocopies of the Ahavath Achim and B'nai Brith organizations are courtesy of the American Jewish Archives at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. The original secretary's book containing the meeting minutes of the Jewish Ladies Social Circle, 1904-1911, was transferred from the Sholem Family Collection in 2012.

**Arrangement:**

The Sinai Temple records are arranged into five series:

**Series One: Publications:**

This series includes publications such as brochures, invitations and programs that highlight the social and religious life of the temple congregation. Also included is a Union Prayer Book that was in use through 1980. These records are organized chronologically and by record type.

**Series Two: Financial and Real Estate Records:**

This series includes reports, contracts, and correspondence detailing the fiscal life and financial decision-making process of the congregation. These records are organized chronologically and by function.

**Series Three: Historical Research Records:**

This series includes notes, correspondence, and drafts of speeches and articles detail the efforts of Jerome Sholem and Asa Rubenstein to research and detail the history of the Sinai Temple congregation. These records are organized chronologically by researcher.

**Series Four: Membership and Organizational Records:**

This series includes minutes books, by-laws, constitutions, and correspondence documenting the administration and organization of the congregation. The series is arranged chronologically by document type.

**Series Five: Affiliated Social Organization Records:**

This series includes minutes books, by-laws, and financial reports of the social organizations most closely affiliated with the congregation, including Ahavath Achim, B'nai B'rith, and the Jewish Ladies Social Circle of Champaign-Urbana. These records are arranged chronically by organization and function.



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**Subject Terms:**

Ahavath Achim of Champaign -- Records and correspondence.  
B'nai B'rith. Grand Prairie Lodge 281  
Church records and registers -- Champaign.  
Jews -- History -- Sources.  
Jews -- Societies, etc. -- History -- Sources.  
Sinai Temple (Champaign, Ill.) -- Records and correspondence.  
Sinai Temple (Champaign, Ill.). Ladies Social Circle -- Records and correspondence.  
Synagogues -- Champaign -- Records and correspondence.  
Women -- Societies and clubs -- History -- Sources.  
Clark St (Champaign), West, 303  
Windsor Rd (Champaign), West, 3104

**Name Terms:**

Avner, Allen.  
Rubenstein, Asa.  
Sholem, Jerome J.  
Sholem, Stanford.

**Container List:**

**Box 1**

**Series 1: Publications**

Folder 1: "Welcome to Sinai Temple" Brochure, ca. 1965  
Folder 2: Sinai Temple New Building Brochure, 1972  
Folder 3: Dedication Service of Sinai Temple, 1918  
Folder 4: Confirmation Class Services, 1975-1976  
Folder 5: Dedication Service of Sinai Temple, 1918  
Folder 6: Fortieth and Fiftieth Anniversary Activities, 1944, 1954  
Folder 7: Dedication of New Sanctuary Programs, 1975-1976  
Folder 8: Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship, 1962  
Folder 9: Donation Book for New Temple Construction, 1975 [slides]

**Series 2: Financial and Real Estate Records**

Folder 9: Miscellaneous Financial Reports and Records, 1905-1944  
Folder 10: Pipe Organ Purchase, Clark Street Temple, 1913-1924  
Folder 11: Real Estate Records, Clark Street Temple, 1913-1924  
Folder 12: Contractor Records, Clark Street Temple, 1917-1959  
Folder 13: Purchase of 303 West Clark Street, 1955-1956

**Series 3: Historical Research Records**

Folder 14: Jerome Sholem Historical Research Notes and Drafts, 1937-1975  
Folder 15: Asa Rubenstein Notes and Research, 1954-1976



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**Series 4: Membership and Organizational Records**

Folder 16: Sinai Temple Minutes Book [includes Constitution, By-laws, and Certificate of Incorporation), 1904-1947

Folder 17: Correspondence and Membership Lists, ca. 1920-1972

Folder 18: Fiftieth Anniversary Records, 1954

**Box 2**

**Series 5: Affiliated Social Organizations Records**

Folder 1: Meeting Minutes–Ahavath Achim, 1867-1887 [photocopy]

Folder 2: Meeting Records and By-laws–Independent Order of B'nai B'rith, Grand Prairie Lodge, 1877 [photocopy]

Folder 3: Membership Applications–International Order of B'nai B'rith, Grand Prairie Lodge, 1877, 1910 Folder 4: Meeting Minutes–Jewish Ladies Social Circle, 1897-1904

Folder 5: Meeting Minutes–Jewish Ladies Social Circle, 1904-1911

Folder 6: Meeting Minutes–Jewish Ladies Social Circle, 1911-1915

Folder 7: Meeting Minutes–Jewish Ladies Social Circle, 1915-1920 [photocopy]

Folder 8: Treasurer Reports–Jewish Ladies Social Circle, 1889-1902 [photocopy]

Folder 9: Meeting Minutes–Jewish Ladies Social Circle, 1904-1911 [photocopy]