

THE IDA PEARLE AND JOSEPH CUBA ARCHIVES AND GENEALOGY CENTER
OF
THE WILLIAM BREMAN JEWISH HERITAGE & HOLOCAUST MUSEUM
1440 SPRING STREET
ATLANTA, GA 30309
www.thebreman.org

REGISTER: CONGREGATION
SHEARITH ISRAEL

Processed by Michael J. Safra
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Mss. No. 75

Congregation Shearith Israel was founded in 1904 by a segment of Atlanta's East European Jewish community. When Jews first came to Atlanta from Eastern Europe, in the 1880s, they established Ahavath Achim Congregation for their Orthodox worship. However, as a second generation of immigrants arrived at the turn of the century, they became uncomfortable at Ahavath Achim, because it had become a congregation for second generation East Europeans who wished to Americanize. These new immigrants founded "Shearith Israel," which literally means "the remnant of Israel;" this is what these founders considered themselves, the only true Jews left in Atlanta.

Congregation Shearith Israel's first rabbi, Rabbi Zvi Elchanan Gutterman, stayed with the congregation from 1904 to 1906. In 1907, the members invited Rabbi Tobias Geffen to serve the congregation as its spiritual leader. Rabbi Geffen was educated and ordained in Kovno, Lithuania, and he came to Atlanta by way of New York and Ohio. He would remain as the congregation's rabbi, and later rabbi emeritus, until his death in 1970.

Under Rabbi Geffen's leadership, the congregation grew as an orthodox congregation that upheld traditional Old World values and rites. At various times, it was affiliated and unaffiliated with the Union of Orthodox Congregations of America. As the members of this congregation became Americanized over time, they began to develop their own Americanized Judaism that would eventually challenge the orthodox stance. As early as 1952, the congregation rejected one rabbinical applicant, Rabbi Maurice Lamm, because he was "too orthodox."

From the late 1940s, when the collection begins, the congregation was served by an assistant rabbi who controlled the daily life in the synagogue. Eventually, Rabbi Geffen became the rabbi emeritus as the congregation appointed a Rabbi Heisler to be its "Rabbi." In 1956, the congregation elected Rabbi Sydney Mossman, who led the congregation towards a more modern orthodoxy. He soon authorized the use of a microphone during services on the Sabbath, and he authorized the congregation to introduce family seating if the desired. This decision regarding seating continued to divide the congregation throughout the 1960s, as certain services were conducted with family seating, while others were conducted with separate seating and a *mechitza* (divider). In 1969, the Religious Committee recommended that the congregation join the United Synagogue of America (Conservative), but that decision was tabled and eventually dropped. Since Rabbi Mossman, the congregation was served by four different rabbis.

The Synagogue has been housed in three different buildings. The first, on Hunter Street, was destroyed by the great fire of 1917. The congregation was housed in its second home, on Washington Street, until 1958. When the population of the synagogue shifted to the north side of town, the congregation again moved to its present location, on University Drive in DeKalb County. In 1969, the congregation purchased a tract of land off Highpoint Road in north Fulton County, but the tract was sold in 1981 as the decision was made to stay on University Drive.

The Congregation Shearith Israel Records, 1910-1990 are arranged in alphabetical order according to subject, and chronologically within each folder. The largest piece of the collection consists of congregational minutes from 1947-1974. Many of these are in great detail, and they highlight congregational business, as well as discussion and dispute for that period. The collection also contains synagogue bulletins from 1959-1990, correspondence beginning in 1956 and various membership rosters from throughout the period. Other sections of the collection include Sisterhood minutes, Religious School publications, Passover manuals, and High Holy Day materials.

Restrictions: Available to the serious scholar

Number of containers: 11

Oversize flat items: Removed to oversize files

Photographs: Removed to visual arts collection

Shelf Space occupied: 4.1 cubic

Container

1 Subject file, Bu, 1956-1966

Folder 1: Building-1180 University Drive
Folder 2: Building Drafts, 1971 and undated
Folder 3: Bulletins, 1959-1960
Folder 4: Bulletins, 1961-1962
Folder 5: Bulletins, 1963-1964
Folder 6: Bulletins, 1965
Folder 7: Bulletins, 1966

Container

2 Subject file, Bu-Co, 1947-1991

Folder 1: Bulletins, 1967
Folder 2: Bulletins, 1968-1971 and undated (not complete volumes)
Folder 3: Bulletins, 1975-1980 and 1990
Folder 4: Cemetery Bill, 1966-1991
Folder 5: Congregational minutes and addenda, August 3, 1947-April 29, 1954
Folder 6: Congregational minutes subject index, 1947-1955
Folder 7: Congregational minutes and addenda, November 20, 1953-December 26, 1960

Container

3 Subject file, Co, 1955-1973

Folder 1: Congregational minutes and addenda, July 25, 1955 - June 6, 1966
Folder 2: Congregational minutes and addenda, July 10, 1966 - October 11, 1968
Folder 3: Congregational minutes and addenda, December 1, 1968 - May 21, 1970
Folder 4: Congregational minutes and addenda, May 25, 1970 - August 7, 1972
Folder 5: Congregational minutes and addenda, May 1, 1972 - June 25, 1973
Folder 6: Congregational minutes and addenda, July 2, 1973 - August 5, 1974

Container

4 Subject file, Co, 1940-1978

Folder 1: Congregational minutes and addenda, June 3, 1974 - May 20, 1975
Folder 2: Congregational minutes and addenda, May 5, 1975 - January 5, 1976
Folder 3: Congregational minutes and addenda, January 3, 1977 - December 5, 1977
Folder 4: Constitutions, undated
Folder 5: Correspondence - Announcement flyers, 1940-1976 and undated
Folder 6: Correspondence, Rabbi Donald Friedman
Folder 7: Correspondence - from Congregation, 1956-1977
Folder 8: Correspondence - to Synagogue, 1956-1978

Container

5 Subject file, Fi-Ho, 1937-1978

Folder 1: Financial records, 1937-1941

Folder 2: Financial records, 1947-1953

(Note: Additional financial records in oversize containers 10 and 11)

Folder 3: Fundraising agencies

Folder 4: Highpoint Road Property

Folder 5: Holidays – Hanukkah, 1974-1976

Folder 6: Holidays – Passover, 1970s and undated

Folder 7: Holidays – Purim Ball 1938-

Container

6 Subject file, Ho-Ne, 1956-1981

Folder 1: Holidays – Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Succoth, Shemini Atzereth, 1956-1977 and undated

Folder 2: Holidays – Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Succoth, Shemini Atzereth, 1958-1972

Folder 3: Holidays – Ushers and Tickets, 1958-1974

Folder 4: Lists – Bar Mitzvah, Marriage, ‘Children’, 1942-1974

Folder 5: Lists – Births and Deaths, 1960-1961

Folder 6: Lists – Membership rosters, 1956-1977

Folder 7: Lists – Membership rosters, undated

Folder 8: Membership, 1957-1960 and undated

Folder 9: Membership information, 1974

Folder 10: ‘Newsletter,’ 1975-1981

Container

7 Subject file, Ne-Si, 1940-1981

Folder 1: Newspaper articles, 1940-1981 and undated

Folder 2: Other institutions, bulletins and letters

Folder 3: Prayer books – Purchasing of Silverman Prayer books, 1968; Torah repair

Folder 4: Receipts, miscellaneous

Folder 5: Religious school and Hebrew Institute, 1958--1981

Folder 6: Roster from Seventy-Fifth Anniversary

Folder 7: Sisterhood announcements and flyers, 1956-1975

Folder 8: Sisterhood announcements and flyers, undated

Folder 9: Sisterhood – Community/Shearith Israel Calendars, 1958-1977

Folder 10: Sisterhood – Correspondence to Sisterhood

Folder 11: Sisterhood – gift shop

Folder 12: Sisterhood – job descriptions and organizational text

Folder 13: Sisterhood minutes and addenda, June 28, 1949-February 20, 1961

Folder 14: Sisterhood minutes and addenda, May 28, 1974-April 26, 1976

Container

8 Subject file, Si-Yi, 1950-1979

Folder 1: Sisterhood minutes and addenda, May 16, 1976-January 22, 1979

Folder 2: Sisterhood minutes and budget, undated and 1976-1977

Folder 3: Sisterhood pamphlets

Folder 4: Sisterhood programming materials

Folder 5: Sisterhood rosters, 1965-1979 and undated

Folder 6: Sisterhood roster, 1975-6

Folder 7: Sisterhood scrapbook, 1978

Folder 8: Sisterhood Women's League President's Report, 1974

Folder 9: Sisterhood Special Programs, 1953-1978 and undated

Folder 10: Special events, 1950-1975 and undated

Folder 11: Yizkor, memorial books

Container

9 Oversize bound volume

Chevra Kaddish record book, c. 1910

Container

10 Oversize bound volume

Financial ledger, 1919-1923

Container

11 Oversize bound volume

Financial ledger, 1947-1949