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## **Finding Aid to the Congregation Beth Israel-Judea records, 1862-1999**

Finding Aid written by The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life staff

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## Finding Aid to the Congregation Beth Israel-Judea records, 1862-1999

**Collection Number: BANC MSS 2010/641**

The Bancroft Library

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Berkeley, California

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Date Completed:

June 2011

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### Collection Summary

**Collection Title:** Congregation Beth Israel-Judea records

**Date (inclusive):** 1862-1999

**Collection Number:** BANC MSS 2010/641

**Creators :** Congregation Beth Israel-Judea (San Francisco, Calif.)

**Extent:** Number of containers: 2 cartons, 3 oversize boxes, 5 volumes, and 2 oversize folders (Linear feet: 3.7)

**Repository:** The Bancroft Library

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**Abstract:** This collection documents over 100 years of Congregation Beth Israel's history from shortly after its founding. It is divided into six series: Corporate, Administrative, and Financial; Congregational Materials; Marriage Licenses; Salem Cemetery; Cornerstone; and Photographs.

**Languages Represented:** Collection materials are in English.

**Physical Location:** Many of the Bancroft Library collections are stored offsite and advance notice may be required for use. For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the Library's online catalog.

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#### **Preferred Citation**

[Identification of item], Congregation Beth Israel-Judea records, BANC MSS 2010/641, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

#### **Alternate Forms Available**

There are no alternate forms of this collection.

#### **Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Burstein, Elliot Maurice, 1898-1975

Cycowski, Josef R., 1901-1998

Rabinowitz, Joseph, 1891-1943

Congregation Beth Israel-Judea (San Francisco, Calif.)--Archives

Congregation Beth Israel-Judea (San Francisco, Calif.)--Anniversaries, etc.

Hebrew Free School (San Francisco, Calif.)

Jews--California--San Francisco

Jews--California--San Francisco--Societies, etc.

Jews--Charities

Jewish cemeteries--California--Colma

Jewish religious education--Textbooks

Jewish women--California--San Francisco--Societies and clubs

Parents' and teachers' associations--California--San Francisco

San Francisco Earthquake and Fire, Calif., 1906

Synagogues--California--San Francisco

Jews--California--San Francisco--Societies, etc.

San Francisco (Calif.)--Buildings, structures, etc.

San Francisco (Calif.)--Religious life and customs

Burial records--California--San Francisco

By-laws--California--San Francisco

Ledgers--California--San Francisco

Marriage records--California--San Francisco

Photographs--California--San Francisco

Minutes--California--San Francisco

Messing, Aaron Joseph, 1843-1916

B'nai B'rith--District Grand Lodge No. 4

Chevra Shaare Refoah

Congregation Beth Israel (San Francisco, Calif.)

First Hebrew Benevolent Society (San Francisco, Calif.)

Jewish Ladies' Relief Society (San Francisco, Calif.)

Mount Zion Hospital Association (San Francisco, Calif.)

Pacific Hebrew Orphan Asylum and Home Society

Young Men's Hebrew Association (San Francisco, Calif.)

Western Jewish History Center. 027

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Judah L. Magnes Museum. WJHC 1971.009

Bancroft Library. Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life

#### **Acquisition Information**

The Congregation Beth Israel-Judea records were gifted to The Bancroft Library by the Judah L. Magnes Museum in 2010.

#### **Accruals**

No future additions are expected.

#### **System of Arrangement**

Collection is arranged into eight series: Corporate, Administrative, and Financial; Congregational Materials; Marriage Licenses; Salem Cemetery; Cornerstone; and Photographs.

#### **Processing Information**

Processed by the Judah L. Magnes Museum staff in 1999. Additional processing by The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life staff in 2011.

#### **Biographical Information**

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?).

#### **Scope and Content of Collection**

This collection documents over 100 years of Congregation Beth Israel's history from shortly after its founding. It is divided into six series: Corporate, Administrative, and Financial; Congregational Materials; Marriage Licenses; Salem Cemetery; Cornerstone; and Photographs. Significant among the administrative records are minute books from 1886-1950 and a dues ledger from 1878-1884. The bulk of the Congregational Materials series consists of files on services and holidays as well as disbound scrapbooks (clippings, letters, tickets, bulletins) documenting congregational news, events and activities for 1948-52. This series also contains files from after the merger of Beth Israel and Temple Judea. The marriage certificates date from 1882 through 1935 and include the names of the bride and the groom. The collection also has items relating to Congregation Beth Israel's cemetery in Colma. The Cornerstone series consists of material from the 1905 cornerstone for the Geary Street building, including documents from other local Jewish institutions such as B'nai B'rith, Chevra Shaare Refooah, the Eureka Benevolent Society, the Jewish Ladies Relief Society, Mount Zion Hospital, the Pacific Hebrew Orphan Asylum, the Young Men's Hebrew Association, and Congregations Keneseth Israel, Emanu-El, Sherith Israel, and Ohabai Shalome. The photographs in the collection consist of images of people, activities, and building interiors and exteriors associated with Beth Israel. The museum holdings of The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life house a series of Beth Israel-Judea objects, including twelve Torah rimonim, two Torah breastplates, three Torah pointers, and an embroidered table covering that was made in 1859 by an unknown congregant of Beth Israel.

**Series 1 Corporate, Financial, and Administrative. 1864-1959**

**Physical Description:** Carton 1, folders 1-7; Volumes 1-5

**Scope and Content**

This series contains by-laws, financial and historical records, and minutes. By-Laws include the 1904 "By-Laws and Rules of Order" and an undated revision. 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. The four volumes of Congregation Beth Israel meeting minutes cover the years between 1886 and 1950 (vol. 1: 10/17/1886-9/6/1904; vol. 2: 10/30/1904-10/29/1916; vol. 3: 11/12/1916-11/18/1926; vol. 4: 1/13/1927-1/19/1950). This series also includes a ledger (vol. 5) listing membership dues payments for 1878-1884.

**Series 2 Congregational Materials. 1887-1999**

**Physical Description:** Carton 1, folders 8-57; Carton 2, folders 1-2

**Scope and Content Note**

This series contains a wide variety of clippings, letters, bulletins, tickets, announcements, congregational publications, and other documents covering the full range of activities and events sponsored by the congregation (Services, Adult Education, Bar and Bat Mitzvah, Confirmation, Holidays, Lectures, Religious School, and various clubs) from the 1880s through the 1990s (with the bulk of material dating from circa 1940 through 1970). Most of these materials were produced by Congregation Beth Israel, but some originate from the merged institution, Congregation Beth Israel-Judea, including a religious school journal for Temple Judea (1957); annual membership rosters for Temple Judea (1961, 1966); a dedication journal for Temple Judea's new synagogue building, from 1964, which has a list of the congregation's members; a dedication book for Beth Israel-Judea's Rabbi Elliot M. Burstein activities building, from 1976; and annual membership rosters for Congregation Beth Israel-Judea (i.e. 1971, 1986, 1989, 1996, 1999).

**Series 3 Marriage Licenses. 1882-1935**

**Physical Description:** Oversize Boxes 1-3

**Scope and Content Note**

This series contains the official marriage licenses/certificates for Congregational Beth Israel weddings held between 1882 and 1935 with the majority from 1898-1916. The certificates are arranged alphabetically by groom's name (A-G in Oversize Box 1; H-N in Oversize Box 2; and O-Z in Oversize Box 3) and include signatures and official stamps.

**Series 4 Salem Cemetery. 1895-1962**

**Physical Description:** Carton 2, folders 3-9

**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.

**Series 5 Cornerstone. circa 1905**

**Physical Description:** Carton 2, folders 10-21, Oversize Folder 2B

**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, Keneseth Israel, and Ohabai Shalome), 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 (in Oversize Folder 2B), 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 (in the museum holdings of The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life).

**Series 6 Photographs. circa 1900-1960**

**Physical Description:** Carton 2, folders 22-42; Oversize Folders 1A and 2B

**Scope and Content Note**

This series contains photographs of people, activities, and building interiors and exteriors associated with Beth Israel. The majority of the photos appear to be from the late 1940s and early 1950s, though there are some early photographs dating between circa 1900 and 1925). Early photographs include four oversize photographs (circa 1900) of the interior of Temple Beth Israel (including images of the pews, the Bema, and an open Torah ark), photographs showing the destruction of the newly finished building after the 1906 earthquake and fire, and several early wedding photos. 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, confirmations, tree planting, a Chanukah service, the 1950 graduation class, the Youth Choir, and unidentified school assemblies. Confirmation photos includes pictures from the early 20s through the 1950s, including two early oversize prints (in Oversize Folder 1A). Also included is an oversized panoramic shot showing delegates to the First Pacific Coast Conference of the United Synagogue of America held at Beth Israel May 3, 1932 (in Oversize Folder 2B) and pictures of Beth Israel's Salem Cemetery including headstone samples, a series of snapshots of the cemetery and photographs from a photo album commemorating the dedication of the Salem Garden Mausoleum in 1958.