

Jewish American Resource Guide

Sources of Information Relating to the
Jewish American Community
in Austin and Travis County

Austin History Center, Austin Public Library

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The purpose of the Austin History Center is to provide customers with information about the history and current events of Austin and Travis County by collecting, organizing, and preserving research materials and assisting in their use.

INTRODUCTION

The collections of the Austin History Center contain valuable research materials that document The Jewish American Community in Austin, Texas. The materials in this resource guide are arranged by call number where possible, as in the case of books and architectural collections. The subject files are in order by subject number. Biographical files are in order by surname. Note that women and other family members are usually filed under the name of the male head of the household.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE JEWISH AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN AUSTIN AND TRAVIS COUNTY	3
ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES COLLECTION	5
ARCHIVES AND MANUSCRIPTS COLLECTION.....	7
AUSTIN FILES – SUBJECT: TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS	8
AUSTIN FILES – BIOGRAPHY: TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS.....	9
AUSTIN FILES – HOUSE/BUILDING: TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS	12
GENERAL COLLECTION.....	13
PERIODICALS.....	15
ORAL HISTORIES	16
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES.....	17

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE JEWISH AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN AUSTIN AND TRAVIS COUNTY

Jewish settlers began to arrive in Austin as early as the 1840s. Most were from Germany, Russia, Poland and other Eastern European Countries. In 1876, a handful of Jewish pioneers that included Henry Hirshfeld and Jacob de Cordova met in the mayor's office of the City of Austin to discuss a synagogue for its first congregation, later known as Temple Beth Israel. The congregation built its first house of worship in 1884 on the corner of 11th and San Jacinto streets in the heart of downtown Austin.

Austin's second Jewish congregation, Agudas Achim, was founded in 1924 and originally met in the various private homes of its members. In 1931, the congregation built its first building at 909 San Jacinto. Among the founders was Jim Novy, a longtime friend of President Lyndon Baines Johnson. This friendship had a positive effect on the growth of the Jewish community. In fact, Johnson was influential in moving the synagogue from downtown Austin into an expanding and newer part of Austin. Not only was this a more central location in the growing community, but the sale of the land downtown helped ensure the financial viability of the congregation for years to come.

The Jewish population grew slowly in Austin's fledgling years. Many of its earliest members were peddlers turned businessmen. They succeeded due to hard work, fair business practices and a sense of community. For instance, Koen's Jewelers was one of the first businesses to offer time payment plans to its customers, not only bringing in new business, but putting available wares in reach of the lower middle class.

Other Jewish families were drawn to Austin not for business related endeavors, but to teach or study at the University of Texas at Austin. Moselle, Mayne and Jeanette Littman, three of Leopold Littman's nine daughters, were some of the first Jewish women to graduate University of Texas.

Austin grew steadily through World War II years, and by the 1950s, several research laboratories and think tanks had been founded. These drew innovative thinkers and high-tech companies to the area and the Jewish population expanded as Jewish engineers, doctors, intellectuals, and inventors made the city their home.

During the 1970s, local Jews contributed to the growth and development of the state's cultural and political life. Michael R. Levy founded Texas Monthly magazine, a publication chronicling life in contemporary Texas including politics, the environment, industry, education, music, art, dining, and travel. In 1975 Austin's first Jewish mayor, Jeff Friedman, was elected. Also during the 1970s, local philanthropist Helen Smith became the first Texan to serve as international president of B'nai B'rith Women.

While Austin's Jewish population steadily rose from the late 1970s to the 1990s, the concept of a united Jewish community was still slow to catch on. However, the Austin Jewish Federation had a small community center located in an old church, and during the late 1970s and 1980s, signs of communal growth manifested itself through a preschool of about 100 children, a Jewish Book Fair, and a Jewish Family Service.

The high technology boom of the 1990s caused an unexpected influx of hundreds of new Jewish families to Austin. Most notably, Dell Computers, founded by Michael and Susan Dell, played a large part in the community's growth. The Dell Family became Austin's first major Jewish philanthropists.

Due to this population growth the Jewish community needed an organizational structure that had never before existed. One example was the consolidation of the Austin Jewish Federation and Jewish Community Center. Michael Dell and his wife, Susan Lieberman Dell, purchased and donated a 40-acre site in central Austin, which has become the Jewish Community Association of Austin's Dell Jewish Community Campus. Ground was broken in December 1996 for the new campus facility, which would house Congregation Agudas Achim and a community center. It also provided space for the operation of the Austin Jewish Academy, Early Childhood Program, plus a number of other youth and family programs as well. While the campus has become the physical center of Austin's burgeoning Jewish community, the community's growth since 1997 has also spawned two new Reform congregations, as well as growth of its existing Conservative and Orthodox minyans.

The innovative "campus" approach to Jewish communal life has set the tone for the second century of Jewish life in Austin and is actively watched by other mid-sized communities throughout the United States as a model for operating Jewish communities in dynamic and changing times.

Note: Information compiled using *The First One Hundred Years* a dissertation by J. Silberberg, 1974; *Pioneer Jewish Texans* by Natalie Ornish; and the Jewish Virtual Library (JVL).

ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES COLLECTION

The Architectural Archives Collection contains drawings and renderings produced by local architectural firms and individuals donated to or acquired by the Austin History Center.

Collection Number	Title, Date, Description
FG-764 FF-278, 279	Congregation Agudas Achim Bull Creek Road 4300 Fehr & Granger and Emerson Fehr Drawings and Records 1962, 1963 [plans- architectural; 12 Mylar drawings]
FG Assorted FF-380	Congregation Agudas Achim Bull Creek Road 4300 Fehr & Granger and Emerson Fehr Drawings and Records 1962, 1963 [plans- architectural; 12 Mylar drawings]
CCP-0636 FF- 15	Temple Beth Israel Shoal Creek Boulevard 3901 Charles Coatsworth Pinkney Drawings 1966, 1971, 1984 [plans-landscape; 4 pencil on tracing drawings; Working drawings. Landscape design with planting. Design for memorial garden and service drive to kitchen area. Planting for front spaces.]
LM-308, 309 FF-145-147	Temple Beth Israel Shoal Creek Boulevard 3901 Lundgren & Maurer 1966, undated, 1956-57 [plans- architectural; 21 pencil on tracing and sepia drawings, 25 pencil on tracing drawings, 34 pencil on tracing and sepia drawings]
AR.2009.009 FF-025/BH FF-026/BH	Hirshfeld Mansion 9th Street W. 305 Bell, Klein & Hoffman Hirshfeld Mansion – Restoration, 1977 [49 various format drawings, incomplete]. Hirshfeld Cottage – Restoration, 1979 [20 drawings, incomplete]. Hirshfeld Carriage House – Restoration, n.d. [2 ink on linen and blueline drawings, (incomplete)].
AR.2016.028	Hirshfeld Honeymoon Cottage 9th Street W. 305 University of Texas School of Architecture [9 diazo prints, plans, elevations, sections, details]

AR.2009.037	Texas Osteopathic Medical Association 1415 Lavaca Street Clovis Heimsath 1996 [3 blue/black line drawings]
MH-90533 (no collection number listed)	Metz Elementary School 2101 Willow, Austin, TX Clovis Heimsath [contributor] 1990 [88 blue/black line drawings]
AR.2009.025 LM-170	Morris Polsky Residence - Alterations and Additions 3306 Perry Ln, Austin, TX Lundgren & Maurer 1955 [3 pencil on tracing drawings]

ARCHIVES AND MANUSCRIPTS COLLECTION

The Archives and Manuscripts Collection contains primary research materials about people, organizations, governments, and businesses in Austin and Travis County. The collections below are arranged by call number. For detailed information about specific collections, please refer to the archives finding aids located in the Reading Room or to Texas Archival Resources Online (TARO). The title of the collection is a link to the online finding aid, if one is available.

Collection Number	Title, Date, Description
AR.H.024	<u>Hirshfeld Family Papers</u> The Henry Hirshfeld Family Papers document the personal, social, religious and business lives of Henry and Jennie Hirshfeld, seven of their children, their spouses and their three grandchildren and span the years 1845 through 1954
AR.O.011	<u>Austin (Tex.) Mayor's Office. Jeffrey M. Friedman Records</u> 2-term Austin Council member and mayor, 1975-77.
AR.2001.018	<u>Paramount Theater Records</u> Includes information about Louis Novy and Novy family. qAR Box 057/013 has the Scottish Rite certificate for Novy.
AR.2007.007	<u>Austin-Travis County Veterans Collection</u> Box 1, Folder 2 includes information about the Jewish War Veterans organization.
AR 2012.004	<u>Trans-Texas Theaters, Inc. Papers</u> [Novy family]
Ar.2019.043	<u>Philip Spertus Austin Jewish Community Center Records</u> Philip Spertus served as a leader in the Austin Jewish Community Plan, which was organized in response to the need for an Austin Jewish Community Center. The records contain documentation of the planning and development of the Jewish Community Center through correspondence, clippings, agendas, minutes, reports, financial records, and notes dating largely from 1991-1999

AUSTIN FILES – SUBJECT: TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS

The Austin Files (subject) contain a variety of clippings, photographs, and ephemera related to the Jewish Community in Austin. Please note that photographs, if available, are filed separately from the text files. A “T” indicates a text file, and a “P” indicates a photo file. A small number of photos in the collection have been digitized and are viewable through the Portal to Texas History (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/explore/partners/ASPL/browse/>).

Subject Number	Subject Title
AF C3400	Churches National Conference of Christians and Jews, Austin Chapter (7) T Bethel Temple (13)
AF J0200	Jewish People General P/T B'nai B'rith (1) T Fasts and Feasts - Judaism (4) T Hadassah (2) T Hillel Jewish Organization-filed in General file Jewish Community Association of Austin (JCAA) (6) T Jewish Community Council/Center (3) T Jewish Federation of Austin (5) T
AF M8430	Moving Pictures—Film Festivals Austin Jewish Film Festival (5) T
AF M8460	Moving Pictures—Production and Direction Jewish Film Festival (44) T
AF N3400	Nursey Schools—Daycare Jewish Community Council Nursery School (10) T
AF S9000	Synagogues Agudas Achim Congregation (2) P/T Temple Beth Israel (1) P/T

AUSTIN FILES – BIOGRAPHY: TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS

The Austin Files (biography) contain clippings, photos, and ephemera about Austin and Travis County Jews who have contributed to the community in so many ways. A “T” indicates a text file, and a “P” indicates a photo file.

Abzug, Robert	UT Professor, his area of intellectual interest was the Holocaust. T
Cohen, Wilbur J., 1913-1987	Academic and public servant. Former Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare; faculty University of Texas, LBJ School of Public Affairs. T
Cohn, Leopold, 1882-1960	Longtime businessman and Austin clothier. Co-owner, with brother Israel, of Cohn Brother’s Ladies and Men’s Clothiers for 53 years. T
de Cordova, Jacob, 1808-1868	Entrepreneur and denizen of Texas for over 30 years, an expert in and advocate of all things Texan. Publisher of two early Austin newspapers, <i>The Texas Herald</i> , and the <i>Southwestern American</i> out of Austin. Instrumental in passing the Compromise of 1850. T
de Cordova, Phineas, 1819-1903	Vice President, Temple Beth Israel. Newspaperman. Active in area politics. Half-brother of Jacob. Land agency owner in Austin for over 50 years. Advocate for railroad building. Buried in Austin’s Temple Beth Israel’s Cemetery. T
Dell, Michael and Susan	Philanthropists. Owner of Dell Computers in Austin. T
Doughtie, Venton Levy, b. 1897	Renowned professor of aerospace and mechanical engineering at the University of Texas. Noted for his work during both world wars in training pilots for the U.S. Navy. His pilot training program served as the impetus for the creation of UT’s aerospace engineering program. Lived at 1616 Northwood Road, Austin from 1940 until his death in 1987. T
Ettlinger, Hyman J.	UT mathematics professor and successful athletic coach. Honored by numerous groups for humanitarianism and service to Judaism including NCCJ, B’nai B’rith and the Kallah of Texas Rabbis. T/P
Friedman, Jeffrey, 1945-2007	Austin’s hippie Mayor, 1975-1977. Youngest candidate ever elected to the office. Advocate for environmental protection, ethics and EQUAL Employment Opportunity. T/P
Heimsath, Clovis, 1930-	Noted architect and designer of the synagogue for congregation Agudas Achim. Founder of Heimsath Architects. T

Hirshfeld, Henry (1834-1911)	Austin Pioneer. Served in Parson's Brigade in the Civil War. Founder of Austin National Bank. First President and founder of Temple Beth Israel. T/P
Koen, Joe, 1857-1945	Prominent Austin business owner, Joe Koen and Sons Jewelers. Director of the Chamber of Commerce 1928-1938, President Temple Beth Israel, 1899-1944. Active in church, civic and philanthropic works. T/P. SEE J0100 (Jewelry Trade) for photos.
Koen, William J., 1898-1989	Son of Joe and Justine Koen. Austin business owner, Joe Koen and Sons Jewelers, President Temple Beth Israel and Austin Jewish Community Council, and Vice President Austin Symphony Orchestra. T/P
Kopperl, Benjamin, 1935-1905	Businessman, bookseller, stationer and news dealer. Active in Temple Beth Israel and B'nai B'rith. T
Kruger, Fania, 1893-1977	Nationally acclaimed Russian poet. Took classes at UT Austin. T/P
Leon, Harry J., 1896-1967	Popular 44 year UT professor specializing in classical literature and languages. First to teach Hebrew for credit. Trustee for Temple Beth Israel. Involved with Hillel foundation. Wife Ernestine Phelps Leon was also a UT professor. T.
Littman Family	Leopold Littman was a cigar maker. He and his wife Harriet had nine daughters, three of whom (Moselle, Mayne and Jeanette) were some of the first Jewish women to graduate University of Texas. T
Melasky, Bernard, 1825-1911	Early Austinite, Civil War soldier, father of Mrs. Henry Hirshfeld (nee Jenny Melasky). Owner of B. Melasky and Sons Dry Goods and Clothing T/P
Novy, Jim, 1896-1971	First Vice-President, Agudas Achim. Three term president of same. Owner of Austin Metal and Iron. Owner of Austin Pipe and Supply. Friend of LBJ. T
Novy, Louis, 1891-1958	Older brother of Jim. Business man and civic leader. Manager Hancock Opera House. City Manager of Austin's Interstate Theaters. T
Pickle, David Jones (b. 8-22-1878)	Prominent Lawyer and County Judge from 1917-1920. SEE Pickle Family. T
Pickle, Charles E., 1873-[1937]	Noted Travis County District Court Reporter. SEE Pickle Family. T/P
Pickle, James Jarrell "Jake", 1913-2005	Congressman. Noted as one of the nation's foremost experts and defenders of Social Security and a supporter of civil rights and tax reform. T/P
Pickle, John Scott	Confederate Army Soldier. SEE Pickle Family T/P

Polsky, Morris, 1908-2005	Doctor. Scholar. Philanthropist. A 50-year member of both Congregation Beth Israel and Congregation Agudas Achim, where he served as President. President of Hill City Lodge of B'nai B'rith Men, and District Director of the Institutes of Judaism for a seven-state region. Founder of the Jewish Community Council of Austin, now the Dell Center. T
Rosenfeld, Arnold	Newspaperman and editor of the <i>Austin American Statesman</i> from 1984-1988. T
Samuelson, Danny	Hyman Samuelson's business partner, cousin and lifelong friend. T
Samuelson, Hyman, 1919-2010	Austin haberdasher (Slax Menswear), author, pillar of the Jewish Community. President congregation Beth Israel, President Jewish Federation of Austin, President Jewish Community Council. Financially instrumental in the Jewish Community Center. T
Saulson, Elconan Henry, 1891-1977	Director of the Hillel Foundation for 14 years (1947-1961). Also served on the Jewish Community Council, the Jewish Welfare Board during WWI and, during WWII, as Regional Director of the USO-NJWB. T
Smith, Milton T. , 1911-2006	Businessman, manufacturer, President Economy Furniture. Philanthropist and President Congregation Beth Israel. His wife, Helen Smith, was international president of B'nai B'rith Women. T/P

AUSTIN FILES – HOUSE/BUILDING: TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS

The Austin Files (House/Building) contains clippings, reports, and ephemera related to structures built, designed or inhabited by members of the Jewish Community in Austin. These are arranged by street address.

Address	Description
105 E Sixth St then 611 Congress Ave	Koen Jewelry P
303 & 305 W. 9th Street	Hirshfeld Mansion T/P
409 12th. Street, West	Melasky Residence P
500 Rio Grande	Littman Family Home P
909 San Jacinto	Congregation Agudas Achim. T/P

GENERAL COLLECTION

The General Collection contains books, pamphlets, dissertations and local government reports. Titles are arranged by call number.

This list is by no means an exhaustive list of every title held by the Austin History Center that relates to The Jewish American Community in Austin and Travis County; that can be accomplished by a keyword search in the Austin Public Library online catalog. This list is an attempt to identify General Collection items that provide information and historical perspective on the Jewish community in our area.

Call number	Title and Publication Information
296 HA	Hart, Charles B., <i>Texas Jewish Burials, Volume II, Alphabetically by Name</i> , [Austin, Tex.]: Texas Jewish Historical Society, 2012.
296 OR	Orum, Anthony M., History of the Austin Jewish Community, by Professor Anthony Orum's Sociology 321K Class, Austin: The class, 1965.
296 SA AA	Samuelson, Hyman, <i>I'm a Jew How 'Bout You</i> , [Austin, TX]: [Hyman Samuelson], [1995]
296 SI	Silberberg, Jay Lawrence, <i>The First One Hundred Years: A History of the Austin Jewish Community, 1850-1950</i> , Austin, Tex.: The Author, 1974. Note: Useful and extremely granular, especially in terms of early community members in Austin.
296.0922764 WE	Weiner, Hollace, Ava, <i>Jewish Stars in Texas Rabbis and Their Works</i> , College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1999.
328.730924 P587M	Mahoney, Patrick R. J.J. (Jake) Pickle, Democratic Representative from Texas, New York: Grossman Publishers, 1972.
720.9764 HE	Heimsath, Clovis, <i>Geometry in Architecture Texas Buildings Yesterday and Today</i> , Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.
728.0976431 GA	Gaines, Carl A. <i>The Henry Hirshfeld Mansion</i> , Austin, TX. : sponsored jointly by the Austin Heritage Society and the School of Architecture, the University of Texas at Austin, 1976, 1977.
811 Kr	Kruger, Fania, <i>The Tenth Jew</i> , Dallas: Kaleidograph Press, 1949.
917.64 DE	De Cordova, Jacob, <i>The Texas Immigrant and Traveller's Guide Book</i> , 1856.
917.64 DE	De Cordova, Jacob, <i>Texas: Her Resources and Her Public Men, A Companion for J. De Cordova's New and Correct Map of the State of Texas</i> , Waco, Texas: Texian Press,, 1969,1858.
921 D358 D	Day, James M., <i>Jacob De Cordova: Land Merchant of Texas</i> , Waco, Tex.: Texian Press, 1962

976.4004924 OR	Ornish, Natalie, <i>Pioneer Jewish Texans</i> , College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011.
976.4004092 WI	Schechter, Cathy and Ruthe Winegarten. <i>Deep In the Heart: The Lives and Legends of Texas Jews: A Photographic History</i> . Austin: Eakin Press, 1990
976.4089924 IN	Weiner, Hollace Ava and Roseman, Kenneth D., comp. and ed. <i>Lone Stars of David; The Jews of Texas</i> , Waltham, Mass : Brandeis University Press, 2007
976.4092 CH	Chapin, David A., <i>The First Jew of Texas: The Life of Jim Novy, an American Success Story, 1896-1971</i> , College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm.com, 2012.
976.431 MA	Manaster, Jane, <i>The Ethnic Geography of Austin, Texas, 1875-1910</i> , Thesis (M.A.)--University of Texas at Austin, 1986.

PERIODICALS

The Periodicals Collection includes newspapers, magazines, and newsletters published in or about Austin and Travis County. The collection is arranged alphabetically by title. Titles can be found by looking in the Periodical Index, located in the Reading Room. Date spans are listed in order to give the researcher an idea of what is available but this does not mean that the entire run of a periodical for that date span is necessarily available.

Title/Organization	Date Span
The Outlook (continues as The Jewish Outlook)	1990-1996
The Jewish Outlook	1996-2017

ORAL HISTORIES

The Recording Collection contains individual audio recordings donated or acquired by the Austin History Center. This list is in order by tape number – a list in alphabetical by subject and then by interviewee last name is available on the [Austin History Center website](#).

Many of the oral histories have been transcribed and copies placed in AF-biography files.

Recording Number	Subject	Recording Date/Transcription
0114-C	Jeffrey Mark Friedman and Allan Herst.	October 31, 1974
1195	Joe Wihterspoon interviewed by Anthony Orum.	October 23, 1985.
1547	Schwartz, Lou interviewed by Orum, Anthony speaking about the businesses on East Sixth Street	January 17, 1985 Transcript: AF-BIO Schwartz, Lou
1708	Hyman Samuelson interviewed by Valerie Dunham	April 11, 1990 Transcript: AC 381.45687 SA495S
2110	Interview with Judge David Jones Pickle and Mrs. Bertie Pickle; interviewed by Hildegard Stjepcevitich	November 6, 1969 Transcript: AF-BIO Pickle, John Scott
3336	Novy family history recounted by Jim Novy's daughter, Elaine Shapiro.	March 19, 2018 Transcript: AF-BIO Shapiro, Elaine Novy
3443	Marc Seriff interviewed by Michael Barnes. Interview includes information about the Dell Jewish Campus.	November 14, 2018. Transcript: AF-BIO Seriff, Marc

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Call Number	Title	Publisher	Pub. Date	Location
976.4004924 ST	The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontier of Texas.	Austin: University of Texas Press	2010	Austin Public Library (Central)