

St. Joseph County Jewish History

Located in central northern Indiana along the Michigan border, St. Joseph County was established in 1830. Some of the county's earliest residents operated trading posts, exchanging furs, maple sugar, and baskets with the Native Americans. Later residents opened formal stores and sold clothing and dry goods. Jewish merchants immigrated from Germany and settled largely in the cities of South Bend and Mishawaka. They ran businesses, built houses of worship, and bonded with each other and local German Christians through social clubs.

SOUTH BEND

In 1878 South Bend's population included 125 Jews. By 1912 that figure had increased to 1,200, the third largest Jewish population in the state.¹ A 1960 survey counted 805 Jewish households and 2652 individuals. This number declined throughout the 1970s as younger generations moved to larger cities.² Nevertheless, the present local Jewish community, the remaining built environment, and documentary evidence serve as reminders of the rich St. Joseph County Jewish heritage.

The earliest St. Joseph County Jews peddled before settling in South Bend and Mishawaka and opening stores. These German-Jewish business owners typically served as prominent leaders within the South Bend Jewish community. Others ventured into banking and real estate. South Bend Jews became increasingly professionalized the longer they resided in the city and with subsequent generations.

The formation of an association was amongst the first Jewish community activity in the county. As part of religious custom, early South Bend Jews established a burial society in 1859 even before organizing a synagogue. The Hebrew Society of Brotherly Love, founded by Henry Barth, Abraham Hanauer, Theo J. Seixas, Henry Goodman, and Meyer Livingston, pledged to provide and maintain a suitable burial ground for the local Jewish

community and properly bury the disadvantaged. The organization purchased land on the west side of Niles Avenue between Cedar Street and Crescent Avenue. Twenty-two burials were performed before the Singer Company, a sewing machine cabinet factory, purchased the site in 1883 for a parking lot. The graves interred at this site were removed in 1884 and reburied in Rose Hill Cemetery, a portion of South Bend's City Cemetery. The Indiana Historical Bureau and the Michiana Jewish Historical Society installed a historical marker in 2002 to commemorate the former site of the Hebrew Society of Brotherly Love Cemetery.¹⁰

After establishing a local burial society, Jewish communities often formed a congregation and secured a synagogue or temple. Although part of a single religious community, South Bend Jews enjoyed a population large enough to assemble separate congregations according to how they interpreted Jewish law and its malleability. They established houses of worship that conformed to different denominations of Judaism including Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist.

The Hebrew Orthodox congregation organized in 1887 and met in various locations including the home of Louis Feldman at 720 West Division Street. In 1916 the group purchased the 410 South Taylor Street site where they soon constructed a redbrick Georgian-Revival-style building. The structure features two Stars of David above the pilasters and Hebrew words above the main entrance. The Jewish congregation worshipped there from 1922–1970 when they relocated to their present location, 3207 High Street. Their new 1971 institutional-style structure features two Stars of David on the front



The 1971 Orthodox synagogue in South Bend (St. Joseph County).

door handles. The Sweet Home Missionary Baptist congregation currently uses the Taylor Street building for their services despite severe damages from a 1970 fire.

The congregation Sons of Israel worshipped in a 1902 red brick functional-style building with arched windows, a decorative arch with Hebrew scribe at the top of the main façade, and two Stars of David mounted to the corners. B'nai Ysrael Reconstructionist Congregation took over the site in 1982 before deeding it to the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana in 2003. In 2005 an individual purchased the property with plans to refurbish it as a private residence.¹¹

The Reform Temple Beth-El congregation performed religious services in a building at 604 West LaSalle Avenue from 1906–1950. At that time, they moved to a 1950 redbrick institutional-style structure purchased from the city. The interdenominational Peoples Church used the former temple after Temple Beth-El moved to their present location at 305 West Madison Street, a 1950 redbrick institutional-style structure. In 1971, the congregation purchased a new site.

The Conservative Sinai congregation inhabits a 1951 redbrick institutional-style synagogue at 1102 East LaSalle Avenue that features a Star of David mounted on the dome. The congregation organized in 1932 and first met on the second floor of buildings at 114 East Wayne Street and the southwest corner of Monroe and Michigan Streets. Sinai purchased a building at 410 West Jefferson Street in 1935 and worshipped there for sixteen years before relocating to the LaSalle Avenue synagogue.

A 1916 wooden Italianate-style building on William Street accommodated The Hebrew Orthodox Shul until the congregation relocated in 1922. The structure was later called Hachnosis Orchim and provided housing and kosher meals to Jews traveling through South Bend. Its current owners use it as a private residence.

Although they worshipped in several different congregations, South Bend Jews organized associations that united the Jewish community and celebrated their German heritage. Many of the same individuals who opened dry goods and clothing stores helped found Jewish and German organizations. Typically Jewish communities created a B'nai B'rith Lodge to unite the Jewish community facing Gentile discrimination after they had established a burial society.¹² Yet, South Bend Jews did not found a B'nai B'rith Lodge until the 1920s, sixty-some years after they formed the Hebrew Society of Brotherly Love. Instead, the city's Jews bonded with local Christians because of their shared German ethnicity and demonstrated this relationship through several shared social clubs.

The turnverein, a combination gymnasium, social club, and cultural center acted as a vital organization for Hoosier Germans.¹³ Ten local leaders including Moses Livingston founded the South Bend Turnverein in 1861. Other German clubs included the German choir and the Germania Lodge. Jews participated as both members and officers of these clubs. The close social contact between the South Bend German Jews and German Christians extended beyond these clubs. Jews served as pall bearers at Christian funerals, Christians attended Jewish weddings, and German-Christian-owned businesses donated funds for the construction of Temple Beth-El.¹⁴

Jewish organizations existed as well. A local post of the Workmen's Circle, which celebrated Yiddish cultural events and supplied health and education services to the South Bend Jewry, met at 214 South William Street from 1921–1927. The group organized in 1907 and was active through the 1930s.

Organized in 1917 the Hebrew Institute Society used their 420 South Franklin Street building to host weddings, dinners, adult and youth group meetings, and religious education classes from 1920–1963. The Society sold the building to Sears Roebuck who razed it for a parking lot.

A private social club named City Club was located at 903 East Jefferson Boulevard from 1947–1975. The Jewish War Veterans, Maj. Gen. Maurice B. Rose Post 318, met at 301 South William Street from 1947–1962.

New York City native Theodore J. Seixas (1802–1882) moved to South Bend in 1857 and opened a grocery store. Seixas added dry goods to his inventory when he partnered with Ephraim Gerstle. After his business failed in 1868, Seixas solicited prominent businessmen to organize the *St. Joseph County Savings Bank* in 1870. His new venture thrived, netting \$400,000 in deposits within twelve years.³

After peddling in Philadelphia, German immigrant Henry Barth (1818–1895) opened a South Bend clothing store in 1847. Barth also started successful lumber companies by partnering with native-born elite in both Indiana and Ohio and invested in a local mill. A South Bend paper noted in Barth's obituary that he "aid[ed] any enterprise that was calculated to improve South Bend."⁴

Bavarian Abraham Hanauer (1818–1909) immigrated to South Bend in 1859 and established a successful dry goods and clothing store at 82 and 84 Michigan Street. South Bend’s first German choral society, The Maennerchor, met at Hanauer’s store. Hanauer later worked as a traveling salesman for the *LaPorte Woolen Mills*. Hanauer lived with his wife and four children on the corner of Marion and Michigan Streets and served as an executive of the Germania Lodge.⁵

In 1856 German cousins Meyer and Moses Livingston moved to the northern Indiana city and opened a small dry goods store four years later. The partnership dissolved in 1876 and Moses became the sole proprietor. The 58 Washington Street store grew into “one of South Bend’s leading small dry goods and clothing establishments.”⁶ After 1876 Moses partnered with brothers-in-law Moses and Samuel Adler in the *Adler Brothers* clothing store and later launched *The Hub*, another clothing shop. Moses actively participated in both Christian-German clubs and in Jewish community organizations such as the Hebrew Society of Brotherly Love. He helped found the South Bend Turnverein and offered his clothing store as a meeting place for social and business gatherings. Moses and his cousin Meyer, who opened a meat market, belonged to the Germania Lodge and the Maennerchor.

Brothers Samuel and Moses Adler immigrated to South Bend in 1857. They worked as clerks before opening a clothing and boot store and the *Adler and Company Hatters*. Their sister Carrie married Moses Livingston, with whom they partnered. Moses Adler belonged to German organizations such as the Turnverein and the Maennerchor.⁷

Brothers William and Simon Lantz owned the *New York Clothing Store* on the southwest corner of Michigan and Washington Streets. They offered a wide selection of items including “collar, cuffs, gloves, hosiery,

handkerchiefs, shirts”⁸ Another Washington Street store, owned by German-Jewish immigrant Isaac Kahn, specialized in hats and furs.

Other South Bend German-Jewish businesses enabled local Jews to purchase products specially prepared to meet religious dietary laws. Mort Soslowksi operated the *Meyer Sofan Kosher Meat Market* at 612 West Division Street (later Western Avenue) from 1914–1943. Samuel Hershberger ran the *Hershberger-Zonenberg Kosher Meat Market* across the street at 611 West Division Street from 1921–1943. Samuel Zonenberg owned the business from 1943–1960. Abraham Cohen owned the *Progressive Kosher Bakery* at 431 South Chapin Street from 1921–1935. According to residents, the bakery operated into the 1950s. Benjamin Cooperman managed *Cooperman’s Kosher Bakery* down the street at 503 South Chapin from 1921–1960. Both bakeries and meat markets have been torn down.⁹

MISHAWAKA

Although smaller than South Bend, nearby Mishawaka also contains evidence of a local Jewish community including burial grounds, a synagogue, and a school.

A Uniroyal Plant parking lot replaced the Anshe Sholem Synagogue at 210-212 North Spring Street in Mishawaka. The congregation worshipped there from circa 1943–1966 before the building was purchased and razed.

The Hebrew Orthodox Association Cemetery is located on the east side of Logan Street south of Jefferson Boulevard. The cemetery was founded in 1892 and houses the Jewish Memorial Chapel, a 1964 redbrick functional-style building in the form of the Star of David. The chapel is dedicated to the six million Jews killed by the Nazis during World War II.



The 1964 chapel dedicated to Holocaust victims in Mishawaka (St. Joseph County)

In 1945 South Bend and Mishawaka Jewish leaders established the Jewish Community Council of St. Joseph County, Indiana, which was reorganized in 1978 as the Jewish Federation of St. Joseph Valley. Amongst other objectives this group pledged to coordinate, foster, and promote Jewish community activities. The council succeeded in fundraising for Holocaust refugee immigrants and Jews returning to Israel, sponsoring dances, summer camps, and lectures, and responding to anti-Semitic incidents.¹⁵

Although South Bend Jews enjoyed a close relationship with German Christians in the nineteenth century, there is some evidence of twentieth-century anti-Semitism. Housing addition “Morris Park” employed a covenant that excluded Jewish owners or occupants. The South Bend public schools leased their facilities for Protestant religious education activities and public school teachers often sang Christian songs or taught the New Testament in the classroom. The Hebrew Orthodox Cemetery suffered from vandalism and local restaurants distributed anti-Semitic literature.¹⁶

The St. Joseph County Jewry created a strong community within South Bend and Mishawaka. They partnered with family members to operate businesses, formed leagues with fellow Jews and fellow Germans, and assembled into congregations to worship. Even though their population numbered greater than most Indiana counties, St. Joseph County Jews developed close-knit relationships.

In St. Joseph County, ten structures were surveyed. Two were rated Outstanding, three were rate Notable, five were rate Contributing, and none were rated Non-Contributing.

Footnotes

¹ “Jews in Five Major Indiana Cities,” from *American Jewish Yearbook in Peopling Indiana*, eds., Robert M. Taylor, Jr., and Connie A. McBirney (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1996), 322.

² Roger Birdsell, “The Jewish Federation of St. Joseph Valley: Continuity and Change” (South Bend: Michiana Jewish Historical Society, Inc., 1999), 9-10.

³ “The ‘German Jews’ in South Bend,” 102.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 100-101.

⁶ Ibid., 100.

⁷ Ibid., 101

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ron Grossman, “Jewish Communities Fade in Small Towns: Synagogues Stand as Sole Reminders,” *Chicago Tribune*, 25 January 2004.

¹⁰ Roger Birdsell, “A Burial Ground for Deceased Israelites: Jewish Cemeteries in South Bend” (South Bend: Michiana Jewish Historical Society, 2002), 1-4.

¹¹ Margaret Fosmoe, “A Man’s Home is His Temple: Long-vacant Building Will Be Residence and Office,” *South Bend Tribune*, 2 August 2005.

¹² “The ‘German Jews’ in South Bend,” 102.

¹³ Ibid., 105.

¹⁴ Ibid., 107.

¹⁵ Roger Birdsell, "The Jewish Federation of St. Joseph Valley: Organizing a Jewish Community Council" (South Bend: Michiana Jewish Historical Society, 1998), 3-49.

¹⁶ Ibid., 27-31.