



Jewish American Subject 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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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.

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.

Congregation Agudas Achim, 1962 and 1963

- Collection: Fehr Drawings and Records
- Project Address: Bull Creek Road 4300
- Project No.: FG-764
- File Location: FF-278, 279, 380

Temple Beth Israel, 1966, 1971, 1984

- Collection: Charles Coatsworth Pinkney Drawings
- Project Address: Shoal Creek Boulevard 3901
- Project No.: CCP-0636
- File Location: FF- 15

Temple Beth Israel, 1966, undated, 1956-1957

- Collection: Lundgren & Maurer
- Project Address: Shoal Creek Boulevard 3901
- Project No.: LM-308, 309
- File Location: FF-145-147

Hirshfeld Mansion, 1977, 1979

- Collection: Bell, Klein & Hoffman, AR-2009-009
- Project Address: 9th Street W. 305
- Project No.: BH-77003
- File Location: FF-025/BH; FF-026/BH

Hirshfeld Honeymoon Cottage

- Collection: University of Texas School of Architecture, AR-2016-028
- Project Address: 9th Street W. 305
- Project No.: UT-007
- File Location: FF-002/UT

Texas Osteopathic Medical Association, 1996

- Collection: Clovis Heimsath, AR-2009-037
- Project Address: 1415 Lavaca Street
- Project No.:VOL-96001
- File Location: R-013/VOL

Metz Elementary School, 1990

- Collection: Clovis Heimsath [contributor]
- Project Address: 2101 Willow, Austin, TX
- Project No.: MH-90533
- File Location: R-001/MH

Morris Polsky Residence- Alterations and Additions, 1955

- Collection: Lundgren & Maurer, AR-2009-025
- Project Address: 3306 Perry Ln, Austin, TX
- Project No.: LM-170
- File Location: FF-34/LM

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 [Austin History Center Collections](#). The title of the collection is a link to the online finding aid, if one is available.

The list below follows this pattern:

Title

- Collection number
- Description

[Hirshfeld Family Papers](#)

- AR-H-024
- 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.

[Austin \(Tex.\) Mayor's Office. Jeffrey M. Friedman Records](#)

- AR-O-011
- The campaign materials, constituent correspondence, photographs, speeches, press releases, and research/subject files in the collection document the issues facing the City of Austin in the 1970s during a time of growth and development in the city and the global energy crisis.

[Paramount Theater Records](#)

- AR-2001-018
- Includes information about Louis Novy and Novy family.
 - qAR Box 057/013 has the Scottish Rite certificate for Novy.

[Austin-Travis County Veterans Collection](#)

- AR-2007-007
- Box 1, Folder 2 includes information about the Jewish War Veterans organization.

[Trans-Texas Theaters, Inc. Papers](#)

- AR-2012-004
- A digital collection of photographs, clippings, printed material and a scrapbook related to Trans-Texas Theaters, Inc, an Austin-based movie theater company founded in 1952 by Louis Novy, his son Harold "Buster" Novy, daughter, Lena and son-in-law, Earl Podolnick.

[Philip Spertus Austin Jewish Community Center Records](#)

- AR-2019-043
- 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.

[Mark Worob Papers \(unprocessed\)](#)

- AR-2020-029
- Marc Worob is an Austin dentist who is involved with Jewish Federation Austin, Austin Jewish Community Plan, and developing the Dell Jewish Community Center. This collection contains administrative files, correspondence, reports, proposals, studies, financial documents, and programs related to the Austin Jewish community.

[Sidney S. Smith and Bert Kruger Smith Papers](#)

- AR-2022-017
- This collection documents their lives and work through correspondence, articles, manuscripts, clippings, and photographs. The collection also documents the Kruger and Smith family histories.

[Congregation Agudas Achim Records | Austin History Center](#)

- AR-2023-020

- Membership directories, weekly newsletters, Sabbath services programs, videotapes, and documents related to the Congregation Agudas Achim.

[Congregation Beth Israel Records | Austin History Center](#)

- AR-2024-002
- Congregation Beth Israel was founded in 1876 by Austin's early Jewish community and grew steadily, relocating from its original 11th and San Jacinto site to its current Shoal Creek campus, where a major new facility opened in 1967. After enduring challenges including the 2021 arson and the COVID-19 pandemic, the congregation rebuilt, welcomed new Senior Rabbi Brian Leiken in 2025, and continues planning a new sanctuary and campus with Lake|Flato Architects.

[Sandy Dochen Papers | Austin History Center](#)

- AR-2025-003
- The collection includes brochures, information of Austin Jewish institutions such as Congregation Agudas Achim, Temple Beth Shalom, Congregation Beth Israel and Dell Jewish Community Center. Also includes material relating to MCC and Dochen's involvement with Affordable Child Care Now.

[National Council of Jewish Women Austin Section Records | Austin History Center](#)

- AR-2026-002
- The National Council of Jewish Women, Austin Section (NCJW Austin) is a progressive, inclusive community dedicated to advancing social justice, empowering women, and improving the lives of women, children, and families through advocacy, education, and action. The materials include rosters, newsletters, photo albums, awards, proclamations, flyers, and digital materials. Digital images relate to events, demonstrations, and protests undertaken or supported by the National Council of Jewish Women Austin Section.

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 (texashistory.unt.edu).

The list below follows this pattern:

Subject

- Subject number
- Description

Churches C3400

- National Conference of Christians and Jews, Austin Chapter (7) T
- Bethel Temple (13)

Jewish People J0200

- 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

Moving Pictures—Film Festivals M8430

- Austin Jewish Film Festival (5) T

Moving Pictures—Production and Direction M8460

- Jewish Film Festival (44) T

Nursely Schools—Daycare N3400

- Jewish Community Council Nursery School (10) T

Synagogues S9000

- 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.

The list below follows this pattern:

Name

- Notes

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, *The Texas Herald*, and the *Southwestern American* 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 *Austin American Statesman* 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.

The list below follows this pattern:

Address

- Description

611 South Congress Ave (Formerly at 105 E Sixth St.)

- 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.

The list below follows this pattern:

Title, date

- Call number

Texas Jewish Burials, Volume II, Alphabetically by Name, [Austin, Tex.]: Texas Jewish Historical Society, Charles Hart, 2012.

- 296 HA

History of the Austin Jewish Community, Professor Anthony Orum's Sociology 321K Class, Anthony Orum, 1965.

- 296 OR

I'm a Jew How 'Bout You, Hyman Samuelson, 1995

- 296 SA AA

The First One Hundred Years: A History of the Austin Jewish Community, 1850-1950, Jay Lawrence Silberberg, 1974

- 296 SI

Jewish Stars in Texas Rabbis and Their Works, Hollace Ava Weiner, 1999.

- 296.0922764 WE

J.J. (Jake) Pickle, Democratic Representative from Texas, Patrick Mahoney, 1972.

- 328.730924 P587M

Geometry in Architecture Texas Buildings Yesterday and Today, Clovis Heismath, 2002.

- 720.9764 HE

The Henry Hirshfeld Mansion, Carl Gaines, 1976

- 728.0976431 GA

The Tenth Jew, Fania Kruger, 1949.

- 811 Kr

The Texas Immigrant and Traveller's Guide Book, Jacob De Cordova, 1856.

- 917.64 DE

Texas: Her Resources and Her Public Men, A Companion for J. De Cordova's New and Correct Map of the State of Texas, Jacob De Cordova, 1858.

- 917.64 DE

Jacob De Cordova: Land Merchant of Texas, James Day, 1962

- 921 D358 D

Pioneer Jewish Texans, Natalie Ornish, 2011.

- 976.4004924 OR

Deep In the Heart: The Lives and Legends of Texas Jews: A Photographic History, Cathy Schechter and Ruthe Winegarten, 1990

- 976.4004092 WI

Lone Stars of David; The Jews of Texas, Hollace Ava Weiner and Kenneth Roseman, 2007

- 976.4089924 IN

The First Jew of Texas: The Life of Jim Novy, an American Success Story, 1896-1971, David Chapin, 2012.

- 976.4092 CH

The Ethnic Geography of Austin, Texas, 1875-1910, Jane Manaster, 1986.

- 976.431 MA

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.

The Outlook (continues as *The Jewish Outlook*)

- 1900-1996

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.

The list below follows this pattern:

Subject

- Recording Number
- Recording Date
- Transcription location, if exists

Jeffrey Mark Friedman and Allan Herst

- Recording Number: 0114-C
- Recording Date: October 31, 1974

Joe Witherspoon interviewed by Anthony Orum

- Recording Number: 1195
- Recording Date: October 23, 1985.

Schwartz, Lou interviewed by Orum, Anthony speaking about the businesses on East Sixth Street

- Recording Number: 1547
- Recording Date: January 17, 1985
- Transcription Location: AF-BIO Schwartz, Lou

Hyman Samuelson interviewed by Valerie Dunham

- Recording Date: 1708
- Recording Date: April 11, 1990
- Transcription Location: AC 381.45687 SA495S

Interview with Judge David Jones Pickle and Mrs. Bertie Pickle;
interviewed by Hildegarde Stjepcevitch

- Recording Number: 2110
- Recording Date: November 6, 1969
- Transcription Location: AF-BIO Pickle, John Scott

Novy family history recounted by Jim Novy's daughter, Elaine Shapiro

- Recording Number: 3336
- Recording Date: March 19, 2018
- Transcription Location: AF-BIO Shapiro, Elaine Novy

Marc Seriff interviewed by Michael Barnes (Interview includes
information about the Dell Jewish Campus.)

- Recording Number: 3443
- Recording Date: November 14, 2018.
- Transcription Location: AF-BIO Seriff, Marc

Additional Resources

The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontier of Texas, 2010

- Call Number: 976.4004924 ST
- Publisher: Austin: University of Texas Press
- Location: Austin Public Library (Central)