

The Filson Historical Society
B'nai B'rith. Louisville Lodge No. 14 (Louisville, Ky.)
Records, 1860-1921

For information regarding literary and copyright interest for these papers, see the Curator of Collections.

Size of Collection:
3 volumes

Location Number:
Mss. BD B661

**B'nai B'rith. Louisville Lodge No. 14 (Louisville, Ky.)
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Scope and Content Note

Collection consists of early organizational records of two Jewish fraternal lodges in Louisville, both independent orders of B'nai B'rith: the Har Moriah Lodge No. 14 and the Mendelssohn Lodge No. 40. These records document the early Jewish community in Louisville, Kentucky.

The three bound volumes in the collection are: membership register for the Mendelssohn Lodge (1860-1921), which includes members' names, occupations and family information as well as date they were inducted; the official minute book for Mendelssohn Lodge (1860-1870), which documents organizational procedures, dues and fine structures, charitable projects, member disputes, and news from other B'nai B'rith lodges, and a ledger book for Har Moriah Lodge (circa 1860-1870), which logs dues, fines, and other financial information for each lodge member.

The Mendelssohn Lodge materials alternate between spellings, sometimes using "Mendelssohn" and "Mendelsohn" in others). The minute book, in particular, offers insight into the structure and politics of a fledgling men's society during the mid-nineteenth century, chronicling meetings that began as weekly and eventually transitioned to monthly. The members are always addressed as "brother" in the record and the minutes usually conclude with a sentiment of "Benevolent Brotherly Love and Harmony." Topics include the petition and election processes by which new members were inducted and officers chosen, the (convivial) relationship between Mendelssohn and Har Moriah lodges, between individual lodges and the District Grand Lodge in Cincinnati, and the formation of lodge committees to advance learning, review larger B'nai B'rith reports, and investigate internal problems. The minute book also contains regular notes and reports on lodge finances, recording when members were fined or advanced to a new degree of membership and paid associated fees. The bulk of the lodge's money went into a fund to support the widows and children of deceased members, but other funds are regularly appropriated for lodge expenses and charitable projects like assisting members who had fallen on hard times, or other benevolent societies.

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Historical Note

B'nai B'rith (Hebrew for "sons of the covenant") was formed in New York city in 1843, a time when the Jewish population of the United States numbered around 20,000. The preamble to the organization's constitution cited the following goals among its mission: uniting persons of the Jewish faith in elevating mental and moral character, inculcating principles of philanthropy, honor, and patriotism, assisting the poor and sick, rescuing victims of persecution, and protecting widows and orphans.

Local lodges began to open in cities throughout the country and Cincinnati soon became home to Grand District Lodge No. 2, the second major center of the organization after New York. The Har-Moriah Lodge No. 14 ("Mt. Moriah") opened in Louisville in October 1852 and a second B'nai B'rith lodge, the Mendelssohn Lodge No. 40, opened in Louisville in May 1860 (possibly named after the eighteenth-century German Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn). Many of the early lodge members were recent Jewish immigrants from Germany who had strong bonds through neighborhood proximity, marriage, and business ventures.

Modeled after other friendly and fraternal societies of the day, B'nai B'rith borrowed organizational structures and rituals from groups such as the Freemasons and Oddfellows, offering an emerging minority population a share in American associational life. Dues and fines went into a lodge treasury, from which operating costs and charitable contributions to various local and global causes were occasionally allocated. Above all, the lodge chest existed to provide financial support to members and their families in event of injury, business catastrophe, or death. Members were inducted and advanced in rank through a process that involved a petition supported by extant members followed by a ballot vote. Because these societies existed, in large part to provide members and their families with a financial safety net, potential inductees had to demonstrate not only fitness of character but also good health. When applicants were not accepted or members were expelled for failure to pay fines or perform committee duties, such information was shared between the two Louisville lodges other regional lodges.

The Har Moriah and Mendelssohn lodges officially merged in February 1904 and became Louisville Lodge No. 14. In 1929, the city gained a chapter through the B'nai B'rith youth organization AZA (Aleph Tzadik Aleph) called Louisville Chapter 107, AZA. Over time the lodge became increasingly involved in civic issues and the global Zionist movement. For more information on the Lodge's activities in the twentieth century, see a seventy-fifth anniversary pamphlet by Herman Landau (a former AZA member) entitled *Louisville Lodge NO. 14, B'nai B'rith* (Filson Pamphlet collection P360 L253).

In the last decades of the twentieth-century, membership in fraternal organizations declined throughout the country and Louisville Lodge No. 14 eventually disbanded. The materials in this

collection were donated to the Filson in the summer of 2017 by Erwin A. Sherman, a Louisville lawyer and former president of the lodge.

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Volume List

- Volume 1: Membership register for the Mendelsohn Lodge, 1860-1921
- Volume 2: Official minute book for Mendelsohn Lodge, 1860-1870
- Volume 3: Ledger book for Har Moriah Lodge, circa.1860-1870

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Subject Headings

Arbitration
Bereavement - Kentucky - Louisville
B'nai B'rith. Mendelssohn Lodge No. 40 (Louisville, Ky.)
B'nai B'rith. Har Moriah Lodge No. 14 (Louisville, Ky.)
Fraternal organizations - Kentucky - Louisville
Jewish businesspeople - Kentucky - Louisville
Jews - Kentucky - Louisville – Societies, etc.
Jews - Kentucky - Louisville - Charities
Louisville (Ky.) - Social life and customs
Merchants - Kentucky - Louisville
Reform Judaism
Wise, Isaac Mayer, 1819-1900