

Lake County History

Lake County, located in the northwest corner of Indiana, was first explored by Jesuit priests in 1675. Lake County was officially organized in 1837. The northern third is heavily industrialized, with strong ties Chicago. On the other hand, the southern two thirds typifies much of rural Indiana with farms and rural communities. Because of the county's topography, much of the early settlement occurred in the county's central areas.

Between 1890 and the 1920s, steel companies and associated industries developed along the northern shores: *Inland Steel's* plant in Indiana Harbor, *Mark Manufacturing* in East Chicago, *Standard Oil* in Whiting, *Pullman Standard* in Hammond, and *U.S. Steel* in Gary. These companies drew thousands of workers to the region. During the 1970s, the decline of the steel industry, closing of several large companies, and the loss of manufacturing jobs, led to high unemployment and a gradual decline of quality of life in the region.

Gary

Gary had the largest concentration of sites identified with Jewish heritage; most Gary Jews arrived from other large cities, most often Chicago, rather than Europe. The city had two Jewish congregations with Temple Beth-El and Temple Israel. Temple Israel still exists in a 1958 structure in the Miller area, a recently annexed suburb of Gary. Temple Beth-El no longer exists. Other than Temple Israel, none of the existing residences or businesses has identifiable Jewish characteristics. The identified residences are clustered around the former locations of the congregations, which is typical of any Jewish community.

Early Jewish settlers had their first services in 1907 in a hayloft. Temple Beth-El's first building was a temporary structure completed in 1908, but a permanent building was erected in 1912.

Temple Israel was established in 1910. As in other cities, the Orthodox Jews kept services close to the European style while the Reformed considered their services Americanized. Gary's temples, like immigrant churches, became community centers providing services such as counseling and social activities to the Jewish residents.¹ Temple Beth-El produced a monthly newspaper called *The Bulletin*, which contained articles on Zionism, local Jewish achievements, and the successes of American Jews in general.



Temple Beth-El in Gary (Lake County). The building is no longer used as a synagogue, but rather is now a church).

Both temples placed major emphasis on the Jewish education of their children. The most important Jewish educational institution in the city, the Hebrew Educational Alliance, received national recognition. It had an

extensive library of Hebrew and Yiddish books and sponsored numerous social and organizational activities.²



Temple Israel in Gary (Lake County is still an active synagogue).

Lazarus Goodman, the proprietor of the largest and most complete department store, was a born in Poland in 1874. He came to the United States when he was fifteen, started a business in Philadelphia, and then moved to West Lebanon,

Indiana. He established and operated small stores in West Lebanon. In 1907 he moved to Gary. His store in Gary employed around 125 people. Goodman had two stores *The Emporium* and the *Boston Store*. Goodman was involved in the Masons, B'nai B'rith, Commercial Club and Chamber of Commerce.³

Isidor M. Cohen was successful architect. He was born in Russia in 1893 and moved to South Bend, Indiana. After college, he came to Gary in 1916. In 1921 he established his own office. He was the architect for Gary's first large apartment building. Because of the speed at which much of Gary was built, many buildings were erected hastily and without regard for artistic fronts; Cohen worked to remodel these. Cohen was a member of the Indiana Society of Architects, a Moose, and a member of B'nai B'rith.⁴

Abraham Rosen and his associates established *The United Fixtures Company*. Rosen was born in Russia and at the age of 14 came to the United States. He lived in New York, working in a factory that manufactured shirts. After three years, he moved to Chicago; by 1907 he moved to Gary. In addition to the *United Fixtures Company*, Rosen also owned *United Bottling Company*. He was a member of the Moose, B'nai B'rith, Temple Beth El, and Chamber of Commerce.⁵



The home of Abraham Rosen, owner of the United Fixtures Company in Gary (Lake County).

Jack and Sam Miller owned *Miller's Toggery* and were members of the Jewish community. Louis Glueck was a local banker and active in Temple. Irving Given owned *Continental Cleaners*, Cyrus and Loretta Wechsler owned *Hudson's Ladies Dress*, Isadore Alterowitz owned *Gary Sanitary Mattress and Bedding Manufacturing*, and H. Gordan & Sons owned a department store in Gary. Rabbi Garry August was an influential Rabbi for Temple Beth-El.

Other business owners included Sylvia and Simon Pass (*Indiana Clothing Company*), Nathan Migatz (*The Hub Store*), Herman Smolensky (a dry goods store), Harry Alschuler (*H. Alschuler Department Store*), Herman Smolensky (*Smolensky Dry Good Store*), J. Kaplan (*J. Kaplan Clothing Store*), and Edward Milgram (*Milgrams Bootery*).



Home of Jack and Sam Miller, owners of Miller's Toggery in Gary (Lake County).

Hammond

Like Gary, Hammond had two Jewish Congregations, one Orthodox called Kneseth Israel and the other Reformed called Temple Beth-El. Most of the structures surveyed do not have identifiable Jewish markings except the 1950s location of both Kneseth Israel and Temple Beth-El and the cemetery. Two of the commercial structures have names of the business.



Kneseth Israel Cemetery in Hammond (Lake County).

As early as 1881, Jews moved into Hammond, the early settlers being Nathan Levi, Morris Wise, Julius Taussig, Joe Handle, William Elsner and Jonas Lautman. In 1894 Hirsh Berkman settle there. Without a synagogue, he officiated services in a private house until 1899, when Mayer Rubin organized and chartered an Orthodox congregation, known as Keneseth Israel.

In the year 1909 Mayer Rubin also organized and incorporated a Reformed congregation under the name of Beth El Congregation. Hammond also boasted a Jewish Ladies Aid Society and two Jewish lodges (Israel Zanwill of the Western Star Order and Zion Gate of the Sons of Zion).⁶ The Sunday school was organized in 1922. The congregation had a youth organization called the Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association. The congregation also sponsored a Zionist organization and the Hadassah organization of women Zionists.



Conkey Printing located in Hammond, Indiana (Lake County).

W.B. Conkey operated the world's largest printing and binding plant. Conkey printed eighteen thousand Sears, Roebuck catalogues a day, and at the same time produced labels, dictionaries, Encyclopedia Britannica, and other items. Conkey, born in Canada in 1858 and educated in Philadelphia, he moved to Chicago in 1872. He entered the printing trade in 1878. By 1905 he owned the largest printing plant.⁷

Leo Wolf owned *The Lion Store*, which began as *Leo Wolf's Shoe Shop* in the 1880s. His brother-in-law Carl Kaufman joined him in 1898. As *Kaufman & Wolf* stock grew to include dry goods, furniture, and groceries between 1899 and 1908, *the Lion Store* expanded and opened a separate furniture store. By 1913 the two men managed a



Home of Leo Wolf in Hammond (Lake County), owner of The Lion Store.

hundred thousand square foot store with 250 employees, 2 buses, and 10 wagons.⁸

H. Gershman was a local merchant, Samuel Isaac Levin owned a shoe store and repair shop, Maurice Rothschild co-owned *Rothschild-Hirsch Department Store* (formerly *The Model*), Peter Fox was a landscape architect who designed several parks in downtown.

Crown Point

Crown Point never had an organized congregation, but community members would meet for the high holidays on the second floor of a commercial building.

Meyer Winer owned *Winer Manufacturing*. Services would be held in his home. H.H. Levis opened a tobacco and cigar store in 1864. Morris Levine, born in Russia, opened *The Boston Store* in 1897 in Crown Point, but he lived in LaPorte.



Winer Manufacturing in Crown Point, Indiana (Lake County) owned by Meyer Winer, who also held services in his home before they moved to another building.

East Chicago-Indiana Harbor

Indiana Harbor and East Chicago, referred to as the “Twin Cities,” are located in the northwest corner of the county. The township’s geographic location played a vital role in the development of the area as a major industrial force. By 1880, eight railroad lines linked the area to Chicago and other urban centers and a series of canals connected Lake Michigan to the Grand Calumet River. This extensive transportation network, as well as large expanses of undeveloped land, proved attractive to a number of industries and soon the area experienced an industrial boom unparalleled in its history.

The East Chicago/Indiana Harbor area historically had two Jewish congregations named Beth Shalom and B'nai Israel. Neither congregation is in existence today. Congregation B'nai Israel was organized in 1910 with 25 members and had its own structure.⁹

The Block brothers (Joseph, Philip and Leopold) had a huge impact on the Indiana Harbor area with the establishment of the *Inland Steel Company* in 1893.¹⁰ Joseph Block, a Cincinnati industrialist, took advantage of incentives offered by the town of Chicago Heights, and with his son, Phillip, founded the *Inland Steel Company*. In 1897, Phillip purchased a bankrupt East Chicago manufacturing interest, and with that leverage, struck a deal for free land in Indiana Harbor. The Blocks asked for a guarantee of a harbor on the lakefront, a railroad line and housing for their workers. As labor demands increased, large numbers of foreign-born workers flocked to the city. Initially, many of the workers came from Western European countries such as Ireland and Germany.¹¹

Albert Given (1871-1941) was born in Poland. He founded a textile company. He often sponsored Eastern European Jews as they immigrated from Europe to East Chicago. Other stores included *Abramson's Men's Store*, *Bayless Luck Lady*, *Brozowsky's Cedar Department Store*, *Freignebaum's Men's Store*; *Solman Furniture*, *Albert Marcus Jewelers*, *Meirovich's Department Store*, *Simon Miller's Variety Store*, *Magdeman's Store for Men* *Pecar's Children Store*, and *Tarler Shoes*.

Munster

The Jewish congregations in Hammond and East Chicago have relocated to the Munster area. Also the Chabad (a form of Hassidic Judaism) of Northwest Indiana is located in Munster. The structures associated with these congregations are outside of the time frame of this study.

Whiting

The Orthodox B'nai Judah Congregation was founded in 1903, but it was not until 1910 that a building was built. By 1950, enough families were attending services, that a new building was needed. The congregation closed in 2003.



The Orthodox synagogue B'nai Judah in Whiting (Lake County). Note the blue Stars of David on the chimney.



The plaque that still remains on the synagogue in Whiting (Lake County).

In 1890, Nathan Migatz and Max Stiglitz opened *Cheap Mike's Place*, a clothing store. Later it became known as *The Hub Clothing*, although locally it was called *Migatz & Stiglitz*.¹³ One of the first Jews was a jeweler named David Nassau. His brother, Julius, then moved to Whiting to manage *the Royal and Palace Theatres*. Charles Pitzele from Austria-Hungary, opened his clothing store in 1896. Later, he opened *The New York Department Store*. By 1907, he had moved to East Chicago, Indiana to run *the Boston Clothing Store*.¹⁴ Sol Oppenheimer, founded *Oppenheimer Brothers* clothing store in 1891. Along with being involved in business, Sol also served as volunteer fire chief and Whiting town treasurer. By 1903, he had moved to Washington, D.C. Isaac Rosenberg, of Germany, owned a tailoring shop in town. He died after only two years in business; his son Henry then took over the shop. Joe Bernstein, from Russia, opened the *School House Store*, a grocery store. Barney Cohen opened a tavern in 1891 (*The Whiting Liquor House*). Abe Goldsmith opened the *Whiting Wholesale Liquor House*. By 1904, he added a retail portion to his business. Other saloon owners included Sam and Abe Cohen, O.S. Pitzele, Harry Gordon, Charles Goldstein, and Charles Pick. Aron Sugar started as a peddler, but by 1910 opened a bar. Abe Goldsmith opened Goldsmith's haberdashery. Robert Gordon started *R. Gordon & Sons* department store.

In 1915, Charles Perel established his law firm. During World War I, he served in the air corps and by 1924, was named commander of the American Legion Post 80. In 1926, he was appointed city attorney, then later as city judge. Abe Oberlander served as president of B'nai Judah for 35 years and was vice-president of the Jewish Federation of Northwest Indiana. He owned *Whiting Laundry*.

Harry Gordon of Lithuania came to the United States in 1882. He got a job at Standard Oil. He opened his first business, a liquor store, in 1897. After closing the bar, he opened *The Reliable* clothing store; by 1988 he opened his first *Gordon Store*. By 1906 he had also opened stores in Gary. He served as a trustee of the

congregation. Fred Gold opened a gas station in 1920. By 1924, his son Harry opened two other stations and several auto parts stores.

In the entire county, 49 properties were surveyed. One was determined to be outstanding, six were rated as Notable, 39 were rated as Contributing, and three were rated as Non-Contributing.

Footnotes

¹ William Frederick Howat, *A Standard History of Lake County, Indiana and the Calumet Region*, Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1915.

² Raymond A. Mohl and Neil Betten, *Steel City: Urban and Ethnic Patterns in Gary, Indiana, 1906 – 1950*, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1986 p. 172-173.

³ Thomas H. Cannon, *History of Lake County and Calumet Region of Indiana: Embracing the Counties of Lake, Porter, and La Porte*, Vol. II, Indianapolis, Indiana: Historians Association Publishers, 1927

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Howat.

⁷ Lance Trust, *Hammond: A Centennial Portrait*. Norfolk VA: Donning Company, Publishing, 1990.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Thomas H. Cannon, *History of Lake County and Calumet Region of Indiana: Embracing the Counties of Lake, Porter, and La Porte*, Vol. I, Indianapolis, Indiana: Historians Association Publishers, 1927, p. 526-527.

¹⁰ Cannon, *History Vol. I.*, 811.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 811.

¹² *Ibid.*, 526-527.

¹³ Daniel Levin, "Jewish Colony of Whiting," *Indiana Jewish History Publication No. 30*, (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Indiana Jewish Historical Society, 1994), 14.

¹⁴ Levin, 15.