

Austin Jewish Community Archive (AJCA)

Frequently Asked Questions

Is there really a need for an Austin Jewish Community Archive?

The Austin History Center, Austin Public Library (AHC), has long anticipated the need for



Temple Beth Israel, Co1281, Chalberg Collection of Prints and Negatives, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

an archive focused on the history of the Austin Jewish community. Although the AHC holds the family papers of Henry Hirschfeld, the first president of Congregation Beth Israel, the Center has few documents reflecting the rest of Austin's Jewish history. Those materials, where they exist, are scattered among the city's various Jewish institutions and families. How those materials are maintained is unknown. The recent floods in Houston destroyed many of that

community's historical materials, some dating back to the mid-1800s. The Archive would provide Austin's Jewish institutions and families a place to which their materials could be donated easily and maintained securely.

What would be the purpose of an Austin Jewish Community Archive?

The Archive would solicit, store, and organize historical materials for public use. Materials would be available for on-site examination in a secure environment. Materials would include donated papers, books, photographs, sound recordings, films, and other related material. The Archive would accept materials in any language. Although the Archive would have no documentary translation function, it may maintain a list of translation services that individual users could contact for assistance.

What would be the structure of an Austin Jewish Community Archive?

The Archive would be a public archive of materials donated by Austin-area Jewish institutions and individuals and others who have items that help tell the story of the Jewish community in Austin. The Archive would be housed and maintained by the Austin Public Library through its local history division, the Austin History Center. The Center is located at 810 Guadalupe Street with additional space at its next-door annex, the former Austin Central Public Library, and would serve as the institutional host for the project. A steering committee comprised of volunteer members of the Austin Jewish Community and staff from the AHC would provide advice, guidance and support to run the programmatic side of the project, such as oral histories, lectures and symposia, exhibits, and collection development.

How would an Austin Jewish Community Archive be developed?

The Archive would be developed through the cooperation of the Austin Jewish community and the AHC. A goal would include initial donations of historical materials to the Archive, as well as a program of ongoing donations of materials as their use shifts to historical preservation. At the same time, individual families would be encouraged to donate originals or copies of materials that have historical significance. Examples might include autobiographical materials about immigration to America, photographs of the commercial enterprises that were part of Austin's Jewish experience, and audio- or video-recorded interviews with Austin residents about their memories of the city and the experience of being Jewish in central Texas.

How would persons and organizations donate documents to the Archive, and what limits would be placed on their use?

Materials, when donated, would be accompanied by a Deed of Gift document reflecting transfer of ownership. Donors may place reasonable limits on the use of materials, including a time period before which the materials would not be subject to viewing by researchers. Any requested restrictions would need to be negotiated between the donor and AHC. The AHC would work with donors to obtain, if possible, the names of persons in

photographs and the approximate dates the photos were taken. The Archive would be available to students, scholars, and anyone in the community with an interest in Austin Jewish history, and researchers could review original materials and, unless restricted, obtain copies.

Who would own the documents given to the Austin Jewish Community Archive?

All donations to the Archive would become the property of the AHC, per the Deed of Gift document. The AHC does not have the resources to accept loans of items. However, subject to any restrictions placed on a donation by a donor, materials would be available for review, copy, and other fair use. Also, at the time of donation, donors can specify that the AJCA either return any unwanted items, such as materials falling outside of the collection scope or duplicates of previously donated items, or find a more suitable home for them



WWII Pilot trainer Harold Goldschlager, member of the Jewish War Veterans. AR.2007.007(034), Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

What services would an Austin Jewish Community Archive be able to provide to organizations that wish to begin their own archival programs?

One of the overarching goals of the Archive is to coordinate knowledge across the city of the history of Jewish life and culture in Austin and Central Texas. For those institutions that wish to retain and manage their own archives, the Archive hopes to provide a program to explain how an organization may gather and preserve materials for its own archival purposes but also develop ways to make some or all those materials available to the public. This could be through making copies available to the Archive for public access, or sharing indexes and access policies with the Archive to share with the public. Among other topics, that program would review solicitation of materials, preservation of documents, identification of storage materials, and the like.

What role, if any, would oral histories play in the development of an Austin Jewish Community Archive?

The Archive plans to include oral histories, and one of the initial efforts was to create an oral history committee to plan and implement an oral history program. Perhaps more importantly, the Archive hopes to provide training to any Austin Jewish institution to conduct its own oral history program.

What would be the source of an Austin Jewish Community Archive's materials and funds?

The AHC is committed to housing, preserving, and making accessible to the public all unrestricted materials donated to the Center. These functions will be part of the normal operations of the AHC, but also part of the timetables dictated by limited resources, including staff time. The AJCA can accept donations to help augment the work of AHC staff through the nonprofit Austin History Center Association (AHCA), the 501c3 support

group for the Center. Funds received by the AHCA for the Archive would help pay for archival storage materials, staff for indexing, copying, conservation, and public programs associated with the Archive.

What is a reasonable timeline for development of an Austin Jewish Community Archive?

The Center would hope to have a working consensus with the city's participating Jewish institutions by the end of 2019, but has already begun accepting donations of materials. The initial public community meeting will be held in November 2019. After the initial meeting, it is hoped that work on the project can shift from the initial planning committee to the steering committee in early 2020.



Henry Hirshfeld, PICBo4815, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library

How would an Austin Jewish Community Archive work with other existing archives?

The Center has relationships with other existing archives and would make the Archive part of its shared resources with other archives. So, if a scholar were to ask the Archive for help in learning more about Texas Jewish history, the Archive would share its own resources and would put the scholar in contact with the other archives for further help. There are also possibilities, especially in the digital world, to create cross-institutional projects, online portals, and other cooperative efforts.

What relation, if any, would exist between an Austin Jewish Community Archive and the University of Texas Schustermann Center?

The Schustermann Center is a valuable nationwide resource for the study of Jewish history. The Schustermann Center does not include an archive function. The Austin Jewish Archive would make its resources available to the Schustermann Center, its students, and its scholars. A representative of the Schustermann Center serves on the AJCA Steering Committee.

In what other Texas cities do unified Jewish archives exist?

A Houston Jewish Archive exists at Rice University. The program is quite successful and became even more highly valued when recent hurricanes and floods ruined many of the private archives at some of Houston's Jewish institutions. In addition, the Briscoe Center at the University of Texas has some Jewish historical archive materials through collecting efforts of the Texas Jewish Historical Society. Whether other Texas Jewish communities have operating archives will be a source of inquiry for the Austin Jewish Archive.

What scholarly function, if any, would an Austin Jewish Community Archive provide?

The Center has a long history of preparing and presenting scholarly materials, including public photographic and documentary exhibits. These exhibits are often accompanied by scholarly talks to which the public is invited without charge. In addition, having archives in a centrally located facility will improve ease of access for scholars who are studying Texas Jewish history.

If a person wanted to become involved as a volunteer with the Austin Jewish Archive, whom should they contact?

Questions may be directed to: ahc_reference@austintexas.gov

