

Congregation Shaarey Zedek's History

In 1861, at the beginning of the Civil War, seventeen followers of Traditional Judaism withdrew from the Beth El Society in Detroit to found the Shaarey Zedek Society. Then, in 1877 the membership constructed the first building in the Detroit area to be erected specifically as a synagogue, at Congress and St. Antoine.



Congress and St. Antoine – 1877 to 1903



Dedication of CSZ plaque located at site of Congress & St. Antoine:
Judy Cantor and Rabbi Irwin Groner

The membership continued to grow, and in 1913, as the first Conservative Jewish Congregation in the Detroit area, Congregation Shaarey Zedek became one of the founding congregations of the United Synagogue of America. Since the nineteenth century, members of the congregation have played leading roles in Michigan, the nation and in world Jewry.



Left to Right: Cantor Sidney Rube, U.S. Senator Carl Levin, Cantor Chaim Najman, Harold Berry, Harvey Weisberg, Louis Berry, Rabbi Irwin Groner, Honorable Avern Cohn, William Davidson, David Hermelin



Rabbi Morris Adler with Governor George Romney and Max Fisher



Rabbi Irwin Groner with Israel Prime Minister Menachem Begin – c.1974

Over the years, Congregation Shaarey Zedek has been located in a number of beautiful and picturesque buildings. These include Winder between St. Antoine and Beaubien Streets, Willis Street E and Brush, and Chicago Boulevard and Lawton, which is still standing.



Shaarey Zedek's Home from 1905 to 1913
The Winder Street Synagogue



1925

DETROIT ALONG NORTHWESTERN HIGHWAY IN SOUTHFIELD TOWNSHIP WERE Congregation Shaarey Zedek, with its concrete and stained-glass apex jutting dramatically heavenward. The name translates to "gates of righteousness" or "gates of justice" from the Hebrew. Built in 1925 by Percival Goodwin, the synagogue is an architectural marvel of mid-century style, but it's only the latest of seven buildings for Detroit's oldest Conservative Jewish congregation, which began in 1861. Its first building was at Congress and St. Antoine, in downtown Detroit. Other locations followed, including this neoclassical- and Romanesque-influenced building at Willis and Brush. At the time of this circa-1925 photo, just a few more years remained before another move, to temporary quarters in 1926, and then to Chicago Boulevard and Lawton, which would be Shaarey Zedek's home from 1927-1962. In a sense, there are actually eight buildings in the congregation's history. In the early '60s, a merger with B'nai Israel created the Shaarey Zedek B'nai Israel Center in West Bloomfield township. — Gary Balanda



Moving Torahs to Chicago Boulevard – c.1932
Middle to Right: President A. Louis Gordon, Chancellor Lewis Finkelstein of JTS,
Rabbi Abraham Hershman

At the 100th annual meeting of the Congregation on April 12, 1961, more than 700 members approved the recommendation from the Board of Directors that a new synagogue be built on a forty-acre site in Southfield, where our congregation is presently located.



Groundbreaking ceremony – Bell Road – 1961
At the podium: Building Chairman Mandell “Bill” Berman.







Moving the Torahs from Chicago Blvd. to Bell Road – 1962

Throughout its history, CSZ has a rich tradition of bringing together the community for the celebration of Jewish holidays, educational pursuits, as well as life cycle events.



Rabbi Irwin Groner with Russian immigrants in Sukkah at Bell Road – c.1980



Rosh Hashanah – Cantor Sidney Rube with Shofar, and Cantor Frankel looking on.



Rabbi Morris Adler with Eleanor Roosevelt at Israel Bond event – 1956



Students attending CSZ Religious School on Seven Mile Rd. – 1950s



Rabbi Irwin Groner with Brian Hermelin at his Bar Mitzvah - 1978

CSZ has maintained active Sisterhood and Men's Club groups for many years.



Sisterhood with Eleanor Roosevelt – 1956



Men's Club at Traverse City retreat - 1956

Recently, the synagogue's leadership initiated a strategic planning process that will take Congregation Shaarey Zedek into the future with a clear mission and vision of our growth and development for generations to come.