

LILLIAN AND ALBERT SMALL CAPITAL JEWISH MUSEUM

Lillian and Albert Small Capital Jewish Museum Collection Overview

The Lillian and Albert Small Capital Jewish Museum's collection is composed of historic artifacts, personal and family papers, as well as archival documents and photographs that provide a rich, multifaceted glimpse into Jewish life in Washington DC, suburban Maryland, and Northern Virginia from the 1850s to the present day. It is a collection which reflects a history that is at once local, national, and international. The collection—a valuable tool for researchers and a strong foundation for the Museum's exhibitions— includes more than 24,000 digital and print photographs, 1,050 objects, and 800 linear feet of archival materials, including personal papers and business and organizational records.

Highlights from the collection focus on the intersection of Jewish and democratic life in the nation's capital. They include a matchbox signed by President Jimmy Carter, used to light the first National Menorah in 1977; the seder plate and Haggadah used by the Obama family and staff in the White House; a mezuzah from Congressman Jamie Raskin's Capitol Hill office; tribute messages and drawings on Post-it notes from mourners attending a vigil at the Supreme Court upon Ruth Bader Ginsburg's death; and nearly 80 years of institutional archival material from the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (formerly the Jewish Community Council). In Spring 2025, the Museum committed to building out the sizeable collection related to the federal workforce in recognition that the growth of the region's Jewish population is inextricably linked to the growth of the federal workforce.

Much of the collection focuses on activism in its various forms, including the photographs and personal documents of disability rights activist and federal employee, Judith Heumann; a Soviet Jewry collection featuring personal and professional papers, photos, and artifacts, documenting the local Jewish community's commitment to the movement from 1963 to 1990; and a sign (and corresponding photograph) reading "This is the Moment I Trained for in Hebrew School" from a rally in 2017 against a Muslim travel ban.

The collection also includes artifacts, ritual objects, and documents pertaining to Jewish religious and cultural life: the 1968 model of the historic Adas Israel synagogue, built to fundraise for the conservation of the historic structure; a large window from the former Hebrew Home for the Aged depicting the Star of David (ca. 1951); a Sephardic Torah brought over from Turkey by a local family in the 20th century; and the 1898 *ner tamid* (eternal light) from Washington Hebrew Congregation's Eight Street temple, now restored, modernized for electric light, and installed in the Museum's historic sanctuary. We also hold a strong collection of signs and ephemera representing Jewish-owned and operated businesses, including the vast and detailed collection of local grocery retailer, Giant Food, from the company's founding in the Depression through the early 2000s, and the iconic "Bagelman" business sign from Bethesda Bagel's former location in Dupont Circle.

Recent acquisitions include a 17th-century family Bible from one of the earliest Jewish families to settle in the United States; the business archive of Kar-Ben Publishing, one of the world's largest publishers of Jewish-themed children's books; a century of historical records for the Woodmont Country Club, a predominantly Jewish-owned and supported club; ephemera and artifacts from the rallies of 2023-24

pertaining to the Israeli-Hamas conflict; and paper materials and Judaica made by the late local Jewish artist Gary Rosenthal.

Another notable collecting initiative features materials related to LGBTQ+ Jewish history in Greater Washington. Examples include the papers of Holocaust survivor Evelyn Beck, instrumental in the then-emerging field of Women's Studies at the University of Maryland and a mainstay of local lesbian and feminist groups; the David Green Collection, documenting the life and work of the early AIDS educator and activist; dozens of recent oral histories produced in collaboration with the Rainbow History Project; the archive of Bet Mishpachah—the nation's fourth LGBTQ+ synagogue; and records from various other synagogues that reflect their efforts to be more inclusive in their ritual practices. Selections from this effort deeply inform the Museum's landmark exhibition *LGBTJews in the Federal City* (May 2025-Jan 2026).

Accessing the Collection

The collection is accessible by appointment to scholars, genealogists, students, and other researchers. The Museum has digitized nearly 9,500 unique items from our collection, and more than 1,800 additional catalog records have been made accessible within the last year via our online collections search. With the recent purchase of advanced scanners, dozens of unscanned film negatives, panoramic print photographs, cookbooks, and scrapbooks were recently processed and seen for the first time, some in over a century. Ongoing efforts to digitize the collection and add image descriptions to catalog records will continue, with a significant effort to put expanded catalog records online.

Support

Generous support to preserve the Capital Jewish Museum's collection is provided by the Stuart and Martha Bindeman Charitable Trust; Lynn and John Sachs and Susan Sachs Goldman; the Isadore and Bertha Gudelsky Foundation; Wilma Probst Levy and Louis Levy; Edith Chidakel Pascal and Charles M. Pascal; and Jeffrey and Christie-Anne Weiss.

About the Capital Jewish Museum

The Lillian and Albert Small Capital Jewish Museum explores the Jewish experience in the national capital region, inspiring visitors to connect personally and collectively, reflect on the relevance of the past to today, and act on behalf of their values and communities. The new Museum opened to the public on June 9, 2023, with thought-provoking exhibitions, lively programming, and creative public experiences. Learn more about the Museum at capitaljewishmuseum.org.

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