

Mount Sinai Congregation Texarkana, TX

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This modernist confection, built in 1948, was a model for at least one other synagogue. A committee from Port Arthur made several trips to study it before building a near replica a few years later. The articulation of parts in an obvious and diagrammatic way is clearly different from the pre-war models such as San Angelo or Baytown.



The Jewish community in Texarkana was already well-established by the last quarter of the 19th century. A wooden synagogue was built early in this century and a more substantial social hall somewhat later.



Except for the cornerstones embedded in the new building no trace remains of the earlier structures which were demolished in the early '50's.



This line drawing of the Ehrlich social hall appeared in the 50th Anniversary Ad Book in 1935 along with the history, a list of notable members, and a celebratory program featuring Yetta Wexler, pianist.



Miss Wexler was a prodigy from a family of prodigies. The Wexlers had come from Russia a few years before and despite hardships and obstacles encountered by any greenhorn, they quickly demonstrated in their several ways outstanding ability and talent. Max Wexler, Yetta's brother, remained in Texarkana, achieved business and civic prominence, and was a leader of the Jewish community for many years.

The area around Central School was an incubator for Jewish absorption. Most eventually operated small along Broad St. The Feinberg family operated the Savoy Hotel. Although a few attained "memberships" in local cafe society, most Jews regardless of economic status kept a low profile. Although there was almost no overt anti-Semitism, the country club remained off-limits to Jews until recently.

After the ignominious economic collapse of Jefferson, Texas, the reform Germans who founded the Jewish community there, dispersed to surrounding towns in Northeast Texas. Texarkana, however, was made up largely of Russian and Polish Jews, with a few notable exceptions such as Judge Louis Joseph.

Despite the majority's Orthodox antecedents, religious observance tended, as in most small towns in the South, toward Reform. When there were exceptions, they were accommodated gracefully. Leo Walkow, like his brothers in Seattle and Houston, did much to bring traditional Judaism to Texarkana and strongly influenced the generation educated in the late '50's. The Jewish community from the very beginning set an example of *tzedakah* charitable giving, which spread to the entire town.



The Grim Hotel, once a favored spot for local simchas, is now boarded up, and the Holiday Bowl provides almost the only live entertainment on State Line Avenue these days.

