

Howard County History

Kokomo, the county seat of Howard County, was laid out in 1844. The Wabash and Erie Canal brought an economic boom to the county. Most of the settlers were farmers, with a great many of them being Quakers. Like many of the other counties in this area of Indiana, natural gas was found in 1886, leading to another economic growth.¹

While as early as 1845 Samuel Rosenthal settled and opened a store, the Jewish population never boomed and became a community until the twentieth century. At this time, Jews became members of the large community and eventually came together to promote their Jewish life.

By the early 1920s and 1930s, enough Jews were living in the city to establish organizations associated with the community. In 1930, the women of the congregation established the Jewish Ladies Aid Society, affiliated with the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods since 1931. The Sisterhood is still active within the Temple. The Men's association, the B'nai B'rith, was active within Kokomo until the 1970s.

It was not until 1942 that the community was able to support the building of a synagogue, when the congregation built Temple B'nai Israel. After 50 years of service to the Jewish population of Kokomo, the Temple B'nai Israel remains the center of activity for the small community.

The leader of the movement to construct the temple was Max Gerber, founder of *Gerber Plumbing Products*. Other leaders of the Jewish community include Milton Kraus (1866-1942), who served as United States Representative from Indiana's 11th District from 1917 - 1923. He attended law school at the University of

Michigan at Ann Arbor. He was admitted to the bar in 1887 and practiced in Peru, Indiana. He organized a company of volunteers for the Spanish-American War. After serving in Congress, he resumed his manufacturing activities. He died in Wabash in 1942.² Another man, Misch Kohn was born in 1916 to Russian emigrants. He studied art at the John Herron Art Institute in Indianapolis. He was a fine art painter and a renowned printmaker. He moved to Chicago in 1939.³ Some of his works can be found at the Kokomo Public Library and at Indiana University Kokomo. He died in 2003.



Tiger, by Misch Kohn, found at the Kokomo Public Library

Footnotes

¹ Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, Howard County Interim Report (Indianapolis: Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, 2003), xii-xiii.

² United States Congress, Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=K000323> (accessed September 19, 2006).

³ Annex Galleries, Misch Kohn 1916-2003 Biography, http://www.annexgalleries.com/artists/Misch_Kohn.html (accessed September 19, 2006).