



Haven in Manila: Cantor Joseph Cysner's Escape from the Holocaust

SDSU Library Addition, 24/7 Hallway
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Sponsored by the Jewish Historical Society of San Diego, the
SDSU History Department, the SDSU Jewish Studies program,
and Special Collections & University Archives



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An exhibit of photographs, ephemera, and documents from the **Collection of Cantor Joseph Cysner** regarding his life in Manila, The Philippines during World War II, will be on display from November 1st to January 30th, on the second floor of the Library Addition, in the 24/7 Area hallway, which is open to the public all day. The exhibit is in conjunction with the film, *An Open Door, Holocaust Haven in the Philippines*, to be shown on campus on November 9th.

The collection was assembled by a cantor who had an extraordinary, but brief life.

Cantor Cysner was born in 1912 in Bamberg, Germany. He graduated from the Teacher's College in Wurzburg, Germany in 1933 and in 1937 he was granted a life contract to the Hamburg Temple, the first permanent Reform synagogue and one of the rare Jewish edifices not destroyed during Kristallnacht. Unfortunately, within the year he was deported to Zbaszyn, a detention site on the Polish border with Germany, where he performed as a cantor and taught music to the other prisoners.

He was allowed to leave in 1939 when he was granted a position at Temple Emil in Manila, The Philippines. He served that congregation and taught music at De La Salle College and Centro Escolar University. In Manila, he performed regularly on the radio and gave concerts for the president of the Philippines.

When the Japanese invaded, he was imprisoned in Santo Tomas Internment Camp for eight months and then conditionally released, forced to wear an armband and always under scrutiny. His house was burned by the retreating Japanese and many of his books and manuscripts were lost. The synagogue was also burned and Cantor Cysner then conducted services for the US Armed Forces in the Philippines. Thousands attended his Kol Nidre Service in Rizal Stadium in 1945.

After the war, he came to San Francisco and served Temple Sherith Israel from 1946-1949. His last appointment was at Tifereth Israel Synagogue in San Diego where he remained until his death in 1961.

His collection resides at the Jewish Historical Society of San Diego Archives in the Jewish Studies Reading Room at SDSU's Love Library. It consists of materials from his internment at Zbaszyn, including a diary; from his time as a cantor and teacher in Manila and from his internment at Santo Tomas. There are also materials from his cantorial work in San Francisco and San Diego. The collection includes music he composed, photos, and artifacts. Much of the material is one-of-a-kind and not available from any other source.