

THE BAPTISTRY AT ST. JAMES' CATHEDRAL

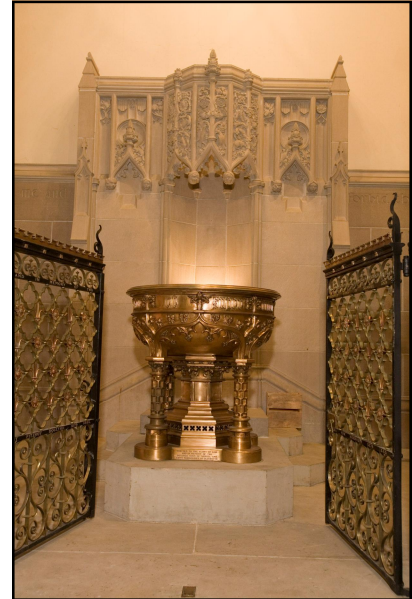
Donated by Samuel and Edith Nordheimer

Reading The Cathedral Church of St. James

Knowing symbols shown and what they represent adds immeasurably to the interest of any visit and the meaning of any liturgy. But so also do the stories behind architectural details, furnishings, carvings and windows of the Cathedral. So we were pleased when Dr. Kenneth Wyman came into the Archives and Museum recently to complete further research on his ancestor, Samuel Nordheimer, for a paper he was preparing for publication.

Who was Samuel Nordheimer?

The names of Samuel and Edith Nordheimer are inscribed on the gates into the baptistry on the east side of the nave. The gates were presented in memory of their two young sons who died of diphtheria within four days of each other in 1885. The mid-east porch was converted into the baptistry in 1891. The font, cast in bell metal, is large enough for infant immersion.



The inscription refers to their home, "Glen Edythe" - we know that the home was situated on 25 acres of land at the top of Davenport Hill immediately to the west of Poplar Plains Road. But we have known little about Samuel himself until Dr. Wyman shared his research.

The Nordheimer Family

Samuel Nordheimer and his brother Abraham were born into a large and religiously observant Jewish family living in modest economic circumstances in the village of Memmelsdorf in Bavaria. They emigrated to New York City in 1839 amongst the first wave of German Jewish immigrants to the United States. Samuel was only 15 at the time, and in contrast to the vast majority of the immigrants, the two brothers moved to Canada - first to Kingston, and then to Toronto - in 1844. They set up the A. and S. Norheimer Music Store. It flourished from the outset and played a leading role in the development of the early music industry in Canada. Abraham was a talented violinist and the brothers sponsored internationally famous musicians to perform here, including Jenny Lind. When Abraham returned to Europe in 1860, Samuel took his place as head of the firm until his death in 1912, but unlike his brother, he was not active in the Jewish community in Toronto. In the 1861 census, he is not listed as Jewish by affiliation, and in the census of 1871 he is listed as Lutheran/evangelical.

Samuel Nordheimer became an adherent of the Anglican faith on his marriage to Edith Boulton in St. James' Cathedral in 1871. They had eleven children, all of whom were baptized at St. James' and raised in the Anglican faith.

The Nordheimers in the community

The Nordheimers built Glen Edythe in 1872 and resided there until their deaths in June and November, 1912. It was a 35-room mansion with a staff of 12 servants! In addition to the music business, Samuel Nordheimer was President of the Federal Bank, a Director of Confederation Life, on the Board of the Toronto General Trusts, a Director of the Canada Permanent, President of the Toronto Philharmonic Society, and in 1887 Kaiser Wilhelm I appointed him Consul for the German Government in Ontario. His funeral in the Cathedral was presided over by the Bishop. The brass cross on The Lady Altar was presented to the Cathedral in the memory of Samuel and Edith by Samuel's nephew, Albert Nordheimer, who served as Chair of the Cathedral's Music Committee for close to 50 years.

Enquiries about the Nordheimer baptistry and cross may be addressed to the Cathedral Archives and Museum at 416-364-7865 ext 233.