

TO OUR READERS...

We are pleased to welcome and acknowledge the good work of this journal's new managing editor, Dr. Dana Herman. Dr. Herman recently received her doctorate in history from McGill University, and joined the administration of The Marcus Center in August 2008. In addition to her editorial responsibilities, Dr. Herman will also serve as the American Jewish Archives' Senior Research Associate. This current edition of our journal has been guided into publication by Dr. Herman, and we are confident that this historic journal—now in its seventh decade of continuous publication—will grow from strength to strength under her diligent supervision.

Long ago, Jews adopted the cornucopia as a symbol of bounty. Numismatists remind us that Judean coins were emblazoned with cornucopias during the Hasmonean period, and the image of a rich and colorful assortment of fruits tumbling out of a ram's horn—based on an ancient Greek legend—has endured as a popular Jewish symbol. For Americans, the cornucopia is a powerful symbol as well, and evokes warm associations connected to the Thanksgiving holiday. In December 1621, the Pilgrims of Jamestown resolved to convey their gratitude for a bountiful harvest. They instinctively turned to the twenty-third chapter of the Book of Leviticus, where they were taught that the children of Israel observed Sukkot, the festival of Tabernacles. The Pilgrims who had come to a Promised Land of their own identified with the biblical Hebrews. "When you have gathered in the fruit of the land," the Scriptures enjoined, "rejoice before the Lord your God." For American Jews, the Thanksgiving cornucopia engenders thoughts of their Sukkot holiday.¹

This edition of our journal—the last in a series of double issues—is a veritable cornucopia of satisfyingly delicious historical fare. Although the individual articles do not relate to a common theme, they present themselves in this issue as a colorful banquet of lessons about the American Jewish experience. Those who read this journal from cover to cover will see that we are still fulfilling the promise that our founding editor offered sixty years ago: The journal of the American Jewish Archives continues to provide "the interested public and co-workers in the field of American history" with essays of "calibre."²

Comparative or cross-national history refers to a methodological approach that follows topics across national boundaries. Prominent American historians such as Barrington Moore (1913–2005) and Herbert E. Bolton (1870–1953)

produced groundbreaking studies using this approach. They argued that historians who restrict their analysis to the traditional “national approach” view the past myopically. In recent years, several Jewish historians have used cross-national methodology to enhance our understanding of the American Jewish past.³

Theorists of comparative history assert that there are many benefits to this methodology. In particular, the approach “casts into relief facets of national experiences that specialists have taken for granted.”⁴ The two essays featured in this issue, authors of which have both been fellows at The Marcus Center, lend support to this contention. Sonja L. Mekel provides a fine interpretive analysis of how America, and Jewish life in the United States, was depicted in the pages of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, one of the most important Jewish newspapers in central Europe. Focusing most of her attention on coverage that took place during the nineteenth century, Mekel shows that the readers of the *Allgemeine Zeitung* were exposed to an America that served as a touchstone for a modern enlightened republic. At the same time, she points out the high regard the newspaper held for American Jewry, and the *Allgemeine Zeitung*’s assertion that, “in the final analysis, the majority of American Jews had proved to be defenders of the best the United States embodied.”⁵

In his pioneering essay on the work of Canadian Jewish chaplains during World War II, Richard Menkis offers readers an opportunity to compare the work of these chaplains to the much more elaborately documented history of their American Jewish counterparts. Menkis properly laments the “general neglect of Canadian Jewry in Jewish historiography,” and his article opens a window on the role Canadian Jewish chaplains and, to some degree, Canadian Jewish soldiers played in the reconstruction of Jewish communal life in the Netherlands after World War II. He also demonstrates how these reconstruction efforts influenced Canadian Jewry itself during the postwar years. The interesting work of the Canadian Jewish chaplains is likely to inspire scholars to compare and contrast the work done by Americans, Canadians, and the citizens of the Yishuv in the aftermath of the destruction of European Jewry. As Menkis aptly concludes, this is a “story that needs telling to broaden and deepen our understanding of the various impacts of the Holocaust, on both the Jews...in Europe and the Jews farther away...”⁶

A few years ago, Michael Sparks, a music equipment technician from Nashville was browsing for collectibles at a local thrift shop when he noticed

a yellowed, shellacked, rolled-up document sitting on a shelf. He asked the clerk to quote a price and was told he could own the item for \$2.48 plus tax. Sparks made a handsome profit on his investment when he sold what turned out to be an “official copy” of the Declaration of Independence—one of two hundred commissioned by John Quincy Adams in 1820 when he was secretary of state—for \$477,650!¹⁷ As unbelievable as it may seem, the unanticipated discovery (or rediscovery) of a valuable historical document is actually a more common occurrence than we might assume. The two documents featured in this edition of the journal substantiate this claim.

The American Jewish Archives, as well as future historians, owe Robert Schine a debt of gratitude for the outstanding work he has done on the minutes book (*pinkas*) of the Jewish congregation in Poultney, Vermont. History aficionados will smile when they read how this significant document resurfaced. Schine was searching for documents that illuminated the history of Jewish life in Vermont. He contacted the AJA with a general inquiry and was stunned to learn that the archives owned the Poultney minutes book—the oldest document of Jewish communal life in the state of Vermont! It had slept in peaceful anonymity among our holdings for nearly fifty years.

Alumni of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion should take special pride when they read Schine’s essay on the Poultney *pinkas*. Over the past sixty years, the AJA’s large and incomparably rich holdings have, to a great degree, been assembled with the help of HUC-JIR alumni. In this particular instance, it was a young Rabbi Joseph Goldman (Cincinnati 1959) who stumbled upon this minutes book in an antique shop while serving his first pulpit in Denver, Colorado. He purchased and donated the document to the AJA, where it was kept until Dr. Schine began his search. The *pinkas* may not be worth a half million dollars, but American Jewish historians will treasure it just the same now that Shine has made such a fine translation and annotation available.

The second essay in the documentary analysis section comes from the papers of Rabbi William B. Silverman, which were donated to the AJA in 2006 under the auspices of an HUC rabbinical alumnus, David Meyer. On 16 March 1958, a group of antisegregation vigilantes took responsibility for bombing the Nashville Jewish Community Center. Two weeks later Silverman, who was then serving as the rabbi of Nashville’s Congregation Ohabai Sholom, delivered a blistering and defiant response in the face of vigilante violence. He

called on his people to stand their ground and to live in accordance with the ethical dictates of their noble heritage: “We will not yield to evil,” the rabbi thundered, “we will not capitulate to fear.” This moving sermon, enhanced by Meyer’s informative annotations, will contribute to the growing body of historical research on the daunting struggles southern Jews faced during the Civil Rights era of the 1950s and 1960s.

In closing, the editors note that we are indeed making good on our recent pledge to catch up on our delinquent issues and thereafter to issue our journal semiannually and in a timely fashion. Readers may expect to receive Volume LXI, number 1 (2009)—on schedule—in July 2009. Over the past sixty years, *The American Jewish Archives Journal* has published approximately 325 scholarly essays on the history of American Jewry. By any reckoning, this fact alone entitles the journal to think of itself as a historical “horn of plenty.”

G.P.Z.

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Notes

¹Leviticus 23:39–40.

²Jacob Rader Marcus, “The Program of the American Jewish Archives,” in *The Dynamics of American Jewish History: Jacob Rader Marcus’s Essays on American Jewry*, ed. Gary P. Zola (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 115.

³For example, see Steven J. Zipperstein, “American Jews and the European Gaze,” *American Jewish History* 91, nos. 3/4 (September and December 2003): 379–386; David Sorkin, “Port Jews and the Three Regions of Emancipation,” *Jewish Culture and History* 4 (2001): 31–46.

⁴Deborah Cohen and Maura O’Connor, *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (New York: Routledge Press, 2004), xvi.

⁵See Mekel, “Salvation,” 10.

⁶See Menkis, “But You Can’t See the Fear that People Lived Through,” 44.

⁷“Declaration copy nabs \$477K,” *USA Today* (24 March 2007), accessed on 1 February 2009 at http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-03-23-rare-document_N.htm.