

# After Five Years

In the winter of 1947, Nelson Glueck, president of the Hebrew Union College, called me in and suggested that we create the American Jewish Archives.

The times were ripe. We had already made American Jewish history a required course on the College campus, and the College library owned a modest collection of manuscripts touching on American life. The Second World War had just come to a close, and European Jewry, almost annihilated, was no longer of importance in the intellectual economy of world Jewry. If there was to be a new spiritual center for Jews it would, at least for this century, be here on this continent. The Jews of this land were, if only by default, called upon to assume world Jewish leadership. It was important that this young and vigorous Jewish community here be conscious of its past. Because this land had been spared the ravages of war, many of its documents, its papers, and much of its "history" were still available. Here was a chance to write Jewish history while it was still being made! We went to work.

Now after five years we have stopped to catch our breath and to take inventory. Much of what we have acquired is recorded in the acquisition lists of our magazine, the *American Jewish Archives*. We have a large building, good equipment and, what is far more important, a loyal, hard-working, interested staff. (Money? The Lord will provide!) There are large collections of pictures of distinguished Jews of the last three centuries, hundreds of volumes of congregational and societal minutes, and the excellent Kraus-Nathan corpus of genealogical notes. A West India and South America expedition of the American Jewish Archives recently brought back copies of much of the Jewish historical material still available in Jamaica, Curacao, Surinam, Barbados, and the Virgin Islands. This important body of papers, throwing light on the nursery of early American Jewry, is being supplemented by microfilm copies of the records in the archives of the colonial powers which first settled the Americas. The correspondence and memoranda of Jacob H. Schiff, Louis H. Marshall, and Felix M. Warburg, which we now possess, are indispensable for the student of the early twentieth-century American Jewish community. Future historians of the Reform movement in Judaism need only

turn to our numerous files on David Philipson, Moses J. Grics, William Rosenau, and other notables. The contemporary scene is reflected in the correspondence of Frank L. Weil. Exhibitions of a popular nature have been dispatched to all parts of the land.

But the "physical properties" which we acquired were only a beginning, only tools to help us build. We are, we hope, creating a "school" of American Jewish history. Students, aided by material and advice from us, are writing their dissertations in the field of American Jewish history, and publishing their findings in the *American Jewish Archives*. Throughout the country, in the universities and in the rooms of students and scholars, we have sought—and not without success—to further the knowledge of American Jewish history as a part of the larger America and of the even larger and older "Israel."

We would like to preen ourselves on the flattering thought that, to some degree at least, we are making Jews conscious of their history in this land, that we are making them aware of the part which they have played these last three hundred years. We will consider it an even greater achievement if we can induce some not only to reflect on their past, but to become intelligently conscious of their future as Jews and as Americans. This is our hope. Because of what Nelson Glueck has already done to make this hope a possibility, we dedicate to him this issue of the *American Jewish Archives*.



*Photo by Harris & Ewing*

NELSON GLUECK

FOUNDER OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES