

After Twenty-Five Years . . .

Self-congratulation would not be in order. It is true that the American Jewish Archives has grown prodigiously since its founding in 1947—but this is hardly surprising. The groves of academe in general, and those of Jewish academe in particular, have flourished and proliferated since World War II. It would have been remarkable had the Archives *not* grown, mirroring as it does the largest and—at least in secular terms—the most energetic community in the Jewish diaspora.

No one doubts the growth. No one doubts its present and potential value. A vexing question persists even so. How much of what has been accomplished—not only at the Archives but in Jewish academia generally—deserves to be seen as more than quantitative? How much of it has been exploited with passion and imagination to foster the growth of a Jewish spirituality?

Such questions, it may be, are not legitimate for the twenty-fifth anniversary of an academic enterprise. *Alle Anfaenge sind schwer*—to begin even quantitatively is hard enough, and perhaps quantitative factors do need to be given priority at first. Still, one cannot help thinking, what historian has even attempted to achieve for the unfolding of twentieth-century American Jewish life what the novelist Charles Angoff has been at pains to do in his multivolume Polonsky saga? Does this say nothing about American Jewish historiography? But let us not wait with bated breath for a historical effort of Angoffian proportions. How long will it be before an authoritative *one*-volume history of the American Jewish experience becomes available?

Twenty-five years of activity have heaped up some four million pages of data at the Archives—not to mention a long and quite impressive list of essays, studies, bibliographies, and indices. But, as Ludwig Lewisohn once wrote, “Not what you do matters, but what your soul makes of the thing you do.” The soul? Is there within Jewish academia something historians—or anyone else—might recognize as a soul? Maybe the next twenty-five years of the American Jewish Archives will see a positive answer to that question.

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