

After Twenty-Five Volumes

The first issue of the *American Jewish Archives* was published in June, 1948; with this issue of April, 1974, we begin our twenty-sixth volume.

The birth of the American Jewish Archives in 1947 and of its journal a year later is no quirk of history. The rise of this national depository for the documentation of American Jewish life and the appearance of its semiannual journal reflect the hegemony which the United States exercises in world affairs and which American Jewry exerts on World Jewry. By 1948, the Jews of the United States had become the dominant force on the world Jewish scene; the State of Israel was, in June, 1948, an infant less than one month old. The North American Jewish community was virtually absolute in its centrality for all other Jewries—politically, economically, philanthropically, and culturally. Even in its religious institutions and its scientific, critical work in Jewish scholarship, it had few rivals.

American Jews were conscious of their hegemonic role as early as the second decade of the twentieth century; World War I brought intimations of European Jewish mortality, and after the Holocaust of the 1940's, with the annihilation of European Jewry, American Jewish leadership was an unchallenged reality. The Jews here began to understand their responsibility; this continent sheltered the greatest assemblage of Jews the world had yet known. Their destiny was manifest. Aware—self-consciously—of the burden of leadership that history had thrown upon his community, the American Jew turned inward and backward, studying his American roots that he might the better prepare himself for the future that challenged him. This sense of Jewish identity, submerged for a generation in the effort toward Americanization, came to the surface after the Hitlerian devastation of European Jewry and the subsequent rise of Israel, the third Jewish commonwealth.

What has happened in American Jewish historical studies since 1948? The changes have been vast. The interest aroused during the tercentennial celebration of American Jewish communal beginnings at New Amsterdam in 1654 has eventuated in an American Jewish historiography which is now a scientific discipline and has begun to produce works of quality. In addition to the national depositories,

the American Jewish Archives and the American Jewish Historical Society, numerous smaller American Jewish associations have developed for the study of city, state, and regional Jewish communities and are now publishing their own magazines. There are literally hundreds of colleges which now have Jewish academic programs, and in some of them American Jewish history is being taught methodologically and critically. Many books on American Jewish life and thought have appeared in the last twenty-five years, and an increasing number of them carry the stamp of careful scholarship. A new generation of college and university students is turning, albeit slowly, to the study of American Jewry as an interesting and significant segment of the national past; the phenomenon reflects an interest in ethnic studies undoubtedly heightened by the devotion of the Blacks to their own history.

It is not farfetched to suggest that in the next generation, by the year 2,000, American Jewish historiography will have become a recognized, well-established discipline in colleges with a large Jewish enrollment, especially those of the megalopolises which hug the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. If this prediction is a correct one, then there is every reason to expect that this emergent cultural pluralism will produce notable works which cannot fail to throw light on the general history of the American people.

J. R. M.

LOAN EXHIBITS

Sixty-three exhibit items dealing, for the most part, with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The American Jewish Archives will be pleased to make these exhibit items available on loan, free of charge, for a two week period, to any institution in the United States or Canada. A selection of twenty to thirty items make an adequate exhibit. The only expense involved is the cost of return postage.

Inquiries should be addressed to the Director of the American Jewish Archives, Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45220.