

To Our Readers...

This issue marks the fiftieth anniversary of the *American Jewish Archives Journal* (AJAJ) and, quite properly, we note this milestone by offering our readers three in-depth reflections on the scholarly achievements of this publication's founding editor: Jacob Rader Marcus (ברוך). In light of his legendary productivity—both the quantity and the quality of his academic achievements—it seems quite likely that Dr. Marcus's life and work will continue to provoke comment and thoughtful reflection in the years ahead. Like those who have provided us with biographical studies on the lives of other American Jewish scholars of the twentieth century, it seems probable that Marcus's life, too, will one day merit a full-scale biographical analysis. The three interpretive essays published herein will undoubtedly benefit those who will strive to provide us with a comprehensive history of Marcus's life and career.

We are simultaneously celebrating Marcus's generative contributions as the founding editor of this journal. When the first issue appeared back in 1948, Dr. Marcus described the new publication as a "semi-annual bulletin" that would provide readers with a listing of the recent acquisitions of the American Jewish Archives (AJA). To get a sense of the explosive rate of growth the AJA's collection experienced during its incipency, one needs merely to skim through the "Acquisitions" sections that appeared in the journal's first several issues. Yet the editor also promised his readers that "at least one article of scientific calibre" would appear in each issue. As a down payment on this commitment, Marcus published Bertram W. Korn's often cited essay entitled "Jewish Chaplains During the Civil War." Like so many of the articles that this journal has published over the past half century, Korn's essay has not tarnished with time. The AJAJ has made good on the founding editor's pledge that every issue contain at least one scholarly article. Indeed, most of the volumes carried two, three, and sometimes four articles, many using the ever-growing holdings of the American Jewish Archives. In fact, over the course of fifty years this journal has published more than 150 articles of "scientific calibre" (to use Marcus's language), and considered as a whole, many of these articles were ground-breaking studies that have touched upon practically every aspect of the American Jewish experience.

The journal's distinctive practice of publishing historical documents began with the appearance of the second issue. In the appendixes to his own article entitled "Light on Early Connecticut Jewry," Marcus published several letters that had been written during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. These letters served as the metaphoric building blocks with which Marcus assembled his article. Other authors who published in the journal during those early years followed suit. In 1951, the *AJAJ* published its first annotated document: Abram Vossen Goodman's translation of Abraham Kohn's German memoir, "A Jewish Peddler's Diary."

Actually, most all of the journal's structural components took shape during those early years. Illustrations and photographs appeared in the very first issue, and they have been a staple ever since. A section describing the *AJA*'s programmatic initiatives—its physical expansion, its collaborations with the Hebrew Union College's museum, and its traveling exhibitions—appeared in a 1949 edition under the banner "News of the Archives." The first book review, written by Dr. Marcus himself, appeared in 1951, while the first listing of significant anniversaries in American Jewish history appeared in 1952. The trademark shield emblazoned with a menorah—the *AJA*'s familiar logo—first graced the publication's cover in 1954 in an issue that commemorated the tercentennial anniversary of the first Jewish community to settle in North America.

Ironically, we deviate from *AJAJ* convention only in that we are pausing to celebrate this milestone anniversary. Marcus, who eschewed self-congratulatory rhetoric, customarily allowed the "big" anniversaries to pass by with little, if any, notice. Only on the fifth anniversary of the institution's founding did Marcus stop "to catch [his] breath and to take inventory" in the pages of his "bulletin." He expressed unmistakable satisfaction in the impressive achievements that characterized those early years: the *AJA*'s collection had grown impressively, a significant number of students used its holdings to write theses and dissertations, and some of their work had already appeared in the journal. All in all, Marcus summarized, "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.'"

Yet, in evaluating the institution's achievements during the first five years of its existence, it was *Rabbi* Jacob Marcus who articulated a

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mission that he hoped would ultimately become the transcendent purpose for all of these endeavors:

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. . . . 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.

So on this golden anniversary of the journal's publication, the editors reclaim this hopeful aspiration of the founder for themselves. We hold it up with pride before the eyes of our readers, and we expect to be guided by these sentiments that will serve us as a radiating, brilliant cynosure.

G. P. Z.
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