News from The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

Kevin Proffitt

The American cantorate has a rich and ongoing history. The first known cantor in this country was Saul Brown (*né* Pardo), an emigrant from the West Indies who, according to Jacob Rader Marcus, descended from "a brilliant and illustrious family of religious leadership." Settling first in Newport, Rhode Island, Brown came to New York in the mid-1680s where, Marcus writes, "he was the first ... cantor known by that name."[1]

Early American cantors (*hazan*) performed many tasks, often to the point where they achieved the status of quasi rabbis. They served as *mohelim* (circumcisers), *shochtim* (ritual slaughterers), led prayers, and performed other ceremonial and clerical duties. Yet, as Dr. Mark Slobin, one of the leading historians of the American cantorate has noted, the arrival of "Reform-influenced rabbis" in the 1840s altered the role of the cantorate—and not necessarily to their benefit. Slobin writes that reformers such as Isaac Mayer Wise "had little use for the old-style *hazan* who might interfere with the rising dominance of the new American rabbi." As a result, the role and often the presence of cantors in those communities declined during this time.[2]

However, the arrival of the East European Jews in the 1880s helped to reinvigorate the American cantorate. "The soothing or heaven-storming sounds of the sacred singer," Slobin writes, "deeply moved the masses of oppressed Eastern European Jews." With hopes of employment and the possibility of greater status and prestige now available in the U.S., many well-known and celebrated cantors from Russia, Poland, Hungary, and Romania immigrated to this country and reveled in their new-found position. Some even went so far as to take their talents into the secular community to became opera and recording stars.

Slobin notes that the ongoing influx of European cantors more than satisfied the American Jewish community's demands for cantors into the twentieth century. Yet, following the Holocaust, this source of European-based talent was forever lost. To fill the continuing need, many American Jewish institutions began their own cantorial programs, and the first generation of American-trained cantors came

into being. The first cantorial school in the United States opened in 1948 when the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion began its New York-based School of Sacred Music. The Jewish Theological Seminary of America followed shortly thereafter with its Cantors Institute, while Yeshiva University opened the Cantorial Training Institute.

As American Jewry has evolved and changed through the years, so too has the American cantorate. Many factors, including the impact of modernity on American Jewish life and culture, increased numbers of congregations, the suburbanization of the American synagogue, the evolution and development of new forms of worship, the professionalization of the cantorate and the resulting formation of groups such as the American Conference of Certified Cantors and the Cantors Assembly of America, together with perhaps the most dramatic development—the entry of women into the cantorate—have all worked together to evolve the role, position, and function of the American cantor.

Unfortunately, as Slobin notes, the cantorate has been one of the "most neglected institutions of American Jewry." Archival records are scarce and little scholarship beyond Slobin's study has been devoted to this subject.

With this in mind, Dr. Gary P. Zola, executive director of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, has begun an initiative to more fully document the activities and history of the American cantorate. Focusing more on the documentary evidence of American cantors and their institutions (i.e., letters, papers, diaries, manuscripts, etc.) than on musical performances or scores, this initiative is an attempt by the American Jewish Archives (AJA) to fill the lacunae in the documentation of this important area of American Jewish life and culture.

The AJA has an existing, albeit small, collection of cantorial materials. Included in this collection, among others, are papers and materials of Cantors Jacob Abramowitz, Reuben R. Rinder, Walter Davidson, Eric Werner, Irving Mayer Podet, and Moishe Oysher. However, the AJA is now making a concerted and organized attempt to identify and acquire significant collections pertaining to the American cantorate. These plans will continue to be developed and implemented in the coming months, but we are pleased to list here a few early accessions to this collection received from the following

donors:

- Ms. Fanny Brooks, San Antonio, TX. Collection of seventy-eight phonograph records of Hebrew and Yiddish performances by various cantors throughout the U.S., dating to the early twentieth century.
- Rabbi Kenneth A. Kanter, Nashville, TN. Four cartons of sheet music and other music-related materials, gathered from various publications and magazines, 1901–37.
- Cantor Sheldon F. Merel, San Diego, CA. Collection of personal papers and memorabilia pertaining to his career. Cantor Merel has been most generous in providing his personal materials, as well as in identifying and locating other useful collections of records.
- Cantor Joseph Portnoy, San Francisco, CA. Video interview with Cantor Portnoy discussing his life and career, June 1998; numerous speeches and addresses, 1960–2000; together with transcripts of Cantor Portnoy's World War II diaries, written during his service in France and Germany, 1944–45.
- Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, School of Sacred Music (SSM), New York, NY. Collection pertaining to programs and events held at the SSM, including copies of music and recordings of performances.

If you possess or can locate material pertaining to cantors, their work, and their activities, we invite you to contact the AJA at the address listed below:

Chief Archivist
American Jewish Archives
3101 Clifton Avenue
Cincinnati, Ohio 45220
513.221.1875

NOTES:

1. Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew, 1492–1776* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1970): 864–65.

2. This and all remaining quotes are from Mark Slobin, "Discovering the American Cantorate," *Keeping Posted* 34, no. 3 (1989): 3-4; 15. For a more detailed study on the American cantorate, see Mark Slobin, *Chosen Voices: The Story of the American Cantorate* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

NEW ACCESSIONS FOR 2000

Here are brief descriptions of selected new accessions received by the American Jewish Archives in 2000:

PERSONAL PAPERS

Eliasberg, Richard A. Correspondence. 1996–97. 5 pp.

Correspondence of Richard A. Eliasberg, president of The Eliasberg Family Foundation, Inc., of Baltimore, MD, concerning donations made by the Foundation for the repair and preservation of Temple Mishkan Israel (Selma, AL).

Received from Millard Mack, Cincinnati, OH.

England, Lewis. Passport. 1864. 3 pp.

Passport application for Lewis England to visit the kingdom of Bavaria. Witnessed by a notary public, together with affidavits from relatives.

Received from Richard England, Washington, D.C.

Greenburg, William H. Sermon. 1904. 30 pp.

Sermon titled, "The Jewish Ideal of the Twentieth Century," delivered by Rabbi Greenburg at Temple Emanu-El (New York, NY). William H. Greenburg was born in London, England, in 1868, received his ordination at Jews' College in London, and served for many years as a rabbi in Dallas, TX.

Received from Stuart M. Geller, Lynbrook, NY.

Haber, Samuel L. Personal items. 1975–76. 2 audiocassettes and miscellaneous items.

Audiorecording of a tribute to Haber, given by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC), 1975, featuring remarks by Edward M. M. Warburg and Boris Smolar. Together with an audiorecording of an address by Haber during a 1976 trip to South Africa; and personal effects belonging to Haber. Samuel L. Haber was executive vice-president of the AJJDC and a longtime staff member there.

Received from Mrs. Samuel L. Haber, New York, NY.

Jacobson, Helen. Correspondence. 1944. 13 pp.

Two letters, dated July 14 and September 1, 1944, sent by Helen Jacobson, wife of Rabbi David Jacobson of Temple Beth-El (San Antonio, TX), to members of the congregation serving in the armed forces during World War II.

Received from Barton G. Lee, Tempe, AZ.

Leffler, Marjorie B. Diploma. 1928. 1 item.

Graduation diploma from Wellesley College for Marjorie Ballin (later

Marjorie Leffler), the mother of Rabbi William Leffler.

Received from William Leffler, Kennebunkport, ME.

Levine, Aaron. Personal papers. 1968–70. 36 pp.

Papers relating to Levine's student years at the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion's School of Education. Includes correspondence, registration materials, transcripts, bills, and catalogs. Aaron Levine, a long time friend of The Marcus Center, served as comptroller of HUC–JIR, as well as special counselor to the president of the College-Institute, and on the school's Board of Overseers.

Received from Aaron Levine, Cincinnati, OH.

Levy, Richard N. Address. 1999. 1 audiocassette.

Presidential address given by Rabbi Levy, executive director of the Los Angeles Hillel Council, to the 110th annual convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Received from the Central Conference of American Rabbis, New York, NY.

Schleifer, Helen C. Ketubah. 1949. 1 item.

Marriage ketubah for Helen Chopek and Harold Schleifer, signed by Rabbi Abraham Saltes, Congregation Rodef Shalom (New York, NY).

Received from Helen C. Schleifer, Punta Gorda, FL.

Silver, Eliezer. Affidavit. 1940. 1 p.

Affidavit signed by Rabbi Eliezer Silver and Mr. Joseph Tiger, president of Kehillath B'nai Israel (Cincinnati, OH), stating that they have set aside $2,000 for the purpose of guaranteeing the salary of Rabbi Max Adler of Germany in hopes of securing a visa for Rabbi Adler's departure from Nazi Germany. Ultimately, all attempts to gain a visa for Rabbi Adler failed and he perished in the Holocaust.

Received from Mrs. Ernst D. Frankel, Cincinnati, OH.

Zimmerman, Sheldon. Address. 1999. 1 audiocassette.

Address to the 110th annual convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis titled, "Finding God in the Moment."

Received from the Central Conference of American Rabbis, New York, NY.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND SYNAGOGUE RECORDS

***American Israelite* (Cincinnati, OH).** Correspondence and essay. 1929–35. 107 pp.

Correspondence concerning the sale of the *American Israelite,* a weekly

newspaper founded in 1854 by Isaac Mayer Wise. Also includes materials concerning the resolution of a debt owed to Adolph S. Ochs, a subsequent owner of the *Israelite*. Together with an essay by Brian L. Meyers titled, "The American Israelite Story."

Received from Millard Mack, Cincinnati, OH.

Conference on Rabbinic Education (Tarrytown, NY). Proceedings. 2000. 111 pp.

Proceedings of the inaugural conference of representatives from rabbinical training programs in North America. The collection consists of programs, presenter lists, readings, attendees list, and goals. Also includes a labeled photograph of attendees.

Received from Samuel Joseph, Cincinnati, OH.

Congregation B'nai Israel (Sacramento, CA). History. 2000. 1 videocassette.

Video history of the congregation and the Jewish community in Sacramento titled, "Congregation B'nai Israel: 150 Years of Faith and Community."

Received from Congregation B'nai Israel, Sacramento, CA.

Jewish Federation of Cincinnati (Cincinnati, OH). Minutes. 1967–80. 7 microfilm reels.

Jewish Federation of Cincinnati executive board minutes, 1967–80.

Received from the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati, OH.

Jewish Survivors from Nazism in Cincinnati (Cincinnati, OH). Records. 1979–85. 200 pp.

Records of the organization, including minutes, correspondence, and other materials gathered during the presidency of Sam Kaltman.

Received from Roma Kaltman, Cincinnati, OH.

Temple Beth Israel (Jackson, MI). Cemetery records. 1858–98. 22 pp.

Burial lists for the Temple Beth Israel cemetery, with plot map, compiled by Mildred E. Sussell.

Received from Roberta P. Ponn, Jackson, MI.

Temple Beth Jacob (Pontiac, MI). Records. 1960–91. 100 pp.

Records of Temple Beth Jacob, including a 1960 constitution; board of directors minutes, 1979–84; correspondence, n.d.; and materials pertaining to the temple's disbanding and final service, 1991.

Received from David A. Henig, Sylvan Lake, MI.

Temple of Israel (Greenville, SC). Drawings. 2000. 1 pp.

Drawings of Temple of Israel, including a view from the front and two sides, drawn by Jeanet Dreskin.

Received from Temple of Israel, Greenville, SC.

BIOGRAPHIES, MEMOIRS, AND ORAL HISTORIES

Nelson Glueck. Biography. 2000. 432 pp.

"Nelson Glueck: His Life and Work," a biography of Nelson Glueck, archaeologist and fifth president of Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, coauthored by Rabbi Jonathan Brown and Laurence Kutler.

Received from Jonathan M. Brown, State College, PA.

Loewenberg, Ernst. Memoir. 1940. 100 pp.

Memoir of his youth in Germany titled, "Mein Leben in Deutschland vor und nach dem 30 Januar 1933."

In German.

Received from J. R. Loewenberg, Milwaukee, WI.

Schechter, Irv. Memoir. 2000. 47 pp.

"A Winter Nightmare: Stalag IV B," a memoir recounting Schechter's experiences as a prisoner of war during World War II.

Received from Irv Schechter, Quincy, IL.

Stein, Jay. Oral history. 2000. 8 pp.

Term paper submitted to Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion by Shari Heinrich. Titled, "An Oral History of Jay Stein," the paper contains a brief biography of Jay Stein—president of the Stein Mart Corporation—and the Stein family; includes a transcript of an oral history interview with Stein concerning his life and upbringing in the South.

GENEALOGIES AND FAMILY HISTORIES

Adams, Joan. Genealogy. 2000. 14 pp.

Family tree compiled by Joan Adams, concentrating on the Einstein and Rosenbloom sections of her ancestry. Includes family charts and copied obituaries.

Received from Joan Adams, Rancho Santa Fe, CA.

Brown, Marian. Genealogy. 2000. 3 pp.

Genealogy chart for the Elsas family, compiled by Marian Brown.

Received from Marian Brown, Cincinnati, OH.

Feldman, Annette. Family history and genealogy. 2000. 64 pp.

A Chasman Family History: Rabbi Mordecai David Chasman from Virbalis and his Direct Descendants. A family history tracing the direct descendants of

Rabbi Mordecai David Chasman, with an index of seven hundred names. Written and compiled by Annette Feldman.

Received from Annette Feldman, Bethesda, MD.

Fine, Paul Alan. Family history. 1999. 714 pp.

Our Family in America, dealing with the Fine and Kudlick families. Written by Paul Alan Fine.

Received from Paul Alan Fine, Minnetonka, MN.

Simpkins, Nancy K. Family history and genealogy. 2000. 200 pp.

The Klingenstein family tree, including a history of the family and its related branches; written and compiled by Nancy K. Simpkins.

Received from Lance J. Sussman, Binghamton, NY.

Wiener, Jay L. Family history. 1998. 2 v.

In Their Own Words: A History of the Descendants of Mary Gross and Jacob Loeb, by Jay L. Wiener.

Received from Jay L. Wiener, San Francisco, CA.

Yaschik, Henry. Family history and genealogy. n.d. 114 pp.

From Kaluszyn to Charleston: The Yaschik Family in Poland, Argentina, and South Carolina, by Henry Yaschik.

Received from the South Carolina Jewish Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

MONOGRAPHS, THESES, AND TERM PAPERS

DeWoskin, Franklin A. Thesis. 2000. 250 pp.

Rabbinic thesis submitted to Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion titled, "Individual, Institutional, and Rabbinical Responses to Religious and Social Challenges Facing Jews in the United States Military during World War II." Includes research materials, questionnaires, and oral history interviews gathered and compiled by DeWoskin during his research for this thesis.

Received from Franklin A. DeWoskin, Cincinnati, OH.

Hagedorn, Leah E. Thesis. 1988. 160 pp.

M.A. thesis submitted to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill titled, "The Southern Jewish Ethos: Jews, Gentiles, and Interfaith Relations in the American South, 1877–1917."

Received from Gary P. Zola, Cincinnati, OH.

Hepner, Allen. Research article. 2000. 109 pp.

"Rescue and Resettlement: Thousands Saved from Nazi Germany," a

narrative and documentation by Allen Hepner. Focuses on attorney David Glick's mission to rescue Jews in Nazi Germany between 1936 and 1939. Includes lists of archival resources about Glick, who was a representative of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Received from Allen Hepner, Narrabundah, Australia.

Moffic, Evan. Thesis. 2000. 92 pp.

Honors thesis submitted to Stanford University titled,"The Making of an American Zionist: Reevaluating Louis Brandeis."

Received from Evan Moffic, San Francisco, CA.

Wildstein, Jeffrey. Term paper. 2000. 15 pp.

Term paper titled, "Responses to Hitler: Three Rabbis' Sermons and Speeches of the 1930s and Early 1940s," submitted to Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion. Examines selected sermons and speeches of Rabbis David Philipson, Ferdinand M. Isserman, and Julian B. Feibelman.

Received from Jeffrey Wildstein, Cincinnati, OH.