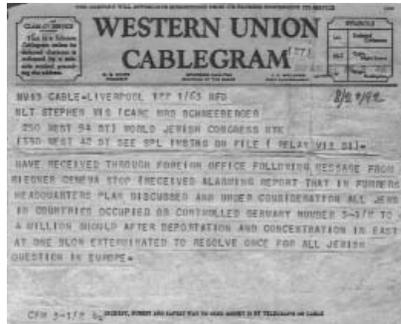


News from The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

Kevin Proffitt and Ina Remus

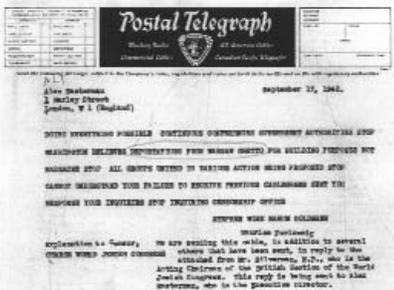
On June 10, 1983, an Allstate Van Lines truck arrived at the American Jewish Archives (AJA). In it were nearly four hundred file cabinets containing the archival records of the New York office of the World Jewish Congress (WJC). Previously housed at the Morgan Manhattan Storage warehouse at Eighty-seventh Street in New York City, these records were in terrible condition. The only inventory to the records was stored in two cardboard

file boxes jammed with 4 x 6" index cards. Each card contained hard-to-read hand-written notations accompanied by an unknown numbering system that coincided with numbers written on the cabinets. Inside the cabinets, the papers were neglected, tattered, and disorganized—some lying loose without folders or binding. Realizing that these records would



Part of the Riegner Telegram
(courtesy American Jewish Archives)

soon be lost or destroyed if left in their current state, many high-ranking administrators of the WJC and the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC–JIR)—Gerhart Riegner, Doris Brickner, and Elizabeth Eppler of the WJC; and Alfred Gottschalk, Paul Steinberg, and Abraham Peck of HUC–JIR, among others—worked together to rescue the records and transfer them to Cincinnati.



Reply to Riegner Telegram
(courtesy American Jewish Archives)

Today, the records of the New York office of the WJC are cataloged as AJA manuscript collection number 361, the single largest collection, after the records of the HUC–JIR. They sit in a secure, climate-

controlled storage vault, neatly arranged and preserved in approximately twelve hundred labeled, acid-free boxes. With a four-hundred-plus-page descriptive folder-level inventory of its contents, the WJC collection has been fully processed and is now ready to be explored by all interested users. Plans for the next level of access—a digital conversion of the records so that the documents will be accessible and searchable in electronic formats—are only a few steps from reality.

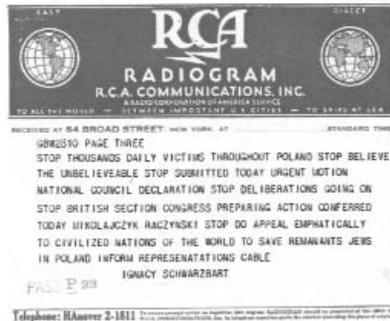
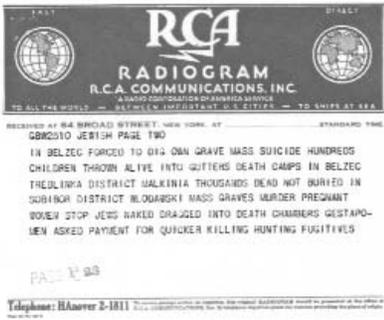
How this collection made the journey from a warehouse in New York to the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati—and how it migrated from rusty filing cabinets to the verge of worldwide distribution via electronic information technology—is a complex tale, spanning many years, and is the story of the dedicated work of many persons. After the collection's arrival in Cincinnati it sat for four years, in its original filing cabinets, in a vacated dormitory on the campus of the HUC–JIR. Very quickly, however, word of the collection's arrival began circulating among various scholarly communities. The AJA soon received numerous requests to see the materials. Concerned about the collection's physical condition and mindful of not further disrupting the intellectual and physical order of the unprocessed material, the AJA staff met their obligations to research requests by allowing carefully supervised access to the papers.

Immediately upon the collection's arrival the AJA began seeking the means to arrange, describe, and preserve the materials according to accepted archival standards. Public and private sources of funding were pursued. In 1983 the Aaron W. Davis Foundation donated ten thousand dollars to this cause. In 1987, following two failed applications, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded the AJA a two-year grant of over ninety thousand dollars to begin the initial processing.

The AJA used this grant money to hire two archivists, Ronald Axelrad and Kathleen Spray. Working in the abandoned dormitory where the papers were housed, the archivists spent two years gaining a minimum level of



Telegram of December 1942
(courtesy American Jewish Archives)



December 1942 Telegram
(courtesy American Jewish Archives)

difficult, these were the necessary first steps in gaining intellectual and physical control over this massive and chaotic collection. When the project ended two years later it was an unqualified success. The initial goals of the project—creating a preliminary structure and organization to the materials, meeting minimum conservation needs, and establishing a finding aid that gave archivists and researchers basic control and access to the collection—were met. The finding aid—over one hundred pages in length—contained an agency history, detailed scope and content preparing notes for each of the ten series, box-level descriptions of the materials, and background information and cross references on the most frequently mentioned persons and institutions listed in the collection.

The collection remained in this arrangement for ten years. The finding aid was posted on the AJA's website and provided effective, if not always efficient, accessibility. From the beginning of the NEH project everyone involved knew there was more to do to facilitate access and research. For all of their efforts, Axelrad and Spray's work

intellectual control over the collection. Together they transferred the files from the rusting filing cabinets to acid-free boxes; organized the collection into ten subject groupings (or series) based upon its provenance and discernable original order; labeled all the new boxes; began weeding duplicate and extraneous materials; and performed basic physical conservation such as placing materials into acid-free folders, straightening, cleaning, removing staples and paper clips, etc., as well as xeroxing highly acidic materials. Most importantly, archivists Axelrad and Spray compiled and wrote the first-ever finding aid to the collection.

This was arduous, sometimes backbreaking work. Yet however

was only the beginning. Further arrangement of the collection and more detail in the finding aid (i.e., folder-level descriptions) were needed. The collection required additional streamlining, and consolidation of files which would reduce its bulk and make it more manageable. But lack of available funds was always the roadblock to additional work.

In 1999 Dr. Gary P. Zola, the executive director of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, began discussions with national and local activists involved in efforts to secure restitution for individuals persecuted and displaced during the Nazi era. The group realized that the files of the WJC had potential not only for historical research, but also to provide invaluable documentation that might assist the Holocaust-era survivors in their legal battles for reparation claims. It was also agreed that the current condition of the WJC collection made searching for and locating specific materials virtually impossible.

Dr. Zola, working together with Cincinnati attorney and noted restitution lawyer Joy Rothenberg, and along with community leader and activist Joan Porat, approached The Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati with a proposal for a second phase of processing the WJC collection. The proposal focused on how various materials in the collection (survivor lists, logs, etc.) might assist Holocaust survivors with their restitution claims.

The Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati and its chairman, Mr. Benjamin Gettler, accepted the proposal and quickly responded with a most generous gift in support of the project. As a result, in the summer of 1999 the AJA was able to hire two new archivists, Anna Truman and Kenton Jaehnig, together with a historical consultant, Ina Remus, who would assist the archivists in locating materials that might be of use in securing restitution claims.

By the summer of 2001 the processing work was completed and a new era of research potential for the WJC collection began. As expected, the new, more in-depth processing revealed many unknown treasures.

Series A is called Central Files. It contains material relating to the history of the WJC, including preliminary meetings, correspondence, and reports leading up to the foundation of the WJC in 1936 by Nahum Goldmann and Stephen S. Wise. This series also contains much information in relation to Stephen S. Wise, whose

correspondence is contained within Series A. The famous Riegner Telegram, which is possibly the first notification the Jewish community received reporting the Nazis' plans for the so-called Final Solution—the intent to exterminate all Jews of Europe—is also included in this series of the collection. Series A also contains many crucial telegrams in relation to the Riegner Telegram, and it is therefore reasonable to believe that the WJC, under the leadership of Stephen Wise and Nahum Goldmann, was instrumental in disclosing the atrocities in Europe. From the wealth of documents that have been uncovered in the collection during the past two years, it has become clear that WJC representatives in Europe, mostly via the British office of the WJC, conveyed messages to the New York office containing crucial information. Often the British representatives urged the American WJC to act upon the messages and do everything in their power to ease the plight of European Jewry. In turn, the American representatives did not sit idle. One document in the collection in particular stands out as an example of the WJC's activities. It is a twenty-page memorandum that was presented by leaders of various American Jewish organizations to Franklin D. Roosevelt, the president of the United States, in a meeting on December 8, 1942. There is ample documentation in the WJC collection indicating that the WJC was the driving force behind this document, which mentions the crematoria at Auschwitz. This is just one example of the WJC's active role in disseminating information and trying to influence government officials to intervene in Europe. Documents like these have been located relatively recently and are evidence that the project that was begun two years ago will be crucial to historical research.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, one aspect of reprocessing the WJC collection was the presumption that the collection contained information and data useful for Holocaust restitution cases. In the past several years, prompted by the opening up of East European countries, and the resulting accessibility to archives and information in those countries, Holocaust restitution has become a current topic. Although Germany was involved in restitution and reparations after World War II, for the first time its businesses have been required to openly and publicly take responsibility for engaging in slave labor during the Nazi era. At the same time the Swiss bank lawsuits and resulting settlement and the case of Austria's involvement as a perpetrator rather than Hitler's first victim, required possible restitution recipients

to find additional proof for their cases. The WJC records, therefore, became necessary for this important work. The AJA was glad to play a role during these crucial times. The assumptions made during the early stages of the project proved correct. The AJA has been in contact with several restitution organizations, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, and the World Jewish Restitution Organization, among them. Information regarding property restitution was made available to these organizations and is now being used. The Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States sent researchers to the AJA to examine the records of the WJC. The material in the collection is cited in the Commission's most recent report of its findings. The United States' negotiator in the international restitution cases, Stuart Eisenstadt, visited the AJA when he was invited to HUC's Cincinnati campus to receive an honorary degree and publicly congratulated the AJA staff on their important work. The AJA hopes to make even more documents available on forced labor and property records in the near future. The AJA also looks forward to making accessible the hundreds of pages of lists of Holocaust survivor names and immigration records, which are part of the collection.

In addition, many national and international researchers came to the AJA in the past two years to study the records of the WJC. They have benefited from the re-organization of the collection and the new, in-depth finding aid.

While archiving the collection, many topical themes emerged as intriguing study areas. The aforementioned position and activities of the WJC and its representatives' impact on the dissemination of information about the Holocaust is only one example. The wealth of the collection can serve many different researchers. Possible topics, among many others, include the WJC's involvement in rescue and relief work during World War II, the situation of Displaced Persons after the war, the experience of survivors based on witness reports and correspondence, the problem of refugees, and the questions of restitution after the war. There are also a number of documents that address historical issues derived from the Holocaust, for example Zionism, the reconstruction of Jewish Communities in Europe, and the creation of the state of Israel.

The WJC collection at the AJA, stored in its new repository, organized and with a detailed finding aid that enables researchers to

search it at a folder level, is one of the great treasures within the AJA's collections. Now that it has been preserved, the next step will be to determine how to make the collection even more accessible.

Kevin Proffitt is Chief Archivist of the American Jewish Archives. He earned his M.A. in Archival Science at Wright State University and his M.L.S. at the University of Kentucky. Ina Remus is Project Historian for the World Jewish Congress Papers. She earned her B.A. at the University of Hamburg and an M.A. in history at the University of Cincinnati.

Recent Acquisitions

Here is a selected listing of new accessions to the collection of the American Jewish Archives in 2001 (Compiled by Kevin Proffitt):

Association of Jewish Libraries

Papers of Harvey Horowitz during his tenure as president of the AJL, 1979–80; together with miscellaneous records of the organization, 1996–2000.

Received from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, N.Y., and Joy Kingsolver, Chicago, Ill.

Berkowitz, Henry

Miscellaneous papers and items pertaining to Rabbi Berkowitz, a member of Hebrew Union College's first graduating class. Includes scrapbooks, correspondence, memorial tributes, journal of European trips, and congregational materials, 1893–1924.

Received from Ruth Lembeck, Mount Vernon, N.Y.

Breitzer, Susan R.

M.A. thesis submitted to Eastern Illinois University, "And the Youth Shall See Visions," 1995.

Received from Susan R. Breitzer, Chicago, Ill.

Browne, Edward B. M.

Materials and papers of Rabbi Edward B. M. Browne, including thirty photographic slides of and pertaining to Browne, prepared by Janice R. Blumberg.

Received from Janice R. Blumberg, Washington, D.C.

Cohn, Edward P.

Correspondence and congregational materials concerning Rabbi Cohn and his professional activities, including membership sheets and other materials pertaining to Temple Sinai, New Orleans, La.,

1987–89; together with research materials and documents pertaining to Maurice N. Eisendrath, gathered by Rabbi Cohn.

Received from Edward P. Cohn, New Orleans, La.

Congregation Emanu-El (New York, N.Y.)

Letters, fliers, and pamphlets concerning Brightside Work, a charitable collection arm of Congregation Emanu-El's religious school, 1941–44.

Received from Congregation Emanu-El, New York, N.Y.

Current Topics Club (Cincinnati, Ohio)

Papers and presentations on topics of current significance, prepared by club members and presented at club meetings during the 2000–2001 membership year.

Received from Peggy F. Selonick, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Diament, Ann L.

Correspondence, articles, and newsclippings pertaining to various aspects of Jewish life and activity. Also, donated copies of *A Scholar's Odyssey* by Cyrus Gordon and *Women Building Chicago, 1790-1990: A Biographical Dictionary*.

Received from Ann L. Diament, Hollywood, Fla.

Friedland, Charles F.

Ethical letter written by Friedland and read at his funeral, 2000; together with a eulogy written and delivered by Friedland's wife, Sandra.

Received from Sandra Friedland, Coral Springs, Fla.

Friedman, Matthew L.

Newsclippings and other materials pertaining to Rabbi Friedman and his professional career, together with materials on the Jewish community of Hot Springs, Ark.

Received from Matthew L. Friedman, Antelope, Calif.

Gertel, Elliot B.

Chicago Board of Rabbis records, 1974–94; miscellaneous Jewish publications, 1954–97; personal correspondence, 1995–2000; newsclippings and publications concerning the Chicago Jewish community; and materials concerning Congregation Rodfei Zedek, Chicago, Ill.

Received from Elliot B. Gertel, Chicago, Ill.

Goldstein, Jennifer

Brandeis University senior history thesis, "Transcending Boundaries: Boston-Jewish Catholic Relations, 1929–1965."

Received from Jennifer Goldstein, Waltham, Mass.

Gottschalk, Alfred

Records and papers of the sixth president of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Alfred Gottschalk, and Gottschalk's leadership in the construction of a new building for the New York campus of the College-Institute, as well as construction of the Jerusalem campus of HUC-JIR. Includes minutes, reports, correspondence, and architectural materials.

Received from Alfred Gottschalk, New York, N.Y.

Isaac M. Wise Temple (Cincinnati, Ohio)

"Wise Words...", a collection of videotaped oral history ethical wills of members of Wise Temple, conducted by members of the congregation.

Received from Isaac M. Wise Temple, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Isserman, Ferdinand M.

Sermons and articles authored by Rabbi Isserman; also, a collection of family postcards and some newspaper clippings, 1932-55.

Received from Ruth Isserman, St. Louis, Mo.

Jewish Federation of Cincinnati (Cincinnati, Ohio)

Minutes of the federation's campaign council; diaries for the men's and women's divisions; reports from agencies; and executive minutes, 1940-94.

Received from the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Kabakoff, Jacob

Research files, articles, clippings, and correspondence concerning Professor Kabakoff's research and career as a scholar of American Hebraica, 1950-80. Also includes one hundred eighty-three pages of typescript and photocopied correspondence between Naphtali Imber and Mayer Sulzberger, 1895-1905.

Received from Jacob Kabakoff, White Plains, N.Y.

Kahn, Robert I.

Sermons and addresses of Rabbi Kahn, primarily during his tenure as Senior Rabbi at Congregation Emanu El, Houston, Tex.

Received from Robert I. Kahn, Houston, Tex.

Karff, Samuel E.

Video recording of Rabbi Karff participating in a prayer service attended by President-elect George W. Bush prior to Bush's inauguration as president of the United States, Washington, D.C.,

January 20, 2001.

Received from Samuel E. Karff, Bellaire, Tex.

Labatt Family

Genealogy of the Labatt and Marks (Marques) families, 1706-2000; together with a photograph of a portrait of Simon Cohen Labatt.

Received from Henry Simon, New Orleans, La.

Lelyveld, Arthur J.

Two bound volumes of the *Columbia Daily Spectator* (New York, N.Y.), 1931-33, edited by Rabbi Lelyveld; together with a robe worn by Lelyveld in academic processions.

Received from Teela Lelyveld, Cleveland, Ohio.

Levine, Joseph

Papers and materials concerning Rabbi Levine's career, particularly at Congregation Mt. Sinai, Texarkana, Tex., but also at Temple Emanu-El, Greensburg, Pa. Includes congregational minutes, sisterhood minutes, sermons, correspondence, and temple bulletins, 1944-87.

Received from Michael Sommer, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Lieberman, Joseph

Over one hundred sermons given by U.S. rabbis during the 2000 presidential campaign concerning Sen. Lieberman's vice-presidential candidacy, compiled by Mike Granoff.

Received from Mike Granoff, Hasbrook Heights, N.J.

Lorge, Michael

Folk Art Festival binders that include details concerning preparations and planning for the festivals, 1980-92; a collection of underground college newspapers concerning Soviet Jewry; miscellaneous items concerning the Olan Sang Ruby Union Institute Camp; plus a collection of personal documents of his father, Rabbi Ernst M. Lorge.

Received from Michael Lorge, Skokie, Ill.

Meltzer, E. Alyne

Personal papers reflecting her personal interests and causes, including materials and publications of the New York chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women.

Received from E. Alyne Meltzer, New York, N.Y.

Mermelstein, Joan

"Out of the Ashes: My Life Story," an oral history interview concerning her life in Nazi Germany, her migration to the United

States, and subsequent life in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Received from Joan Mermelstein, Cincinnati, Ohio.

National Association of Retired Reform Rabbis

Audiotapes of NAORRR programs and conferences; together with convention files, project files, membership information, and scattered meeting minutes, 1984–96.

Received from Erwin Herman, Lake San Marcos, Calif.

Port, Alex

Newsclippings and publications concerning American Jewry and issues of concern to the American Jewish community, gathered and collated by Alex Port.

Received from Alex Port, Encino, Calif.

Prinz, Joachim

Sermons, photographs, and correspondence with many persons and organizations, including the World Jewish Congress and American Jewish Congress. Also includes congregational materials and an essay by Rabbi Prinz titled, "Future of Great Idea," 1930–77.

Received from Jonathan Prinz, New York, N.Y., Temple B'nai Abraham, Livingston, N.J., and Clifford Kulwin, Upper Montclair, N.J.

Salkowitz, Selig

Minutes, correspondence, reports, and attachments concerning the work of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), compiled by Rabbi Salkowitz in the course of his duties on the CCAR's executive board and many CCAR committees, including chairing the Ad Hoc Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinate, 1969–98.

Received from Selig Salkowitz, Fair Lawn, N.J.

Shankman, Jacob K.

Papers of Rabbi Shankman, including correspondence, sermons, articles, and newsclippings, 1928–68.

Received from Susan Shankman, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Sol, Adam

Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the University of Cincinnati, "Balancing Acts: The Invention of Ethnicity in Jewish American Fiction Before 1930."

Received from Gary P. Zola, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Sussman, Arthur

Postcards and articles relating to Mr. Sussman's career as an artist and to the Arthur Sussman Gallery in New Mexico.

Received from Arthur Sussman, Albuquerque, N.M.

Temple Israel (Akron, Ohio)

Programs and bulletins from Temple Israel, 1999–2000.

Received from Temple Israel, Akron, Ohio.

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

Publications, articles, and materials relating to the UAHC, compiled by Jane Evans, long-time UAHC administrator and former executive director of the Women of Reform Judaism.

Received from Jane Evans, New York, N.Y.

Wolf Family

The *Wolf Family Chronicle*, fourth edition; a volume of family genealogies and histories.

Received from Ernest Wolf, St. Louis, Mo.

Women of Reform Judaism, District #3

Convention files, 1967–90; together with correspondence, publicity, slides, photographs, newsletters, 1983–96; minutes, 1966–96; letter books, 1979–94; and membership rosters.

Received from the Women of Reform Judaism, District #3, New York, N.Y.