

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

Digging up Our Roots: American Jewish Genealogy at the AJA Christine Crandall

Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus was fond of saying, “A people that is not conscious of its past has no assurance of a future.” Certainly learning about one’s personal history explains why genealogy has for the past fifty years been a favorite hobby of Americans. This popularity can be traced to a number of reasons, ranging from mild curiosity to a desire to reconnect with family roots in order to recapture something felt to be lacking in one’s life. Although Jewish genealogical research has its antecedent in the 1940s, it was not until Dan Rottenberg published *Finding Our Fathers* in 1977 that it became popular. Rottenberg helped shatter the myth that Jewish genealogy is impossible to track due to the loss of records. Shortly after the publication of his book, local genealogical societies were started. In 1984 the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies was founded, serving as the umbrella organization and impetus for many genealogical initiatives. The AJA sees itself as an integral component in this loose organization, for its collection is one of the best places to research American Jewish roots.

When the American Jewish Archives opened its doors in 1947, Dr. Marcus not only recognized the need to work with scholars and to have them close by, but he also recognized the importance of genealogy. Malcolm H. Stern was one of these scholars. A rabbi and historian, Stern’s name became synonymous with American Jewish genealogy. In fact, Stern’s doctoral dissertation, later published as *First American Jewish Families*, was written under Dr. Marcus’s supervision. Stern served as president of the American Society of Genealogists and was active in many other organizations. From 1949 to 1994 Stern served as the genealogist at the AJA, bringing both prestige and important materials with him. Though he had no formal mandate from Marcus except as the AJA’s genealogist, he was a presence at the AJA and in the world of genealogy until his death in 1994. After his

death, AJA archivist Kathy Spray continued some of his work in assisting researchers with their genealogy queries and working with other institutions to bring their Jewish genealogical collections to light. Sadly, her work ended too soon when she passed away at the age of fifty. Knowing that the AJA's collections contain many treasures for genealogists, Dr. Gary P. Zola decided to make the genealogy collections one of the priorities of the AJA.

The collections at the AJA that have genealogical use range from the most obvious—the family trees in the genealogy files, for example—to materials that one would not initially suspect. Family trees, oral histories, memoirs, and biographies are the most obvious places for most researchers to begin. Synagogue records also contain a wealth of information and often hold membership lists, vital records (births, deaths, and marriages), and minutes of various committees of the temple. These minutes can be difficult to read, as some are in German, and even those in English have handwriting that is difficult to the modern eye. Another great source of information is organizational records. An ancestor who was a member of Hadassah, B'nai B'rith, or the temple's Brotherhood or Sisterhood, for example, could be found in the local chapter's records, which stated their interests, activities, and additional information. Along this same line are the personal papers of rabbis. Many rabbis' collections contain information on marriages or funerals, notes regarding births or other life cycle events such as *b'nei mitzvahs*. The AJA also has many personal papers and manuscript collections of families and individuals, such as the Minis family of Savannah, Georgia, the Nathan-Krause family papers, and the Seligman family of New York, to name a few. Personal manuscript collections are best utilized for genealogical research when a family connection is known.

Though the past is embraced here at the AJA, the future now looks to be quite inviting. Karen Franklin and Nancy Brandt have been hired as consultants to build a new genealogy department. With Dr. Gary P. Zola's commitment to Jewish genealogy, the AJA has several initiatives to expand the scope of genealogy work and the services provided to genealogists. This will most likely include providing access to some information online at the website. Although a start has been made, this is still a work in progress, so keep checking the website [<http://www.americanjewisharchives.org>].

The collections held at the AJA are, for the most part, gifts. As is often told to guests on tours of the archives, the AJA only has what people give. Therefore, information on family lines is available only if someone else has done the research and donated the results. For example, through the kind gift of Joan Reis, the AJA now has genealogical information on the Sachs family. Other recent genealogical donations include a history and family tree of the Apple family, 1820-2001, from Mark Glickman of New York City, the Klein family tree from Walter Klein of Charlotte, North Carolina, and the Skirball family tree from Hank Skirball of Jerusalem, Israel. Though some of the families mentioned may be more prominent than others, the AJA desires genealogical information about Jews from all walks of life. The material donated need not be about famous people nor contain startling new revelations about the history of Jews in America. Rather, the AJA desires the real story of American Jews as told through the normal and sometimes extraordinary lives of average people.

Christine A. Crandall is an Archivist at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio. Much of her work consists of tending to the genealogy collections. She also teaches classes through the Society of Ohio Archivists on basic archival skills for genealogists and other interested students.

RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Kevin Proffitt

Here is a selected listing of new accessions added to the collection of the American Jewish Archives in 2002.

Amos: The National Jewish Partnership for Social Justice

Records of the social justice society, including strategic planning and operations files, together with a survey on American Jewish social justice attitudes. 1997-2001.

Received from Steven Windmueller, Los Angeles, Calif.

Beth Adam Congregation (Cincinnati, Ohio)

Newsclippings, newsletters, incorporation articles, services, programs, and other records of this Humanistic Judaism congregation and its rabbi, Robert Barr. 1980-2002.

Received from Beth Adam Congregation, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Beth Emet: The Free Synagogue (Evanston, Ill.)

Recording of an address given by Martin Luther King, Jr., at Beth Emet congregation, January 13, 1958. Together with a recording of a 2002 congregational service commemorating King's 1958 visit, containing highlights of King's remarks along with recollections by Quentin Young, a member of Beth Emet who was present when King spoke.

Received from Peter S. Knobel, Evanston, Ill.

Birnholz, Michael

"The Cemetery in a Community's Life, Death and Afterlife: A Study of the Cemeteries of Extinct and Nearly Dissolved Jewish Communities in Mississippi and Louisiana," rabbinic thesis submitted by Birnholz to Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio. Together with research materials compiled by Birnholz during the writing of the thesis. 2002.

Received from Gary P. Zola, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Birthright Israel

Publications, brochures, and background material on Birthright Israel, an educational foundation devoted to sending American Jewish youth

on study trips to Israel. 2000-2002.

Received from Sheldon Zimmerman, New York, N.Y.

Borowitz, Eugene

“Meet the Author with Eugene Borowitz,” a video recording of an interview of Eugene Borowitz, conducted by Dr. Judith Hauptman. January 4, 1999.

Received from Eugene B. Borowitz, New York, N.Y.

Chyet, Stanley F.

Personal papers of Stanley F. Chyet (1931-2002), former Associate Director of the American Jewish Archives and Professor of American Jewish History at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

Received from Geraldine Chyet and the Chyet family, Los Angeles, Calif.

Companez, Karen

“Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler: A Thematic Biography,” rabbinic thesis submitted by Companez to Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio. 2002.



*Rabbi Malcom Stern with his wife, Louise
(courtesy American Jewish Archives)*

Dave, Bernard L.

“The Memoirs of Bernard L. Dave,” detailing his life and activity, together with the lives and history of the Dave family of Asheville, N.C., and Cincinnati, Ohio, founders of the Dave Steel Company. 2002.

Received from Bernard L. Dave, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Dropsie, Moses

Obituary, newspaper clippings, and will for Moses Aaron Dropsie (1821-1905), a Philadelphia, Pa., lawyer, communal educator, and

community leader. 1905.

Received from Joseph H. Shockcor, Woodstock, Vt.

Ellenson, David H.

Program and recording of the inauguration service installing David H. Ellenson as the eighth president of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. October 13, 2002.

Received from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, N.Y.

Eppstein, Elias

"Rooted in the River: Elias Eppstein Reflects on Turn-of-the-Century Quincy," video recording, with program, for a play written by David Frolick, using a depiction of Rabbi Elias Eppstein (1831–1906) to relate Jewish life and history in Quincy, Ill., at the end of the nineteenth century. Sponsored by the Historical Society of Quincy and Adams County and Congregation B'nai Sholom. May 5-6, 2001.

Received from David Frolick, Naperville, Ill.

Frank, Leo M.

Eighteen letters consisting of correspondence with C. P. Connolly, a lawyer and writer from East Orange, N.J., who was an advocate for Frank's innocence in the murder case involving Mary Phagan. Connolly wrote a series of articles on Leo Frank and his case, which appeared in *Collier's Magazine* and were later published together under the title *The Truth About the Frank Case*. 1914–1915.

Received from Milton Frank Connolly, Shalimar, Fla.

Gertel, Elliot B.

Oral history interviews with members of the Chicago Jewish community and elsewhere, representing a wide range of professional, personal, and social communities. Interviews conducted by Rabbi Elliot B. Gertel. 2002.

Received from Elliot B. Gertel, Chicago, Ill.

Guzman, Jane B.

"David Lefkowitz of Dallas: A Rabbi for all Seasons," Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the University of North Texas. 2000.

Received from Jane B. Guzman, Dallas, Tex. 2002.

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Klau Library
Files of library director, Dr. Herbert C. Zafren, consisting primarily of correspondence from the director. 1960-1980.

Received from Herbert C. Zafren, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Hoffman, Laura Sheinkopf

"The Making of an American Rabbi: Examining the Life and Work of Robert Langdon Katz," rabbinic thesis submitted by Hoffman to Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio. 2002.

Jacobson, Sylvia R.

Papers of Sylvia R. Jacobson (1911-1994), a specialist in psychiatric social work, primarily documenting her experience as a hostage on a 1970 flight that was boarded and hijacked by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Materials include memoirs, newsclippings, correspondence, and essays by Jacobson on her skyjacking experience. Together with Jacobson's professional evaluation of the individual and group behavioral responses Jacobson observed during the skyjacking, as well as an analysis of the interaction and dynamics involved in the relationship between hostages and their captors. 1939-1994.

Received from Stanley Garfein, Tallahassee, Fla.

Lelyveld, Arthur J.

Recordings of speeches and interviews given by Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyveld (1913-1996) that were broadcast on the Cleveland radio program, *The Jewish Scene*. Together with a tribute to Lelyveld broadcast after his death. 1980-1996.

Received from The Jewish Scene Library and Archives, Beachwood, Ohio.

Lieberman, Joseph I.

A collection of sermons given by American rabbis during the U.S. presidential campaign of 2000 concerning Joseph Lieberman's vice-presidential candidacy, compiled by Michael Granoff.

Received from Michael Granoff, Hasbrouck Heights, N.J.

Mehlman, Morris

Menu for golden wedding reception tendered in honor of Mr. and

Mrs. Morris Mehlman by their children. New York, N.Y. September 6, 1941.

Received from Bernard Mehlman, Boston, Mass.

Neusner, Jacob

Letters, articles, and miscellaneous papers of Professor Jacob Neusner. 2002.

Received from Jacob Neusner, Rhinebeck, N.Y.

Nevada

1880 census extracts for Storey County and Virginia City, Nev., compiled by Leslie Malkin.

Received from Leslie Malkin, Roseville, Calif.

Orbach, Harold

Papers of Cantor Harold Orbach, musical program director at Temple Israel (West Bloomfield, Mich.) for over forty years. Includes newsclippings, photographs, audio recordings of music, musical performance programs, awards, and personal items. 1951–2001.

Received from Harold Orbach, West Bloomfield, Mich.

Polish, Jacob

Sermons and radio addresses, 1951-1952, of Rabbi Jacob Polish (1913-1991). Ordained by Hebrew Union College in 1939, Polish was a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy from 1944 to 1946 and a member of various organizations such as the Central Conference of American Rabbis and Zionist Organization of America.

Received from Gustav Buchdahl, Reistertown, Md.

Prinz, Jonathan J.

Recording of Rabbi Jonathan Prinz—son of Joachim Prinz—delivering the Joachim Prinz centennial sermon at Temple B'nai Abraham. Livingston, N.J. May 10, 2002.

Received from Jonathan J. Prinz, New York, N.Y.

Sanders, Edward

Records, correspondence, and reports concerning Sanders's activities as Special Adviser on Middle Eastern Affairs to President Jimmy Carter, 1977-1981. Together with papers and records pertaining to

Sanders's work with numerous civic organizations in Los Angeles and material relating to the Democratic Party.

Received from Edward Sanders, Los Angeles, Calif.

Sarna, Jonathan D.

"Bless Those Whom the People Have Set in Authority: Jewish Prayers for the United States Government," the Jacob Rader Marcus Memorial Lecture on American Jewish History, given at the one hundred and thirteenth annual conference of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Jerusalem, Israel. 2002.

September 11 Terrorist Attacks, 2001

Sermons given by American rabbis in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Collection compiled by Dr. Gary P. Zola, Executive Director of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives.

Received from Gary P. Zola, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Skirball, Henry F.

Genealogy for the Skirball family and its extended relatives, 1841–2002, compiled by Henry F. Skirball.

Received from Henry F. Skirball, Jerusalem, Israel.

Solomon, Hannah G.

"The Three Ladies: Hannah G. Solomon, Helen S. Levy, Frances H. L. Angel," a compilation of selected letters, family documents, diaries, etc., of Hannah Greenebaum Solomon (1858-1942), Solomon's daughter Helen Solomon Levy (1882–1955), and Levy's daughter Frances Hannah Levy Angel (1912–2001). Compiled by Philip Angel.

Received from Philip Angel, Charleston, W.Va.

Stern, Malcolm H.

Lecture on genealogy and tracing Jewish roots, delivered to the Jewish Genealogical Society of Broward County, Fla. 1989.

Received from Bernard Kouchel, Plantation, Fla.

Surinam

Numbered photo albums for a survey of the Ashkenazic cemetery in Paramaribo, Surinam. Includes printed map with numbered

headstones, handwritten guidelines used for map preparation, and handwritten tomb survey forms focusing on material aspects of tombs. 2000-2002.

Received from Aviva Ben-Ur, Boston, Mass.

Temple Israel (Springfield, Mo.)

Publications, newsclippings, photographs, bulletins, and miscellaneous items pertaining to Temple Israel and Rabbi Rita Sherwin. 2002.

Received from Mara Cohen Ioannides, Springfield, Mo.

Thum, Robert

"The American Media Campaign (1942-1948) to Save Europe's Jews and Establish a Jewish Homeland," a collection of advertisements and notices from U.S. periodicals and newspapers concerning the plight of European Jews during World War II and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Compiled and with an introduction by Robert Thum. 2002.

Received from Robert Thum, Dayton, Ohio.

Wohl, Samuel

Papers of Rabbi Samuel Wohl (1895-1972), longtime rabbi at Congregation Bene Yeshurun, Cincinnati, Ohio, a founder of the League for Labor Palestine, and editor of the *Jewish Frontier*.

Received from Theodore Wohl, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Women of Reform Judaism, District 10

Records of District 10 of the Women of Reform Judaism, which was a merger of the existing Ohio Valley Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (District 9) and the Michigan Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (District 11). Records include presidential records, correspondence, committee reports, financial records, convention materials, and program materials. 1979-2000.

Received from the Women of Reform Judaism, District 10.

Yavneh Day School (Cincinnati, Ohio)

Oral history interviews with founders and early students at Yavneh Day School. 2001-2002. Together with records and correspondence of the school. 1970-2002.

Received from Yavneh Day School, Cincinnati, Ohio.