

TO OUR READERS...

Storytelling and history are almost synonymous. The AJA, like any archives, is fundamentally a warehouse filled with countless stories — some are long, some are short, many are common, and others are extraordinary. For example, the AJA possesses biographical information on Rabbi Binyomin Papermaster (1860-1934) of North Dakota. Rabbi Papermaster arrived in Grand Forks, North Dakota in January 1891. He always maintained that he had been urged to serve the Jews of North Dakota by none other than the renowned Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor (1817-1896) of Kovno, Lithuania. In his memoirs, Rabbi Papermaster relates a distinctly American Jewish story. He once encountered a Christian farmer's wife walking around with phylacteries day and night. Shocked, he offered her a considerable sum if she would be kind enough to sell the *tephillin* back to him. She adamantly refused the rabbi's offer. Some time earlier, she told the rabbi, a Jewish peddler had sold her the item for \$25.00. He assured her it would cure her rheumatism. Apparently, the *tephillin* had a beneficial effect!

Not so very long ago, this story and countless similar stories would have been restricted to the confines of archival chambers or, if somehow they were released by an enterprising researcher, may have found their way into the pages of an article or a published volume. Today, thanks to the technological resources of the twenty-first century, this data can reach a much larger audience. The Marcus Center is now sharing Rabbi Papermaster's story — and other stories of more sober significance — with literally thousands upon thousands of learners who reside in all four corners of the globe.

A reader will be able to validate this assertion by going on the Internet and searching for the words "Papermaster" and "North Dakota." Among the findings, will be this essay. This is because once the *American Jewish Archives Journal* is published, an electronic copy of it is made available online. It is no exaggeration to say that today this journal has a global audience.

At the same time, the editors of the *American Jewish Archives Journal* sincerely regret the fact that our periodical has not appeared consistently. This new issue completes our run for the calendar year

2003, and this means that the journal is nearly two and a half years in arrears. This lag time has caused some readers to wonder whether or not their name had been inadvertently dropped from the journal's mailing list!

In order to rectify this situation, we are planning to publish double issues for the years 2004 and 2005. Subsequently, we are planning to return once again to our traditional semi-annual pattern of publication. We are all determined to accelerate our publication schedule so that, in the not-too-distant future, each new edition of the journal will appear in a timely fashion.

Truthfully speaking, over the past several years The Marcus Center has been preoccupied with a host of significant and exciting projects. The institution has been intricately involved in commemorating the 350th anniversary of Jewish life in America. As one of the four research institutions comprising the congressionally recognized Commission for Commemorating 350 Years of American Jewish History, The Marcus Center collaborated with the Library of Congress, the National Archives and Records Administration, and the American Jewish Historical Society on a variety of endeavors, most prominent of which was a special archival exhibition on 350 years of American Jewish history. This exhibition first appeared at the Library of Congress (September through December 2004) and subsequently at Cincinnati's Museum Center (February through April 2005). At the time of this writing, a third version of the exhibition is at the Center for Jewish History in New York (May through September 2005), and the final venue will be the HUC Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles (November 2005). This special historical commemoration has been extremely demanding for The Marcus Center — but also rewarding. Those who are interested in learning more about the commission and The Marcus Center's role therein should visit the commission's website: www.350th.org

The Marcus Center's physical renovation and capital expansion — a building project that has taken more than seven years to complete — constitutes a second initiative that has consumed a great deal of institutional energy. During the past seven years, The Marcus Center's physical plant has literally quadrupled in size. Those who have not

visited the American Jewish Archives in the past five years will hardly recognize the institution. Today, The Marcus Center is a complex of three interconnected buildings: an archival repository, a research center, and an educational center. The research center is located in the AJA's original home, the Bernheim Library Building. This building has been completely renovated, and the facility's reading room — the Barrows-Loebelson Family Reading Room — has been transformed into an elegant and commodious space in which to study and conduct research.

The Edwin A. Malloy Education Building is a 15,000 square-foot addition to the AJA's existing complex. This new facility houses 1,000 square feet of exhibit space, the AJA's new executive offices, and a state-of-the-art distance learning/electronic classroom complex:

The Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati's International Learning Center. This complex consists of an eighty-seat lecture room and separate forty-seat seminar room (which can be subdivided into two separate seminar spaces). With these two electronic classrooms in place, The Marcus Center will be able to share its remarkable resources with other educational institutions, historical organizations, and organizations that seek to have access to the incomparable holdings of the AJA, the American Jewish Periodical Center, the HUC-JIR Klau Library, and much more.

All of these endeavors have been singularly important. We pledge ourselves now to an important objective: the journal will again appear dependably and in a timely fashion.

In one of his very first publications — words written a century ago — this institution's founder, Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus, declared: "Oh, that we could realize... our debt to the past; the debt we owe of continuing the great work that has been going on for the past three thousand years... If we could," he added, then we will always be inspired and motivated to "build while others destroy, to seek for light while others writhe in the darkness of despair, to strengthen the bulwarks of civilization while others seek to shatter them."

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