

5-1-2000

## Indexes to the Journals of the American Jewish Historical Society: Significance, Coverage, and Format

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### Recommended Citation

Weinberg, Bella Hass. 2000. "Indexes to the Journals of the American Jewish Historical Society: Significance, Coverage, and Format." *Judaica Librarianship* 10: 14-17. doi:10.14263/2330-2976.1146.

# APPROBATIONS

## Indexes to the Journals of the American Jewish Historical Society: Significance, Coverage, and Format

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**An Index to Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, Volumes 21–50 [1913–1961].** Prepared by The American Jewish Historical Society. Introduction by Jeffrey S. Gurock. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1994. xxii, 439 p. \$100. ISBN 0-926019-76-7.

**An Index to American Jewish Historical Quarterly/American Jewish History, Volumes 51–80 [1961–1991].** Prepared by The American Jewish Historical Society. Introduction by Jeffrey S. Gurock. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1995. 2 vols. (xx, 333; v, 335–644 pp.) \$150. ISBN 0-926019-77-5.

**Abstract:** The indexes to the journals of the American Jewish Historical Society are reviewed from the perspective of recent indexing standards. The significance of the journals is great, and they clearly merited indexing, but there are many flaws in the execution of the project. Inconsistency of coverage, poor vocabulary control, a lack of continuation headings, and imprecise filing are among the problems noted. The detailed indexing is praiseworthy, and these tools should be useful to librarians and researchers. References to recent indexing manuals and standards are provided.

### Introduction

In a Responsa column published in this journal, Zachary Baker (1990) described the incomplete coverage of Judaica periodicals by serial (continuing) indexes; further detail on the gaps in coverage is provided by Brisman (1977). Penkower (1991) has shown that some Judaica periodicals are indexed in electronic databases for other disciplines, but their coverage is often selective and not retrospective. Romm (1993) has charted the Judaica serials available online in full text, but since this is generally a by-product of computer composition, only recent issues are covered in this medium. Given that we lack Judaica indexes that cover long runs of multiple periodicals uninterrupted, it is necessary to have cumulative indexes to single journals. In some disciplines, only recent literature is used, but not in the humanities.

This review focuses on such an index, evaluating it with regard to standards for index design and structure. One of the goals of the review is to provide guidance to Judaica librarians who are planning to undertake serial indexing projects, by refer-

ring them to recent standards and manuals in this field. There is a vast amount of valuable Jewish studies material—in both journals and newspapers—that is inaccessible owing to the lack of indexing, but it takes more than good intentions to compile an index. Like cataloging, indexing has principles, rules, and conventions that must be studied before undertaking a project in this area. The references to this review include codes of indexing practice.

### Significance of the Work

The journal issued by the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) under three different titles, while creating problems for serials catalogers and perhaps reference librarians, contains the most significant articles in the field of American Jewish history. Jeffrey Gurock's introductions to the indexes issued by Carlson Publishing amply demonstrate this. The core journals of a discipline generally receive good indexing coverage.

The index to the initial 20 volumes of the American Jewish Historical Society's journal was published by the Society in 1914 and covered the volumes dating from 1893 to 1912. It contains only a brief preface by the Corresponding Secretary of the Society. Since that index was published so soon after the journal issues themselves, it was not possible to place the journal in historical perspective in 1914.

The first index issued by Carlson to supplement the initial AJHS index appeared 80 years later. Gurock's Introduction (pp. ix–xxii), entitled "Examining a Journal in Transition," is a very learned essay which provides a content analysis of volumes 21–50—with the aid of the index. For example, Gurock notes that "articles on East European Jews in America were

totally non-existent for the full twenty-five years between 1913–1939” (pp. xi–xii). [A good index allows one to establish what is *not* included in a publication, as well as what is (ISO, 1996, p. 3).] Gurock also analyzes the journal from a methodological perspective, comparing it with other serials, such as *Jewish Social Studies*.

The title of Gurock’s introduction to the index covering volumes 51–80 is “Looking at a Jewish Ethnic Journal in the American Scholarly Mainstream.” He notes that the lack of interest on the part of editors of general historical journals in articles by American Jewish historians created the rationale for a specialized journal in this field. The proliferation of specialized journals is a well-known phenomenon that is discussed in the science information literature (Subramanyam, 1981, pp. 33–36). Even without a bias against articles in American Jewish history, however, the odds are that a journal for this field would have been formed, simply because of the growth in the number of scholars.

The indexes made it possible for Gurock to identify the prolific contributors to the periodical and to indicate the issues in which their notable papers appeared. He closes his second essay by citing other journals that compete with *American Jewish History* for quality papers.

Having established that the journal of the American Jewish Historical Society is worth indexing, we turn our attention to the structure and quality of the indexes.

### Coverage and Depth of Indexing

The coverage of these indexes is clearly expressed in their titles. Indexes that cover multiple journals have more choice in this regard. *Index to Jewish Periodicals* limits its coverage to about 30 English-language journals, while *Index of Articles in Jewish Studies* covers a far greater number—albeit selectively, i.e., indexing only articles judged to be of research value (Greenbaum, 1983, p. 34). A bibliography of research articles in the field of American Jewish history, compiled by Marcus (1971), covered 13 periodicals, including the journal of the AJHS.

### Indexable Matter

The term *indexable matter* refers to the components of a document that are selected for indexing. Some serial indexes cover only full articles but not book reviews, for example. The indexes under review of

course cover articles, but they also provide good access to book reviews—both by author of the work reviewed and by the name of the reviewer. Titles of works reviewed are not access points, however, and there is inconsistent indexing of the subjects of books reviewed. For example, book reviews dealing with the Jews in Cincinnati and Texas are accessible by place name, but not one dealing with Bangor, Maine, published in volume 80, number 2.

The journal groups notes on contributors rather than placing biographical data on authors at the end of each article. Fortunately, this important information is indexed.

### Exhaustivity of the Indexes

The formal way of measuring *exhaustivity* (comprehensiveness) of indexing is in terms of the average number of access points assigned to documents. From these printed indexes, the terms assigned to a given article cannot be determined. In catalogers’ terms, there are no *tracings* for the entries; in information science terms, we cannot view the full *record* for each document indexed.

The Preface to the first AJHS index described the work as “an analytical index” (*Index*, 1914, p. vii). An indication of the thoroughness of analysis in the newer indexes can be gotten by sampling the journal covered. The contents of selected issues were examined, and the index was checked for key terms in the titles of articles. In most cases, an entry was found. There are important exceptions, however. An article on Jewish population in vol. 50 (p. 23ff) is not retrievable by the term *population* or *statistics*. A special issue of the journal (vol. 80 no. 2) entitled “Revisiting *New York Jews*” is indexed neither under the title of the work treated nor under the title of the issue—both memorable elements.

Here it is worth noting that an index to a book or periodical serves two types of user: (1) the person who has *not* read the work and is trying to locate information that *may* be in it, and (2) the person who *has* read the work and is trying to retrieve information that she/he *recalls* having read in it (Thornton, 1969, pp. 91–92). These ideas are generally found in manuals of *book* indexing, but they apply equally well to *serial* indexing. Baker’s aforementioned Responsa column (1990, p. 99) in fact emanates from a question by someone who recalled an article that he had read in a Leo Baeck Institute *Year Book*.

The term “analytical index,” when applied to a retrieval tool for serials, implies more than *title-derivative indexing*, i.e., extracting words from the titles of articles. Although several cases of search failure for this basic level have been cited, there are numerous examples in the AJHS indexes of truly analytical entries, which provide access to the subtopics of articles.

Hans Wellisch, in his one-volume encyclopedia of indexing, defines *depth* of indexing as a combination of exhaustivity and specificity (1996, p. 137). In the volumes under review, most entries have specific subheadings, but there are occasional strings of locators (numerous undifferentiated volume- and-page references). For example, for the heading “Noah, Mordecai Manuel,” there are 65 such locators before the first subheading, “Ararat.” For the most part, these locators refer to single pages and seem to represent minor mentions. Hazel Bell (1992, pp. 33–34) has defended this practice, but Hans Wellisch (1996, p. 283) recommends instead the use of subheadings such as “alluded to.”

### Vocabulary Control and Cross-References

An alphabetical subject index by its very nature scatters related terms, and therefore good vocabulary control and a careful synthetic (cross-reference) structure are essential. The works under review lack this. For example, in the first index, “Labor: Unionism” is a separate heading from “Unionism.” There are no *see also* references between the two headings, which have different locators. The second index, however, has *see also* references between “Labor movement” and “Unionism,” suggesting that the split may have been noticed as the indexing project progressed.

A project of this size certainly warranted maintenance of a thesaurus. A revised American national standard for thesauri was being developed at the time these indexes were being compiled. The work of the revision committee (1988–1994) was widely publicized, and two editions of the draft standard were frequently cited. The revised standard was published at the same time as the first AJHS index (NISO, 1994), but an earlier edition of the standard or a manual of thesaurus construction would have provided good guidance on vocabulary control as well.

Not only topical terms are separated in the AJHS indexes. In the 1994 index, the corporate headings “Shearith Israel Synagogue (Charleston, S.C.)” and “Sheyret Israel Congregation (Charleston)” are far

apart, with no links between them to indicate whether they are the same or different corporate bodies. There is a *see also* reference from "Adath Jeshurun Congregation" to "Kehal Adath Jeshurun" in the 1995 index, but the user would have benefited from an explanatory reference: Did the synagogue change names, or do these headings represent two distinct corporate bodies in New York City?

A link is provided (in the first index) between the closely related surnames Levy and Ha-Levi, but it is positioned poorly: the *see also* reference follows Levy, Zipporah, concluding 10 columns of Levy entries, and is widely separated from the initial Levy entry, with no forename (p. 235), where one would expect the cross reference to be filed. Current indexing standards and manuals recommend that *see also* references be placed at the head of an entry (Anderson, 1997, sect. 6.8.1.3) so that users can immediately see suggestions for other headings that may be better than the ones they started with.

Catalogers are familiar with the concept of the best-known form of the best-known name, and this principle is increasingly reflected in indexing manuals. The work under review (1995), however, enters "Marcus, Mickey" under "Marcus, David"—without a *see* reference. The forenames of "Clark, Chief Justice," "Wilkinson, General," and "Wilkinson, Senator" (all in the 1994 index) could probably have been supplied from general reference tools without too much effort, but such research was not done. There are, however, good examples of parenthetical qualifiers for homographic [non-unique] names: "Judah, Hillel (Boston; Newport; Richmond)."

Catalogers who follow LC practice will also note the use of nonstandard Romanization in the AJHS index volumes, e.g., under the heading "Religion" in the 1994 index: *Darkhei ha-Yahadut ba-Amerika* (there is no direct entry for this title). Today there is increasing interest in merging online catalogs of books and indexes to serials. The use of inconsistent codes and standards constitutes a barrier to such integration.

### Organization and Format of the Work

Within the index for each of the periods covered, the entries are arranged in a single A-Z sequence, which is commendable. Separate sequences of authors, titles, subjects, and/or book reviews always create problems for users, and hence, librarians. Liddy and Jorgensen (1993) showed that even students of library and information science may be unaware that there can be

split indexes in a work. It is not clear why a merged index was not produced for the sixty volumes covered by the two publications, issued only a year apart.

The locators consist of volume number and page reference(s), separated only by a colon (no space), and without typographic differentiation. Boldfacing volume number is considered good form in a serial index. The omission of date in the locators of the AJHS indexes could have been compensated for by a correspondence table of issue number and year in the preliminaries, e.g., no. 35 = 1939. No such table is provided, however, although it is recommended by the British indexing standard (BS 3700: 1988, sect. 7.2.3).

Subheadings—where provided—are paragraphed (run in); indented format is considered easier to read, although it requires more space. The 1914 AJHS index featured both a space after volume number and indented format for subheadings.

A major formatting flaw in the recent AJHS indexes is the lack of continuation headings, even on left-hand (even-numbered) pages. Page 20 of the 1995 index begins with the word "baiting," with no indication that the subheading "red baiting" is split between two pages, or that its main heading is American Jewish Committee. The facing page (21) has two columns of subheadings, one beginning "Historical Association" and the second, "66:156." Index users are not given a clue as to their position in the alphabetical sequence. The main heading for both of these columns is American Jewish Historical Society.

Having served repeatedly on the jury for the H.W. Wilson Award for Excellence in Indexing, I can relate that the lack of continuation headings automatically disqualifies an index from the award, which recognizes the publisher as well as the indexer; the publisher controls the format of an index. Copies of the award criteria are published annually in the newsletter of the American Society of Indexers, now called *Key Words*. Although the award is for a book index, many of the criteria would apply to the index of a single journal as well (Wilson, 1997).

### Filing

The entries in the AJHS indexes are filed letter by letter, although word-by-word filing—long used in library catalogs—is favored by recent indexing standards (e.g., BS 3700: 1988). Illustrating the *former* method of arrangement are the entries

Plumsted (Philadelphia)  
Plum Street Temple (Cincinnati).

The filing in the AJHS indexes does not seem to be precise, or at least there are unexplained rules for the following sequence in the 1994 index (p. 202):

Jewish Theological Seminary of America  
Jewish Theological Seminary (Breslau)  
Jewish Theological Seminary and Scientific . . .

One may infer that "little words" are ignored, a filing practice rejected by librarians decades ago—because computers couldn't decide which were the little words.

These examples underscore the need for a guide to the use of these indexes, which was not supplied.

### Conclusions

Although the significance of the journal of the American Jewish Historical Society and the importance of indexing it have been established, the product has many flaws and seems to have been compiled in ignorance of available manuals and standards for journal indexing.

It is well known that it is difficult to achieve a high degree of consistency in human indexing (Saracevic, 1989, p. 106), but documentation of policies and a controlled vocabulary help to increase the rate of consistency (ISO, 1996, p. 6).

In contrast to the first AJHS index, in which the compilers were credited (*Index*, 1914, p. vii), no indexing manager is named in this work. The Yiddish proverb that comes to mind is "*S'hot nishit keyn ta'et*" (It has no father). This suggests (a) that those who worked on the project were aware of its flaws and inconsistencies and did not want to be named in the publication, and/or (b) that there was a high rate of turnover in the indexing staff, and one or a few individuals could not be given credit for the compilation. In any case, the conventional wisdom is, "Any index is better than no index," and these works are likely to be consulted often by researchers in American Jewish history—especially genealogists—as well as librarians.

The price of the indexes was discounted soon after their publication, suggesting that they were not selling well. Perhaps users and librarians expect serial indexes to be available electronically. The principles of indexing apply to all media, and before this index is converted to machine-readable form, its flaws should be corrected.

It is hoped that when designing indexes to other major Jewish periodicals whose contents are currently inaccessible, Judaica librarians will study the format and arrangement of these volumes, emulating only those features that are user-friendly.

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