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Association of Jewish Libraries, 28th Annual Convention, 1993, New York City: Reflections and Recommendations

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Association of Jewish Libraries, 28th Annual Convention, 1993, New York City:
Reflections and Recommendations*

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Memories linger on of the 28th annual convention of the Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL), hosted by the New York Metropolitan Area chapter, June 20–23, 1993. In this introduction to the published proceedings, we share some of those memories, note the special features of the convention, and make recommendations for future AJL conventions.

Planning

The 1993 convention started with a bang, literally—one that was heard around the world. The original hotel selected, the Vista in the World Trade Center, was dynamited by terrorists on February 26, 1993. Changing the site required a great deal of extra work, but with the help of the New York City Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Mayor's Office, we moved to the Hilton, which was more spacious and centrally located. As our tradition teaches us, *gam zu le-tovah*—all is for the best. The change in venue was indeed a bonus.

That the convention was a huge success was attested to by everyone who attended; that it ran so smoothly and had programs on such a high level was due to the exemplary planning and attention to detail by all of the committee members (see *Appendix I*), who worked on the convention for two years.

The Program Book

The convention program book is a case in point. From its initial conception to its realization in final printed form—with introductory materials, conference program, abstracts, directories, advertisements, and appendices—the combined talents of many committee members were involved.

**Portions of this report were previously published in the AJL–NYMA (New York Metropolitan Area) Chapter Newsletter. A detailed convention report is on file in the AJL Archives. It is also available on request from Edith Lubetski.*

The Program

AJL convention programs used to be planned to interest either members of its Synagogue, School, and Center (SSC) Division or those of the Research and Special Libraries (R & S) Division; one or two sessions were intended for both. The California convention (1992) did away with AJL division labels in the printed program, but labeled the sessions in a summary list.

In New York, the session labels were eliminated completely, as it was felt that the abstracts printed in the program, an innovation at this convention, would give individual participants the opportunity to choose sessions according to their interests. While the programs targeted to specific divisions drew on their respective audiences, there was considerable cross-over in attendance.

The presentations were so good that the evaluation forms had but one major complaint: people could not choose which of the simultaneous programs to attend. They wanted to go to all of them! One solution was to sell audiotapes of all the sessions—an option frequently utilized by registrants. For those who could not attend, we hope the convention papers published here will enable them to enjoy what they missed; those who did attend are given the opportunity here to recall and resavor particular sessions.

Letters to Supervisors

The SSC program chairpeople offered to send a letter to the immediate supervisor of each librarian who was a presenter. The letter did the following: (1) it described the librarian's contribution to the convention, thus raising the librarian in the supervisor's estimation, and (2) it pointed out that by supporting the librarian's participation in the convention, the skills listed in the program book (which could be shown to the supervisor), were learned and would certainly benefit library

service at the institution. Many presenters gratefully availed themselves of this offer.

Recommendation: A form letter focusing on the second point could be extended to all AJL convention attendees by including it in the registration kit.

Handouts

A concerted effort was made to collect handouts from all sessions and to make them available for all attendees. The handouts were placed in loose-leaf binders next to a photocopy machine, and participants duplicated the bibliographies at no charge. Since the participants could not attend all concurrent sessions, this was much appreciated; registrants were at least able to obtain the handouts, many of which were bibliographies, from the sessions they missed.

Recommendations: If a similar photocopying service could be provided at future conventions, the participants would be most appreciative. Furthermore, these useful tools should not be limited to convention attendees, but should also be submitted to the AJL Vice-President for Publications. We might form a "bibliography bank" providing access to bibliographies in diverse subject areas.

Abstracts

The abstracts printed in the program not only helped participants choose what sessions to attend, but also provided a permanent written record of the issues and concerns of AJL at the time of the convention.

The Marketplace: Jewish Books and Crafts

The AJL Marketplace, which took so much of our time and effort in the final months of planning, was incredible! The attendance was greater than we had envisioned in our most extravagant hopes.
(Continued on next page)

The visitors were strangers to us—people who had heard about the Marketplace through convention publicity in the press, on the radio, and through our mailings. The Jewish community learned of the existence of the Association of Jewish Libraries and was noticeably impressed. The vendors were thrilled with AJL because of the large numbers of book- and crafts-buying attendees. Here, we must commend the dynamic Carolyn Starman Hessel, who was responsible for this major undertaking, and whose enthusiasm for our organization made us “think big.”

Recommendation: Since AJL convention participants alone cannot support vendors adequately, it is necessary to bring in the local Jewish community to enjoy such events. Furthermore, this is a project that should involve local Jewish leadership and thereby generate lasting mutual benefits between libraries and their communities.

Storytelling Marathon

In order to attract people to the Marketplace, a Storytelling Marathon was organized, and it was a great success. It brought people in to the Marketplace and also gave pleasure to the AJL convention participants.

Matching Veteran and New Members

The matching of veteran to new members continued at this convention, as had been done at prior conventions, although this time the matching was done in advance. Initial contact between partners was made by telephone. While this effort was very successful, it can be expanded. We focused only on new members. Since there are members who have not attended conventions for a while, we might want to extend this option to anyone who wishes to be matched with an AJL veteran.

Newspaper

An innovation with this convention was a daily newspaper. Its goals were to provide information not in the Program Book—to shorten the list of announcements—and to entertain. We do not know if registrants looked forward to this as eagerly as they

do to *The New York Times*, but we felt that this publication was well received. A newspaper is especially useful at larger conventions.

Call for Papers

While the 1993 New York convention committee had not solicited papers during the previous convention in California, we placed a “call for papers” for the 1994 Atlanta convention in our program book, which was, incidentally, mailed to the entire AJL membership. We felt that this call for papers would bring not only new ideas, but also new presenters, who might otherwise not have come to the subsequent convention.

Special Interest Groups

Two new Special Interest Groups were formed at the Convention: one for high school librarians and one for college librarians.

Recommendation: The expansion of Special Interest Groups should continue. There may be others that AJL can serve. The Association’s administration needs to hear from members which additional groups they would like to form.

AJL Exposure

There was a very strong emphasis on publicity, particularly because of the Marketplace, but the ancillary effect of the convention was that many people learned about the Association of Jewish Libraries for the first time. The AJL booth at the Marketplace also gave excellent exposure to the Association, and many visitors picked up membership applications. People also stopped to view the slide-tape presentation, prepared by Marcia Posner, at the AJL booth in the exhibit area.

Conclusions

The convention reinforced the fact that New York has one of the most exciting environments for Jewish life. The city’s research facilities and program possibilities combined with its resources gave this four-day event a significance that should continue to impact upon the professional lives of Judaica librarians.

Quotations from the 1993 Convention Evaluation Forms

“I’m taking home so many ideas and doing them all!”—Jackie Spritzer, Lawrenceville, NJ

“This was my first AJL convention. After many years of attending other library and social science conventions, this was the *best* in every way!!!”—Linda Silver, University Heights, OH

Firsts at the 1993 AJL Convention

- * Record number of program sessions
- * Handouts from all sessions available for photocopying
- * Printed Program Book
- * Abstracts of sessions in Program Book
- * Greetings from city and state officials in Program Book
- * Program Book sent to entire AJL membership
- * Letters sent to supervisors of speakers
- * Contact between veteran members with new members before convention
- * Appearances of convention organizers on 4 radio shows
- * Chairing of general sessions by convention committee members, rather than just co-chairs.
- * Facilitators in each session serving as technical liaisons to chair of hotel committee
- * Monday night reception
- * Storytelling Marathon
- * Daily newspaper
- * Slide-Tape Presentation about AJL at AJL booth in exhibit area
- * Videotaping of selected sessions and events
- * New AJL Special Interest Groups: High School Librarians; College Librarians
- * Dinners in selected New York Kosher restaurants for \$19.93
- * Record number of attendees—281
- * Locator: directory of attendees
- * Mementos—brass bookmarks

COMMENTARIES

Appendix I

Organizers of the AJL Convention, New York City, 1993

Edith Lubetski
Esther Nussbaum
Convention Co-Chairs

Convention Committee

Leah Adler—*Finances*
Tzivia Atik—*Registration*
Sylvia Avner—*Storytelling Marathon*
Pearl Berger—*R & S Programming*
Shulamith Berger—*Registration/Handouts*
Carolyn Starman Hessel—*Judaica Book
& Crafts Marketplace*
Ellen Korn—*Graphics*
Annette Landau—*Hospitality*
Rita Lifton—*Publicity*
Yael Penkower—*Special Programs*
Marcia Posner—*SSC Program*
Eileen Shmidman—*SSC Program*
Steven Siegel—*Program Book*
Marion Stein—*Banquet*
Naomi Steinberger—*Hotel & Catering*

Edith Lubetski is Assistant Professor of Library Administration and Head Librarian, Hedi Steinberg Library, Stern College for Women, Yeshiva University. She co-authored Building a Judaica Library Collection: A Resource Guide (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1983) and served as President of the Association of Jewish Libraries (1986–1988).

Esther Nussbaum is Head Librarian, Ramaz Upper School, in New York City. She currently serves as Vice President/President-Elect of the Association of Jewish Libraries and as editor of Jewish Book World.

January 31, 1994

Dear Bella,

Just wanted to let you know that I think the issue of *JL* [vol. 7] is beautiful graphically. I'm really enjoying the content and am finally discovering what went on at the convention [the First International Symposium on Jewish Children's Literature] in Israel.

Kol ha-kavod.

Toby [Rossner]
Bureau of Jewish Education of
Rhode Island
Providence, RI

31 January 1994

Mr. Zachary Baker
YIVO Institute for Jewish Research
New York, NY

Dear Zachary:

Receiving *Judaica Librarianship* is always an extraordinary experience for me. As a publisher, I get my share of reading material, but when *Judaica Librarianship* arrives, I find that I stop everything and read it from cover to cover.

I was trying to think about why this is. What does it say about me? Why do I value the publication so much? There are many reasons, but I think that the main one is that I come away from it feeling confident that there is a dedicated army of librarians who have taken on the overwhelming, often thankless, and certainly underpaid task of tending the garden of Jewish books. You have gathered an exceptional group of devoted colleagues; their skill and art take my breath away!

I could go down the list of articles one-by-one to express my delight at each and every contribution in Volume 7, Number 1–2. In the rebuilding that our people are trying to do, your contributions are, in my estimation, among the most important.

Sincerely,

Arthur Kurzweil
Vice-President
Jason Aronson Inc.
Publishers
Northvale, NJ

February 7, 1994

Dear Arthur:

Thank you for your wonderful letter in praise of the latest issue of *Judaica Librarianship*. As a contributor and as style editor I naturally take a great deal of pride in the journal—I should add that as an officer of AJL I also am quite proud of our Association's sponsorship of *JL*. Of course, the lion's share of the credit for the finished product goes to our indefatigable (made that way by continuous cups of coffee) editor-in-chief, Bella Hass Weinberg.

At any rate, it is good to know that we are serving our readers well and that they (or some, at least) appreciate the work that goes into producing a first-class professional journal.

Cordially,

Zachary M. Baker
Vice President/President-Elect
Association of Jewish Libraries

FIRST INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON JEWISH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

November 10, 1994

Dear Bella,

As a children's book writer, I was pleased to see the Proceedings of the First International Symposium on Jewish Children's Literature in *Judaica Librarianship*, volume 7.

The commentary was intriguing and enlightening, and I particularly appreciated the articles regarding [Jewish children's literature in] France and the Netherlands. Having spent time in these countries, I can testify to the accuracy of the authors' observations.

I look forward to reading insightful articles on Jewish children's literature in future issues of *Judaica Librarianship*.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Kaye
Associate Professor
Division of Library and Information Science
St. John's University
Jamaica, New York