An Interview with Jacob I. Dienstag, President of the Association of Jewish Libraries, 1967

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Q. How did the merger of the Jewish Librarians Association and the Jewish Library Association occur?
A. The Jewish Librarians Association (JLA) [an organization of Judaica research librarians] lost steam for a while, but was resuscitated in the early '60s under the dynamic leadership of Herbert Zafren, of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. JLA then decided to suggest a merger with the other Jewish library organization [the Jewish Library Association], an organization of synagogue librarians. In 1965, a joint Merger Committee of the JLA and the Jewish Library Association met in New York. I was among those representing the JLA. It was wonderful that the merger succeeded.

Q. What particular problems did you encounter?
A. The LC classification was not satisfactory. We used to call it "Classification of The American Council of Judaism," because LC cataloged everything out of Judaica. For example, Jewish art and Jewish music were classified, respectively, with general art and general music, rather than with Judaica. We tried to persuade them to change it but did not succeed. Even so, many Judaica libraries adopted LC.

Q. Any other problems?
A. Status of librarians was an issue. We were considered "dignified clerks." I think that over the years, however, our status improved considerably.

Q. How many members were there in JLA?
A. At that time there were about 12 people in the New York group. Nationally, there were about 50 people in the association.

Q. What do you think you personally contributed?
A. At the convention of the merged association, when archival materials were discussed, I recommended that a major library should house such materials because of space considerations and possible need of specialized equipment, such as photographic and microfilming equipment. This recommendation was accepted. I also suggested that the next convention be held in New York, which it was.

Q. How do you view AJL today?
A. AJL has become an active and strong organization with many accomplishments that we at one time just dreamed about. May it go from strength to strength.

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AJL President, 1967.

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