

An Interview with Mae Weine, President of the Association of Jewish Libraries, 1969–1970

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Introduction

I don't remember when I first met Mae Weine. It can't have been so very long ago, yet it seems I've always known her. This, I think, is because she is such a warm and outgoing person. And although I was a neophyte at the time, she always made me feel that I had something of importance to contribute to the field of Jewish librarianship. Her enthusiasm for libraries, and Jewish libraries in particular, is unbounded and contagious. Her knowledge and experience are vast. So, late in the fall of 1989, when I had the opportunity to honor Mae's request for me, as President of AJL's Synagogue, School, and Center Division, to speak at a meeting of the Detroit chapter, I was delighted. Not only would I have the occasion to speak to the Detroit group, but I would have the opportunity to visit with Mae. And at the same time, I could ask about the early days of AJL.

Getting Mae to talk about AJL was easy. It's a subject very dear to her heart. Getting Mae to talk about her role in and contributions to the organization was not always quite so easy. We talked about the Detroit Chapter, but Mae did not mention when it came into being. (She organized it in 1973, about a year after moving to Detroit.)

The Weine Classification

When we talked about her classification scheme, we focused on the method of revision. Every week, a group of librarians, always including Mildred Kurland, met for a discussion of the revision, she said, emphasizing the role played by the others, especially Mildred Kurland. The group would bring lunch and go over the classification schedule, number by number. But then we went on to something else, before discussing the origin of the scheme, which, according to Mae in a note to Marcia Posner, went like this:

... I started in my library as an untrained volunteer, and while in library school I kept trying to figure where some of my books should be classified according to Dewey. Unfortunately, some of them didn't fit anywhere. There was a Catholic librarian in one of the Catholic schools in Philly who had the same problem ... and he worked out some changes for a Catholic collection. The Dewey people raised a fuss, so he added an "x" to his changed numbers When I tried to make changes, the Dewey people wrote that I couldn't, violated copyright, etc. I complained to the dean ... that I was only trying to be helpful and here I was practically being accused of plagiarism. When I got in touch with Father [Walsh?], he told me about his "x." Since I couldn't use "x," I used "z", since it didn't stand for anything in particular, unlike "J" for juvenile or "H" for Hebrew.

The Philadelphia Chapter

While Mae did not talk about her role in founding the Detroit chapter, or the origins of her classification scheme, she did talk about the founding of the Philadelphia chapter, the founding of the Association of Jewish Libraries, and the founding of the Southern California chapter—all events in which she played important roles. The relevant parts of our conversation went like this:

JG: Mae, how did you first become involved in Jewish libraries?

MW: What happened was that I had to do a thesis when I was in library school at Drexel in Philadelphia. I didn't have any idea about a topic, but as my husband was a rabbi [Rabbi Max Weine, of blessed memory] and I was learning to be a librarian, my interest lay in the direction of synagogue libraries. So I decided to do a survey of synagogue libraries as the subject of my thesis. After I did it, I discovered

that none of the libraries knew anything about the others. There was one synagogue that was two blocks away from another big synagogue and both had librarians, but neither knew anything about the other! I figured: here, they're all separate and nobody knows anything about anybody else, but the trouble was, who was I to change this? I was just an individual.

JG: But you did. How did you go about it?

MW: It just so happened that at that time a member of our synagogue was the head of one of the [Jewish] school systems in Philadelphia; it wasn't a synagogue system, it was an independent group. At that time, Philadelphia had about six different Jewish school systems: the Conservatives had a series of Conservative schools; the Reform movement had its own series as well; the Hebrew Education Association had about six schools ... ; there were about five or six different Jewish school systems. They formed an Educators' Council, and the heads of the different systems would meet on educational matters.

So I said to him, "If I gave you the names and addresses of all the Jewish libraries, would you, as a member of the Educators' Council, send out a letter on official stationery to all of them and call a meeting?"

He said, "Oh sure, sure," and then he didn't do it. I used to bug him and bug him and bug him, and finally—I think it must have taken about one year or more—he finally did. I'll tell you why. You see, he was a very good friend of one Joe Yenish, a librarian who worked at Temple University. Although Joe Yenish wasn't in a Jewish library, he was one of the Jewish librarians who was contacted by Miriam Leikind while they were attending an ALA [American Library Association] convention in Cleveland. Miriam, who had already organized a local Cleveland Jewish Library Association, managed to speak to these

Jewish librarians attending the convention, and they spoke about maybe doing something, but as far as I know, nobody did.

JG: This was in the late '50s?

MW: No, middle '50s. I was still in library school. I think it was '56. You see, Drexel's course at that time was one year, but I was going part-time, so it stretched out to three years. I started in '54, but I didn't get my degree until '57. Anyhow, the important thing is, this Temple University librarian, whose name was Joe Yenish, responded to the letter which had been sent to the Jewish librarians of southern New Jersey and Philadelphia (since they were just across the river from one another), to come to a meeting to organize a Jewish Library Association. We got a group together, and we decided to call it the Jewish Library Association of Greater Philadelphia. Then, when I had first worked out my [classification] scheme, we used to meet to work on it; we used to do a lot of things; we were very active. They all thought it was a great idea, and we'd all go

JG: Did you have monthly meetings?

MW: Yes, and later on we got Drexel interested and we even started—several times, for several years—six-week courses where each one of us would talk about library administration, one would give a brief lecture on sources for getting books, and then, maybe, I'd talk about cataloging and somebody else would give a talk on reference. We would invite all of the non-professional librarians—because a lot of us had gone to schools where they had volunteers running the library. I don't remember whether we charged admission, but I remember Drexel paid Miriam's fare to and from Cleveland once, to come and address us. Drexel was very supportive. They gave us this room to meet in and so forth. Anyhow, that was that, and so I could say that we, Joe Yenish and I, and a bunch of us, including Mildred Kurland, were founding members . . . and so Philadelphia was launched in 1956.

I also had something to do with naming the Church and Synagogue Library Association. When they started, the dean of the library school at Drexel, where I graduated, wanted to found a Church Library Association, and I said, well I didn't think that the Jewish librarians would want to . . . so well, call it the Church and Synagogue Library Association. I should have left it alone because while there are some synagogue librarians who belong to it, it's mostly church and Christian-oriented, and you

know the Jewish things are just the tail on the dog, so to speak.

The Jewish Library Association

JG: Mae, tell me about your involvement with Miriam Leikind and the founding of the Jewish Library Association.

MW: I didn't. Miriam did. We started the JLA, the Jewish Library Association, in Atlantic City in 1962.



**Mae Weine,
AJL President,
1969–70.**

JG: Atlantic City? Why there?

MW: Why there? Actually, we met there for the first time in 1961, when the national educators were having their convention. We were naive then: we thought that the educators would support us. Actually, I don't have to tell you the educators are the least interested. I tell you, I get so mad.

JG: So you had met the year before?

MW: Yes, and nothing happened. When Miriam tried calling a meeting the year before, nobody showed up but me, Miriam, and Philip Goodman, who was the head of the Jewish Book Council at that time. But by the next year, Miriam had been helping by mail, people who would write to her, you know, just on a personal basis, different people from different places, for instance, [Edythe] Wolfe from Omaha, Nebraska, people from Cleveland, of course, and even from Canada. We were about 30 of us, and we decided to call ourselves the Jewish Library Association. Right away, we were full of enthusiasm. We started publishing a little mimeographed bulletin called the *Drop Box*, and we decided to elect officers, so we elected Miriam president, of course, and we had a column where people could write in for help in solving their problems.

My Philadelphia group and the national group started corresponding with each other and started publishing things and solving problems. Miriam had a breakdown of Dewey that she used in her library and I had my scheme and somebody else had a simple alphabetical scheme (Reform), and so we decided that we would all work on that and, whatever we did, we would send out to all the members. We had what we called a "membership kit." When you joined, you received this kit which had, I think, the Cedarbaum manual published by the Jewish Book Council, and it had a copy of Miriam's classification scheme and mine. Everybody got the kit free when they joined, and anyhow, by 1965 we were really going places.

Southern California Chapter

JG: Mae, when Rita Frischer introduced you at the banquet during AJL's 1989 annual convention in Washington DC, when you accepted one of the first AJL life-membership awards, I was surprised to find out that you were instrumental in founding the Association of Jewish Libraries of Southern California. How did that come about?

MW: I was visiting my sister. It was the year I was president, in 1965. I got on the phone and I started calling up synagogues, asking: "Do you have a library? Do you have a librarian?" I contacted the Federation people and they weren't interested. They had a bookmobile or something. By the time I got to Dorothy Schroeder, of blessed memory, everyone had turned me down, except Dorothy. All I wanted, you know, was for them to call a meeting because I couldn't call. I was a stranger. I didn't know anybody. Dorothy wrote a letter and sent it to all the synagogues, saying that the National President of the Jewish Library Association was in town and was here to talk about the organization. Dorothy wrote something about wanting to organize for mutual self-help, etc. I remember Dorothy and I saying that if even six people showed up, we would organize. Twenty-five people attended, from as close as Los Angeles and as far away as San Diego, more than 120 miles away. Anyhow, that is how the Association of Jewish Libraries of Southern California was born.

Judith S. Greenblatt served as Librarian of Temple Bnai Israel in Toledo, Ohio for twelve years and as President of the Synagogue, School, and Center Division of the Association of Jewish Libraries from 1988 to 1990.