

Synagogue, School, and Center Libraries and the Public Library

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Introduction

While everyone knows that the purpose of synagogue, school, and community center (SSC) libraries is to serve the Jewish community, not a great deal of systematic research has been done on the interaction of public libraries and the SSC library. The purpose of this paper is to describe some ways in which these libraries interact, and to suggest approaches by which the SSC librarian can enhance the relationship between the public and the Judaic library.

There are several aspects to this broad topic, which includes each of the specific types of library—day school, synagogue, and community center (or Federation or Bureau of Jewish Education library)—in its interaction with the public library. This interaction enriches the smaller Jewish institution as well as the larger public institution. In this paper, we consider both the libraries and the librarians. By examining each of these groups separately, we can describe the ways in which many communities have had meaningful contact and participation in the Jewish and non-Jewish library community.

The Day School

In many communities, the public children's librarian encourages groups of children to visit the public library annually, and rewards these visits from the elementary grades with storytelling. If the school librarian desires, the public librarian will also teach research skills to the older students.

Where local laws and funds permit, public librarians visit Jewish day schools and present special programs. Since the students at the day schools are also generally local public library members, the public library includes the day schools in its promotional activities, especially summer reading programs. The public library then sends the schools the names of their students who have completed the incentive programs over the summer. In addition, most large public library systems have weekly special programs for young chil-

dren, and day schools are certainly included in their monthly program guides and publicity releases. For the librarians and students, there are often visits by popular children's authors, and these events are open to all schools, both public and private.

Public libraries are very helpful in providing high school students with resources that the day schools cannot afford to buy. In New York, where the central New York Public Library is non-circulating, there are still many libraries which are private/public, but open to membership. Day schools, such as Ramaz, take out memberships in the nearest library, and their high school students then use these for their secular research projects. In reality, these become the public libraries for the students.

The public library serves as a resource for all important community information, such as which celebrities live in the community, what music resources are available, which authors or illustrators—both adult and children's—are in the vicinity, which artists or storytellers visit schools, and who the local experts are on vocations and avocations. The public library becomes the major resource for enhancing school projects with films, audio and video cassettes, and realia of varying types.

The Synagogue Library

The synagogue library often has slightly different needs for the public library. Here, the patrons are usually adults searching for their roots. Most major central public libraries have a large collection of material for genealogical research. While the librarians will not do personal family research for a patron, they are very helpful in guiding patrons to the needed resources.

Synagogue libraries often provide monthly book review meetings for their congregants. The public library will almost always obtain a book for a patron when he requests it, making additional copies available when needed. Thus, the public library becomes a valuable resource for the synagogue.

Perhaps the most important activity of the synagogue library is the celebration of Jewish Book Month. Here, interacting with the public library is easier if there is a chapter of the Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) in the community. In addition to publicizing Jewish Book Month in the synagogue, some communities carry it to the public library. Mounting a Jewish Book Month exhibit requires a great deal of planning and coordination of effort. One such exhibit in Los Angeles a few years ago involved all the Judaica librarians of greater Los Angeles. The planning began in the month of April, when the Judaica librarians of the greater Los Angeles area met and divided up the tasks for this major undertaking. Each month, the plans and procedures for the exhibit were carefully detailed in *Library Light*, the monthly newsletter of the local AJL chapter. When the time came for the actual exhibit (the month preceding Hanukkah), the cochairpersons, Rita Frischer and Nettie Frishman, utilized the entire main floor of the central library, and with the cooperation of the library staff, completely designed and filled 37 cases with books, ceremonial art, and realia of every description. Any library chapter should consult the detailed plans and the well-organized efforts of this group before undertaking such a task, for its success depended greatly on careful planning and attention to details.

Rita Frischer collaborated on a twenty-page pamphlet on Jewish Book Month programming for the Jewish Book Council (15 East 26th Street, New York, New York 10010). It is titled: "Celebrating Jewish Book Month: a Program Guide," by Rita Frischer (Jewish Book Council, 1985. 20 pp. \$5.00). This pamphlet followed the successful Los Angeles book-month celebration, which was recorded in the *Proceedings* of the 13th Annual Association of Jewish Libraries Convention in San Francisco, California, June 18–21, 1978, pp. 72–74. It is called "How to Build a Jewish Book Month Machine—A 'Grass Roots' Approach to Promotion."

In Cleveland, Ohio, there has been an ongoing relationship with the public library for 25 years. Every year, the librarians of the local AJL chapter host a tea for their public counterparts in the University Heights and Shaker Heights areas. Sometimes the program includes a speaker, and sometimes a visit to an exhibit of Jewish books or historical materials. With an endowment from the Cleveland Federation, a bookmark listing Jewish adult and children's books is printed annually. These lists are compiled by the AJL chapter, and then 6,000 are distributed to the local library and branches, to be distributed during Jewish Book Month. The Cleveland chapter's fine relationship with the public library is due in large measure to the social interaction between the Judaica and public librarians who often serve the districts with large Jewish populations.

Irene Levin has aptly pointed out, in a paper entitled "Materials and Aids at the Public Library for the Judaica Librarian," that "the public library extends the walls of the synagogue or community center library as far as Jerusalem in serving Jewish patrons." (The source of this quote is an unpublished handout distributed by the Henry Waldinger Memorial Library in Valley Stream, New York in 1975).

Many Jewish films are available for synagogue programming, these films being listed in the library's major film catalog under the headings *Jews*, *Jewish*, and *Israel*. Searches for books or films can be made through the computer terminals that all major library systems are using now, in order to give a specific patron what he or she requests. If Hebrew-language tapes or Hebrew and Yiddish recordings cannot be obtained, the public library will borrow them through interlibrary loan. Through the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*, materials for research can be identified and borrowed (in facsimile form, usually) through interlibrary loan if they are not available locally. In many communities there is also an historical society library, whose archives contain the history of the roots of Jewish life in that city. These records can be photocopied, and original manuscripts used for research, since the local history or historical society library also serves the public. When planning a program on the Jewish roots of a city, always visit the local historical society first. If given enough time, the staff may mount an exhibit for a special occasion, such as a major anniversary of Jewish settlement in the city.

An interesting phenomenon of the past few years has been the acquisition of ethnic literature by the public library for the purpose

of serving new immigrants. The first major tour of books from the Soviet Union occurred in 1989, when five persons from Moscow visited five major cities in the United States and exhibited books, photographs, and toys made in the U.S.S.R. Almost all of the children's books were given to the Atlanta Public Library, which was the last stop of the tour. These books are invaluable to the Russian Jewish children in the Atlanta community and to their parents. The synagogue librarian can now make these available to new members, and serve as the conduit between the new immigrants and the public library. As immigration increases, it will be the Jews who will benefit greatly from this cultural exchange.

The Community Center Library

While day schools and synagogues usually circulate library materials only to their own constituencies, the community center, Federation, or Bureau of Jewish Education library has a much wider clientele. In Atlanta, Georgia, the Bureau library will circulate a book to anyone requesting it; this includes all residents, as well as students from the ten colleges and universities in the city. In Providence, Rhode Island, the Bureau library is open not only to residents of the city of Providence, but also to anyone in the state needing a specific resource. For this reason, the community center library is usually the first library called when the public library refers a patron. Here the Judaica library assists members of the general community who are interested in books which only the Judaica library may have. As Christian scholarship on Judaic themes increases, partly in response to a growing public awareness of the Holocaust, and partly due to increased understanding and interest in Jewish philosophy, many Jewish libraries are being used as resources for the non-Jewish public.

Christian parochial and other private schools call upon Judaica librarians to keep them informed about the latest in Jewish books, which these school libraries purchase for their holiday and ethnic collections. Many of these schools purchase the AJL award-winning children's books each year. Adult parochial libraries, for example, turn to the Judaic library for a newly awakened interest in American-Jewish scholars, such as Abraham Joshua Heschel (the latest book on his thought—*The Human and the Holy: The Spirituality of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, by Donald J. Moore—was published in 1989 by Fordham University Press). A Jewish center library is certainly a logical place to come for a work of this type.

The public library often turns to the Judaica library for special resources, and theological seminars that lend books through interlibrary loan serve as a resource for the rest of the country. This is a time-consuming and expensive service, which these large libraries perform for the benefit of the general public, but it is one of the most admirable types of service that a library can perform.

In areas far removed from these major Judaica libraries, the public library becomes the intermediary between the Jewish scholar and the books he needs for his research. Because databases today often carry codes identifying the libraries that own the books, it is now becoming easier to obtain books through interlibrary loan. For a small fee, the public library can search and print periodical articles or bibliographies on specific subjects for Jewish patrons. Thus, even if one lives nowhere near a major library, the computer, the database, and the modem can bring information quickly to the patron.

Conclusions

Synagogue, school and center libraries interact often with the public library, serving each other's clientele whenever the occasion arises. Through databases, the public library becomes the major resource for Jewish scholarship in areas remote from major Judaica libraries, and Judaica libraries serve non-Jewish patrons when the public library cannot supply needed works. Jewish librarians who join their local metropolitan area or state library organizations establish personal relationships with public librarians, and friendships develop also through AJL chapter meetings to which public librarians are invited.

As Judaica librarians, members of the SSC Division of AJL are in a unique position both to use and serve the public library. We use their resources and, in turn, share our unique holdings and our special cultural point of view. The public library assists the SSC Division in bringing Jewish books before the public, and the SSC library, in turn, serves as a Judaic resource for the general public.

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