

## American Research Collections in Jewish Studies, 1964–1989

**Robert Singerman**  
*University of Florida Libraries*  
 Gainesville, FL

### Introduction

Just as academic programs and course offerings in Jewish Studies have proliferated throughout the United States since the mid-1960s,<sup>1</sup> newly established research library collections in support of Jewish Studies programs have similarly been created and molded, often in areas of the country where Jewish library resources were formerly either non-existent or exceedingly thin. The twenty-five year review that follows emphasizes the growth in these newer collections, while examining several of the external and institutional factors contributing to the development at American colleges and universities of library collections in Jewish Studies in the years since 1964, the year the Association of Jewish Libraries was founded.

### The PL-480 Program

No review of this period could overlook the fact that 1964 also marked the inception of the now-defunct Library of Congress PL-480 program for Israel. This was a centralized and well-coordinated acquisitions project by which participating American libraries, originally twelve in number and expanded to twenty-two by 1973, automatically received shipments of newly published Israeli books and serials at no cost. Veterans in the Judaica library profession prior to the advent of library automation and shared machine-readable catalog records recall with a mixture of fondness and dread the arrival of Israel PL-480 shipments and the attendant work for each full-term participant to create over a ten-year period temporary bibliographic records, derived from the invaluable *Accessions List: Israel*, for an astounding 65,000 titles.<sup>2</sup> In many respects, the Israel PL-480 years spanning 1964–1973 represent a significant bibliographic watershed dividing the newer, non-participating libraries both qualitatively and quantitatively from the voluminous bibliographic enrichment gained by the program's major participants.

In addition to enriching the well-established Judaica research collections, Israel PL-480 also contributed in the most beneficial and salutary sense to the geographic dispersion of Jewish library resources. Libraries at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and the University of Utah, for instance, also benefited, not only with Hebraica from Israel but also from Arabica gathered by a parallel PL-480 program for the Middle East, based in Cairo. Proliferating university programs and academic centers in Jewish Studies and Near Eastern Studies demanded these vernacular resources at a time when the Middle East was front-page news (who can forget Nasser, PLO terrorism, the Lebanese civil war, Camp David, the excesses of the Shah of Iran and the rise of the ayatollahs, and OPEC's machinations with the supply of the world's petroleum?) and two major Israel-Arab wars dominated the world's attention in 1967 and 1973.

### Impact of the Six-Day War

As is well known, the Six-Day War of 1967 also stirred the Jewish consciousness of innumerable American Jews—college students included—and concerns over Israel and Jewish identity became matters of articulated, public concern (witness the counter-culture *Jewish Catalog*,<sup>3</sup> together with the Jewish feminist, student press, and *havurah* movements), percolating from the ground up into the academic curriculum as Jewish Studies, and competing for budgetary resources and validation along with Black, ethnic, and women's studies. Secular publishers, especially the university presses, also responded to the academic and public clamor for Judaica with expanded lists of new titles at the same time that the photo-offset reprinting of scholarly out-of-print tomes, the economical publication of camera-ready texts, and the paperback revolution all endeavored to fill the instructional and cultural needs of an increasingly educated, acculturated, and literate post-World War II generation of Jewish and non-Jewish readers alike.

Post Vatican-II ecumenism; the searing lessons of the Holocaust and the horrors of Nazism as personified by Elie Wiesel; the appearance of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* in 1972; expanded tourism to Israel in the wake of the Six-Day War and, with it, the personal identification by Jews in the Diaspora with Israel and Zionism; the revitalization of Yiddish; interest in genealogy and nostalgia for the lost "world of our fathers"; rallies for embattled Soviet Jewry; and the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Shmuel Yosef Agnon, Nelly Sachs, Saul Bellow, and Isaac Bashevis Singer all signaled to enterprising publishers that a strong market for Judaica was ripe for exploitation. On a somewhat parallel track, the Orthodox "revival" created a demand for reprinted Hasidic and classic Hebrew texts; the ArtScroll series of Biblical and rabbinic commentaries targeted the observant American-born generation of Jews more at ease with English than Hebrew. Clearly, the Jews were justifiably seen as affluent buyers of books, far out of numerical proportion to their percentage of the overall population.

### Coping with the Publishing Explosion

If authors, then, were creating the goods (consult the pages of the *Jewish Book Annual* or *Judaica Book News* if anyone doubts the existence of this publishing explosion), how were AJL's research libraries coping at a time when the field of Judaica librarianship was considerably smaller than it is today, and relatively few Judaica librarians possessed accredited professional education in librarianship? The long-established and deservedly renowned research collections at Harvard, the Library of Congress, and the New York Public Library, as well as the seminary libraries at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS), Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), and Yeshiva University all went from proverbial strength to strength, albeit during alternating periods of budgetary expansion and occasional fiscal crises caused by galloping Israeli inflation, a

weak dollar in relation to European currencies, and escalating domestic book and serial prices—factors that coincided with the boom in Judaica publishing.

Grants and endowments from the National Endowment for the Humanities, corporations, foundations, and private sources assisted Judaica libraries in: *processing arrears*, e.g., various submerged, “back-room” special collections and manuscripts were cataloged or inventoried by the Klau Library, Cincinnati, with an NEH grant awarded in 1975; *erecting new buildings*, as in the case of JTS’s handsome new Joseph J. and Dora Abbell Library facility; *retrospective conversion*, e.g., Harvard received a major grant from the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation for conversion of its entire Hebrew and Yiddish card catalog to machine-readable form; and *acquisitions*, as seen in the recent endowment created by Rosalyn and Joseph Newman for Yale University to develop a Yiddish research collection, or the gift made to Yeshiva University in honor of its centennial in 1986—the holograph letter, dated 1818, written by Thomas Jefferson to M. M. Noah.

The Harvard University Library staff has been particularly resourceful in tapping public and private funds to advance preservation microfilming of Judaica, Hebraica, and Yiddica, drawing on support from the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation and the United States Office of Education Title II-C (Strengthening Research Library Resources) Program. At Indiana University, there now exists an endowment of \$130,000 for library acquisitions in support of the Jewish Studies program, thanks to the support of over one hundred donors and \$25,000 provided by an NEH Challenge Grant.

### Continued Growth of Research Collections

The period under review was not without tragedies: the Jewish Theological Seminary of America Library suffered a disastrous fire in 1966, resulting in an irreparable loss of some 70,000 precious volumes.<sup>4</sup> Growth in collections continued unabated as satellite campus libraries of the Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox branches of Judaism expanded in New York (e.g., HUC-JIR’s new Brookdale Center, adjacent to New York University) and in Los Angeles with JTS’s West Coast affiliate, the University of Judaism, the Yeshiva University/Simon Wiesenthal Center, and HUC-JIR’s Los Angeles campus. These libraries can rely on local consortia and reciprocal borrowing agreements for re-

source-sharing to meet local curricular and research needs, while also maintaining a strong interlibrary loan/photoduplication/telefacsimile relationship with their respective affiliated research libraries in Cincinnati and New York City.

For public and private universities about to embark on creating Jewish Studies programs in the 1960s and 1970s, with the weighty responsibility for developing collateral library resources virtually *ex nihilo*, there were no easy formulas for success, and success stories are by no means common. One needs to read the university’s public relations office-generated press releases (and, I might add, the library statistics) with no small degree of skepticism. Who is not aware of an “active” Jewish Studies program (translation: one of our most active interlibrary loan borrowing libraries) headed by an “eminent Judaica scholar” whose parent institution does not even invest in developing its own local resources by subscribing to the *Jewish Quarterly Review* or *Midstream*? These “programs,” packaged with the ulterior motive of cultivating Jewish money for the institution as a whole, are not to be taken seriously and lack any semblance of credibility other than filling a student’s “mix and match” requirements for a certain number of electives in the humanities.

Yet, many Judaica research libraries have admirably met the collection development challenges, weathering along the way recessions, retrenchments in federal aid, and competition from local Jewish federations as well as Israel’s far-reaching claims on American benevolence. At the time of his much-quoted study of Judaica library resources, published in 1975, Dr. Charles Berlin (Harvard) provided data on collections with total volume count of approximately two million volumes.<sup>5</sup> In his article on libraries in Garland’s forthcoming (July 1991) *Jewish-American History and Culture: An Encyclopedia*, co-edited by Jack Fischel and Sanford Pinsker, Stephen Lehmann has charted impressive expansion in the growth of Judaica collections to an astounding 3.5 million volumes.<sup>6</sup>

### The Bibliographer’s Task

With forty centuries of recorded Jewish history to preserve and interpret, and with Jews dispersed throughout five continents, producing literature in a multitude of languages in book and non-book formats, the Jewish Studies bibliographer’s task is inherently a difficult one, compounded at many institutions by additional assigned responsibilities such as cataloging, and in-

adequate clerical support. Without the enviable collecting headstart and alumni support enjoyed by all of the prominent institutions mentioned above, the bibliographer’s burden is further aggravated by endemic problems of paper embrittlement, rising prices of new and old books (inflation and competition among libraries and collectors for a declining supply of desirable antiquarian books are at play here), and, more often than not, meager budgetary appropriations that inhibit a conscientious bibliographer’s ability to order microforms of the Jewish press, to take a buying trip to Israel, or even to make timely purchases with the sophisticated needs of graduate and doctoral programs in mind—even if such programs do not yet exist but are merely in the planning stage.

Some of the newer Judaica research collections inaugurated in the past twenty-five years include those at Ohio State University, UCLA, University of Florida, University of Toronto, National Library of Canada (Lowy Collection), New York University’s Library of the School of Law (Gruss Collection), University of Maryland, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, University of Denver, Stanford University, and SUNY-Binghamton. Other emerging concentrations of varying size and scope may be found at McGill University, University of Arizona, University of Washington, University of Utah, Purdue University, and Indiana University. Brandeis University and the universities of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Texas (Austin) have significantly enlarged upon core holdings already in place prior to 1964. Philanthropic support from Theodore E. Cummings, combined with early participation in the Israel PL-480 program and the fortuitous purchase of the Bamberger & Wahrman antiquarian bookstore in Jerusalem, accounts for UCLA’s numerical domination among public universities, with holdings estimated at 170,000 volumes of Judaica, Hebraica, Yiddica, and Ladino publications.

Jeanne Eichelberger, a colleague at SUNY-Binghamton with collection development responsibility for Judaic Studies, aptly expressed some of the common problems facing research libraries with new Judaica collections:

Because we try to be all things to all people, only a relatively small portion of the budget can be devoted to supporting the smaller programs, regardless of how worthwhile they are or how dedicated their faculty. Because we must compete with much older institutions which have had a

century or more to build their collections, we must spend a significant portion of what money we have on retrospective purchases to fill in gaps in the recognized classics in the field. Under the circumstances, trying to "cover" a field like Judaic Studies, all several thousand years of it, spread as it is over philosophy, religion, history, law, literature, folklore, art, and you-name-it in any number of different languages, is both endlessly fascinating and perpetually frustrating.<sup>7</sup>

Judaica librarianship has made tremendous strides in the past twenty-five years; thanks for this is due in large part to the tenacious commitment of librarians, laboring without adequate recognition or appreciation, to build and service strong collections for today's users and for generations of students and researchers to come. Is it all worth the effort, even if today's career-oriented Jewish students are by and large indifferent to Jewish Studies, and our collections are underutilized? I believe so, especially with Jewish survival so much in question and cultural illiteracy so rampant, as I recall the words of Barbara Ward: "In free society we are abolishing the past, not by rewriting it or forcefully suppressing it but simply by losing all interest in it. This is as fatal for a society as it is for a man to lose his memory."<sup>8</sup>

### Notes

1. The close relationship between the expansion of Jewish Studies programs and the accelerated growth of supporting research collections underlies this review. For an introduction to this area, consult Arnold J. Band, "Jewish Studies in American Liberal-Arts Colleges and Universities," *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 67 (1966), pp. 3-30; now updated by Band's "Jewish Studies: A Generation Later," *Sh'ma*, no. 383 (Dec. 8, 1989), pp. 17-20. Fresh perspectives and additional bibliographical references are found in essays by: Harold S. Wechsler and Paul Ritterband, "Jewish Learning in American Universities: The Literature of the Field," *Modern Judaism*, vol. 3 (1983), pp. 253-289; Byron L. Sherwin, "Jewish Studies at American Colleges and Universities," *Shofar* (Jewish Studies Program at Purdue University), vol. 7, no. 4 (Summer 1989), pp. 48-56; and Paula E. Hyman, "Jewish Studies and the Jewish College Experience," in: Ronald Kronish, ed., *Towards the Twenty-first Century: Judaism and the Jewish People in Israel and America; Essays in Honor of Rabbi Leon Kronish on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1988), pp. 205-211.
2. Charles Berlin, "The Israel PL-480 Program, 1964-1969: A Review," *Jewish Book Annual*, vol. 27 (1969/70), pp. 48-55.
3. *The Jewish Catalog* (1973) and its sequels, *The Second Jewish Catalog* (1976) and *The Third Jewish Catalog* (1980), each an enormously successful project of the Philadelphia-based Jewish Publication Society of America, "helped transform the Jewish counterculture

from a peripheral movement to one that very much influenced the mainstream," according to Jonathan D. Sarna, *JPS: The Americanization of Jewish Culture, 1888-1988* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 285.

4. Menahem Schmelzer, "The Jewish Theological Seminary Library," *Jewish Book Annual*, vol. 42 (1984/85), pp. 183-188.
5. Charles Berlin, "Library Resources for Jewish Studies in the United States," *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 75 (1974-75), p. 10.
6. Michael W. Grunberger, "From Strength to Strength: Judaica Collections Facing the Future," in: *Judaica Librarianship—Facing the Future: Proceedings of a Conference held at Harvard University on May 2-3, 1988 . . .* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard College Library, 1989), p. 15. (Article reprinted in *Judaica Librarianship*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Spring 1988-Winter 1989), pp. 123-127.)
7. Jeanne Eichelberger, letter to Robert Singerman, Feb. 6, 1990.
8. Barbara Ward, "The Battleground is Here," *The New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 27, 1952, p. 7.

---

*Robert Singerman is Jewish Studies Bibliographer at the University of Florida Libraries in Gainesville, Florida. He served as President of the Research and Special Libraries Division of the Association of Jewish Libraries from 1988-1990.*