

IN THE BEGINNING . . .

On the Founding of *Judaica Librarianship*

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The major part of this issue is devoted to a celebration of the silver anniversary of the Association of Jewish Libraries. The articles commissioned by Guest Editor, Dr. Leonard Gold, contain many reminiscences about the founding and founders of AJL, as well as observations about our profession.

The editors of *Judaica Librarianship* also have cause for celebration—the conclusion of the journal's fifth volume. In her chronicle of AJL, Marcia Posner has documented the initiation of the journal as an AJL serial on the basis of statements published in the *AJL Newsletter*. The "prehistory" of *Judaica Librarianship* resides largely in my memory and personal archives, however. In this editorial, I reminisce about the founding of *Judaica Librarianship*, and assess the journal's role in AJL and in the field of librarianship as a whole.

It was 1982, and my husband's new job brought us to Pittsburgh. In the preceding year, I had received the doctorate in library science from Columbia; this degree, in theory, qualified me for teaching or administration. The University of Pittsburgh library school had no full-time faculty positions open that year. I had extensive experience in Judaica research libraries, but there were no such libraries in Pittsburgh. So I did some consulting for YIVO, wrote for information science journals, and developed a research grant proposal. This relatively quiet period of my life allowed me time to think (a luxury I have no time for now).

One day, I had a vision of a very slick, professional journal designed for the Judaica librarian. It would not be a bibliographic or book review journal; it would not be a periodical on the history of Hebrew printing. It would focus on the activities of the Judaica librarian and provide authoritative, up-to-date information on all of them—acquisitions, cataloging, reference, and more. Ideas for departments and their names started to flow immediately, e.g., ALEF BIT (Hebrew computers); RESPONSA (reference questions and answers).

I was very excited about the idea and called my friend and colleague, Pearl Berger, in New York. I described my vision of the journal to her and enumerated many of the departments and features that might be included in it. I re-

call Pearl's exact words: "I would love to read such a journal!"

At the time, AJL had about 500 members, each paying \$18.00 in membership dues annually. I did not think that AJL could afford to publish a journal with the quality of graphic design that I envisioned. It was my belief that a beautiful-looking periodical would attract professional contributions, and I was unwilling to skimp on production quality.

Pearl and I discussed which commercial publishers should be approached—in the field of Jewish studies as well as in library science. I wrote to six publishers, three in each of these disciplines. In my letters, I described the scope of the proposed journal, its relationship to existing serials, potential advertisers, and the anticipated market, citing the AJL membership figure.

All six publishers sent me polite letters of refusal. None felt that they could be assured of enough subscriptions to justify publication of the journal.

I then took the proposal to the AJL Convention that year, presenting it at a meeting of the R & S Division, presided over by Charles Cutter. R & S members were enthusiastic about the ideas for departments and suggested additional ones. Just as vividly as I recall Pearl Berger's words in the phone call mentioned above, I recall the silence that greeted my proposal for a title of the new journal: *Judaica Librarianship*. No one had an alternative to suggest. The proposal went to the general membership meeting, and I was thrilled when a dues increase to cover the production costs of the journal was approved.

Judaica Librarianship is the journal of both Divisions of AJL, and Phil Miller's initial appointment of Marcia Posner and myself as co-editors was designed to reflect this. Working with Marcia has been a pleasure and a privilege. Her husband describes her as "one of the nicest, most giving people I know," and he is absolutely right.

Both Marcia and I called on our network of personal contacts to build the list of contrib-

uting editors to the journal, which reads like a "Who's Who in Judaica Librarianship." We are proud of our contributors, and I believe they are proud to see their work published in the journal.

The membership of the Association has doubled in the years since the journal was founded. Other factors have certainly contributed to this increase, but there is no doubt that most of the publishers who turned down the initial proposal to publish *Judaica Librarianship* would be happy to acquire the journal today.

Judaica Librarianship has never been designed to obviate the need to read general library literature, but rather to bring together articles of interest to the specialist in this field. An article on Hebraica cataloging, for example, is more likely to be submitted today to *Judaica Librarianship* than to a general cataloging journal. In *Judaica Librarianship*, the author is assured of an interested readership, even though the general periodical may have wider circulation. Still, we know that articles relevant to our field are published both in Jewish studies and in library science periodicals. We therefore inaugurate a column in this issue entitled "Scatter of the Literature," to note such publications.

Of all the positive feedback on *Judaica Librarianship*, the most meaningful to me are the statements of Judaica librarians that the journal has elevated the status of the profession and improved their self-image.

It has been a thrill to see my vision become a reality. Editing *Judaica Librarianship* is stimulating, challenging, fun, and a learning experience, but most of all, extremely time-consuming. If it has taken a little more than five years to produce five volumes, that is because of the numerous stages involved in producing each issue to ensure the accuracy of information, readability of the text, and attractiveness of the layout. Commercial publishers have expressed amazement that the journal is produced entirely by volunteers. May I take this opportunity to thank all of you who have contributed your time and expertise to *Judaica Librarianship*. May the Association of Jewish Libraries and its journal continue to flourish.