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The Shavzin-Carsch Collection of Historic Jewish Children's Literature

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The Shavzin-Carsch Collection of Historic Jewish Children's Literature

HISTORY AND SETTING

The Shavzin-Carsch Collection is housed in the Ralph and Julia Cohen Library of the Isaac M. Wise Temple in Cincinnati, Ohio. Wise Temple, founded in 1840 as K.K. (*Kehilah Kedoshah*) B'nai Yeshurun, is itself a historic congregation – the base from which Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise built the Reform movement in North America during the last half of the nineteenth century.

The library dates to 1927, with the establishment of what was called Wise Center, in the North Avondale community of Cincinnati. Wise Center was a satellite building for the congregation's architectural gem and now National Historic Landmark, the Plum Street Temple. The library was established to serve adults as well as the religious school, and an initial fund of \$500 was supplemented by a bequest from the estate of the temple's rabbi, Louis M. Grossmann, successor to Rabbi Wise. Many of the library's older books bear a bookplate marking them as purchases from this bequest. These include several dozen children's books, now part of the Shavzin-Carsch Collection, having publication dates ranging from 1899 to 1942.

In 1976, a new "Wise Center" building was dedicated in suburban Amberley, Ohio. The building includes a spacious library of more than 3,000 square feet. Now called the Ralph and Julia Cohen Library, it consists of nearly 22,000 items, including print books, videos, audiobooks, and music CDs. In addition to open shelves and a reading area, a teacher resource room, an office, and a storytelling room, the Cohen Library also has a backroom, where older and special books—some dating to the library's earliest days—are housed. The Shavzin-Carsch Collection currently occupies twenty-three shelves in this room.

ESTABLISHING THE COLLECTION: FROM INSPIRATION TO ACTION

The collection was established following a discussion on *ha-Safran*, AJL's electronic listserv, starting in July 8, 2010. It was a query posted by Linda R. Silver of Cleveland, Ohio that set off the conversation. Silver's post about a "source of information, human or otherwise, about early Jewish children's books in Yiddish or German" motivated me to piece together all the early American Jewish children's books at the Wise Temple Library (in English) into a distinctive collection. At the outset, I compared the Wise Temple's collection with titles listed in two studies: Jonathan Sarna's book about the Jewish Publication Society (Sarna 1989) and Silver's presentation, "Milestones in American Jewish Children's Literature", given at the 2005 AJL Western

¹ Linda R. Silver to *ha-Safran* mailing list, July 20, 2010, http://www.mail-archive.com/search?q=Early+Jew-ish+children%27s+books&l=hasafran%40lists.acs.ohio-state.edu.

Regional Conference (Silver 2005). Silver, a specialist in American Jewish children's literature and author of two books on the topic (Silver 2008; 2010), referred in her 2005 presentation to a number of early children's books, and our library had every one of them: *Hillel's Happy Holidays* by Mamie Gamoran; *Mother Goose Rhymes for Jewish Children* by Sara G. Levy; the *Aleph-Bet Story Book* by Deborah Pessin; Robert Garvey's *Good Shabbos Everybody!*, with illustrations by Maurice Sendak; *Lost Prince Almon*, by Louis Pendleton; *Breakfast of the Birds and Other Stories from the Hebrew of Judah Steinberg* rendered into English by Emily Solis-Cohen; *To Build a Land* by Sally Watson; Sadie Rose Weilerstein's *The Adventures of K'tonton*; and, of course, the *All-of-a-Kind Family* series by Sydney Taylor. An examination of Sarna's study revealed that with only one exception, the Wise Temple Library also had every children's book mentioned in that seminal history, including all twenty-five of the Covenant Series of Juvenile Biographies published by JPS (Sarna 1989, 226–227).

Now that my earlier assumption about the comprehensive nature of our historic children's collection was confirmed, I was encouraged to establish a dedicated collection in support of research in American Jewish children's literature. That such a collection was needed was apparent in the vibrant 2010 discussion on *ha-Safran* listsery, spearheaded by Silver: "Since there are no historic Jewish children's book collections in the United States . . . research by scholars, students, and authors is impeded and a small but important part of the children's book publishing record is, at best, incomplete . . . The need for at least one significant collection of historic American Jewish children's books certainly exists." Silver's assumption was borne out by Dolores Blythe Jones, whose directory of children's literature collections (Jones 1995) lists over three hundred institutions with special collections of children's literature, but only one collection under the heading "Judaic": the Helen Sarna Children's Collection at Hebrew College in Newton Centre, Massachusetts. According to library director Harvey Sukenik (e-mail message from September 23, 2012), the core of this collection consists of Hebrew books purchased with funds from the Sarna family and not English books published in North America.

Rita Frischer's survey of prominent Jewish women authors of children's books (1997)³ provided concrete evidence of the need for a special collection to support research in Jewish children's literature. Frischer observed that a major guide to children's literature (Silvey 1995) listed many categories of ethnic literature for children—Japanese American, African American, and so forth—but Jewish American children's literature was absent as a category. Another confirmation for the need of such a dedicated collection came from the introduction by Suzanne Rahn and Naomi Sokoloff to a special issue of *The Lion and the Unicorn: A Critical Journal of Children's Literature*, dedicated to Jewish children's literature. Rahn and Sokoloff (2003, v) noted that "in-

² Linda R. Silver to *ha-Safran* mailing list, July 21, 2010, no. 13951, http://www.mail-archive.com/hasafran@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu/msg13951.html.

³ Frischer's survey highlighted the following Jewish women authors of children's books, active between 1930 and 1960: Sadie Rose Weilerstein, Mamie Gamoran, Lillian Freehof, Deborah Pessin, Sulamith Ish-Kishor, Elma Ehrlich Levinger, Libby M. Klaperman, Dorothy Karp Kripke, Sydney Taylor, Nora Benjamin Kubie, and Mina Lewiton (Frischer 1997, 219–226).

depth criticism and interpretation in this area have been rare, with one exception: studies centering on the Holocaust." I concluded that a comprehensive collection may provide scholars with an opportunity to explore a whole gamut of literature written for Jewish children.

Clearly, Wise Temple's library had the makings of a proper historical collection of American Jewish children's literature. By late summer 2010, I had decided to "declare" the collection, following Silver's guidelines (Linda R. Silver, e-mail message to author, July 20, 2010):

- 1. Establish a mission statement, including a description of the collection and the purpose it serves.
- **2.** Set the criteria for materials to be included and identify materials that meet these criteria. Use the bibliographies of children's books in the early *Jewish Book Annuals* as guides.
- **3.** Create a dedicated space for the books, and add a tag or marker in the catalog to identify that they are part of a historical collection. Establish rules of access.
- 4. Publicize the collection and invite donations of materials that meet the criteria.

With affirmation from Wise Temple's senior rabbi, Lewis H. Kamrass, I named our collection in memory of Bess Shavzin (1913–1978) and Judith Carsch (1935–1999), the Wise Temple librarians whose tenures in that position spanned the years 1950–1999. While other synagogue librarians were weeding and discarding old, dated children's books, these two women, with an eye to history, kept at least one copy of everything, cataloged and well-maintained in the library's stacks.

CRITERIA AND SCOPE

The mission of the Shavzin-Carsch Collection is to support research in children's Judaica via this collection of historically significant books of Jewish content written for children and teens.

The oldest volume in the collection dates from 1839: the third and earliest available edition of Isaac Leeser's *A Catechism for Jewish Children* (Leeser 1839).⁴ Written for children from the ages of eight to fourteen, the book presents lessons on Judaic teachings about God and his attributes, the Ten Commandments and Mosaic Law, and doctrines of repentance, messiah, and even afterlife, all in a question-and-answer format. Other nineteenth-century items, among the earliest books published for Jewish children in America, include *Lost Prince Almon* by Louis Pendleton

⁴ This edition is available in few OCLC libraries, as well as in digital format via the Open Library, at http://openlibrary.org/books/OL14024561M/Catechism for Jewish children.

(Pendleton 1898) and *Under the Eagle's Wing* by Sara Miller (Miller 1899). These fictionalized stories of the biblical figure of Joash and of Maimonides, respectively, were eventually translated into Hebrew.* The collection also has the first JPS-published children's book that did not relate to the Bible or Jewish history: *Breakfast of the Birds*, published in 1917, is a translation from Hebrew of eighteen children's stories by Judah Steinberg, and includes four color illustrations (Steinberg and Solis-Cohen 1917).** Other early works in the collection include Abram Samuel Isaacs's *Stories from the Rabbis of the Talmud* (1893) and books by Grace Aguilar, who wrote some of the "earliest significant works for Jewish children to appear in the United States" (Silverman 2007).

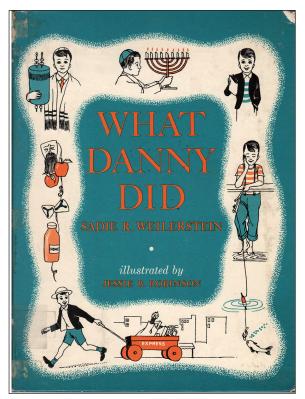


Figure 1. Weilerstein, Sadie Rose, and Sol Aronson. *What Danny Did: Stories for the Wee Jewish Child.* New York: Bloch Pub. Co., 1928

Following the collection development guidelines provided by Silver (Linda R. Silver, e-mail message to author, July 20, 2010), other collection items were included because they were cited in the select Jewish juvenile books bibliographies published in the *Jewish Book Annual*. Compiled

^{*} Editor's note: Interestingly, both books were translated into Hebrew by Joseph Meyouhas (1868–1942). The translation of Pendelton's book was published in Warsaw as early as 1907 (Pendleton and Meyouhas 1907), then reprinted together with Nahum Gutman's illustrations in honor of the translator's seventieth birthday (Pendleton, Meyouhas, and Gutman 1938). Miller's book was published in a Hebrew translation in 1937 (Miller and Meyouhas 1937).

^{**} Editor's note: The fifth edition of the book (1947) is available in digital format via A Celebration of Women Writ-ers, a project of the University of Pennsylvania, at http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/solis-cohen/birds/birds, http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/solis-cohen/birds/birds.

by such authorities in Jewish children's literature as Fanny Goldstein, Sophia Cedarbaum, and Dorothy Kripke, these bibliographies—published until the 1990s—not only mirror the contemporary publication trends, thus serving as an excellent collection development tool, but also represent the growth and development in the field. Therefore, a list of *Jewish Book Annual* bibliographies (1947–1968) is included at the Appendix of this article. As noted by Posner (1997), who studied the half-century history of these bibliographies, "the editors of the *Jewish Book Annual* did not devote a special bibliography to Jewish children's books until Volume 9 (5711–1950/51), when the listing 'American Jewish Juvenile books' was first instituted." It was indeed in the 1950s that children's literature started to be recognized as a separate, deserving domain.

By the 1960s, Jewish children's literature had established itself to the extent that Frischer (1997) sets 1960 as the end of the early period in the field. Posner (1997) regards the decade of 1962–1972 as a "pivotal era in Jewish children's books", and Silver (2010, 233) notes that the 1960s witnessed a new trend toward realism in children's books in general, setting off that decade as a period of transition. For these reasons, the publication year of 1965 was chosen as the end-limit for this collection.

While children's special collections consist mainly of materials written on the child's level, some resource materials written for adults are often included. These may include studies about children's literature, bibliographies, catalogs, and indexes (Jones 1998). Accordingly, the Wise Temple Library has purchased the catalogs of recent exhibits presenting Jewish children's literature: Monsters and Miracles: A Journey Through Jewish Picture Books (Stavans, Sokol, and Gozani 2010), from an exhibit at the Eric Carle Museum in Amherst, Massachusetts, and The Snowy Day and the Art of Ezra Jack Keats (Nahson, Keats, and Berger 2011), which includes an essay explaining how Keats's upbringing affected his work and interest in social justice, the anti-Semitism he experienced, and his ambivalence about being Jewish (his name was changed from Katz to Keats). Another example of this type of resource is Gregory Maguire's Making Mischief: A Maurice Sendak Appreciation (Maguire and Sendak 2009). Based on papers given in a 2003 symposium, the book examines Sendak's aesthetic influences from William Blake to Walt Disney and explores the recurring motifs in his work. The Wise Temple Library also completed its holdings of Jewish Book Annual volumes, providing users with the select bibliographies of Jewish juvenile books published in this serial. Other bibliographies and reference works related to the topic were also added to the collection, including Linda Silver's guides.

While the Wise Temple Library had nearly all the titles listed on the early *Jewish Book Annuals* bibliographies, colleagues elsewhere offered to donate older books from their libraries to fill in the gaps, where possible. A list of desired titles was sent to those who expressed interest, and the Shavzin-Carsch Collection has thus benefited from donations from Hillel Torah North Suburban Day School Library in Skokie, Illinois; Arizona State University Libraries; the Gray Cultural and Learning Center at North Suburban Congregation Beth-El in Highland Park, Illinois; Temple Israel in Hollywood, California; Rockdale Temple of Cincinnati; and Naomi Hordes, a friend of the Shavzin family.

In addition to literary works for children, the Shavzin-Carsch Collection includes textbooks and educational materials published for students in Jewish religious schools. Many of these were included in the select bibliographies of Jewish juvenile books published in the *Jewish Book Annual*. Examples of textbooks in the Collection include multivolume Jewish histories by Mamie Gamoran, Mordecai H. Lewittes, Deborah Pessin, Sulamith Ish-Kishor, and Mordecai I. Soloff. For many of these, our collection already included teacher's guides, pupil activity books, or other accompanying material, and they were added to the Shavzin-Carsch Collection as well. The Wise Temple has a rich collection of educational and curriculum materials from the 1940s and 1950s, including materials published by Bureaus of Jewish Education in New York, Los Angeles, Baltimore, Cleveland, Miami, and elsewhere. As of fall 2013, we are in the process of adding these to our Collection to preserve them for researchers.

The Shavzin-Carsch Collection does not collect galleys, artwork, authors' correspondence, or manuscripts, as do some other children's collections, such as the Kerlan Collection of Children's Literature at the University of Minnesota.⁷ It is a collection of published, print material. The exception is a group of Jewish Book Month posters dating from 1979 to 2000. Although the dates and material lie beyond the definition of the collection, these posters represent the work of several important artists of children's books, including Maurice Sendak, Mark Podwal, Giora Carmi, Neil Waldman, and Leonard Everett Fisher.

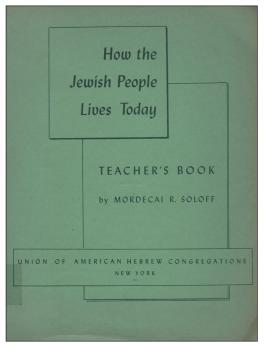


Figure 2. Soloff, Mordecai I. *How the Jewish People Lives Today. Teacher's Book.* New York: Union of America Hebrew Congregations, 1952

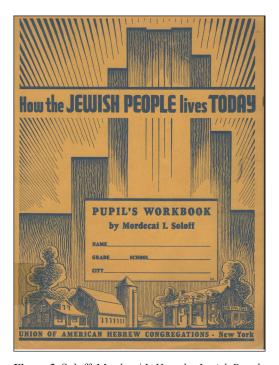


Figure 3. Soloff, Mordecai I. *How the Jewish People Lives Today. Pupil's Workbook.* New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1953

⁷ The Kerlan Collection holds original manuscripts and illustrations of more than eighteen hundred authors and illustrators.

Other ephemera items include the earliest Jewish children's calendars published by Kar-Ben, whose emergence on the scene in 1975 as the only publisher to concentrate exclusively on books for Jewish children was a significant event in Jewish children's publishing. Kar-Ben Publishing generously donated these calendars to the collection.

CATALOGING AND ACCESS

The Wise Temple Library catalog uses the Surpass software as its automation system. The Surpass cataloger can divide all the items into categories based on format, subject, or location, such as reference works, general adult collection, teacher's resources, DVDs, stacks room, E and J books (for primary and middle/upper grades respectively). The user's online catalog OPAC shows each of these locations/categories with a distinctive icon. The books that were to make up the Shavzin-Carsch Collection were found in various locations: mainly in the stacks of the back room behind the office, but also in the E or J areas, or even in the general adult collection. As I built the initial core of the collection, using Sarna's history of JPS (1989), the *Jewish Book Annual* bibliographies (1947–1968), and Silver's 2005 "Milestones" presentation (2005), I created a new electronic location for the items: the Shavzin-Carsch Historic Collection. Using annotated bibliographies, descriptive notes were entered in the MARC 520 field for those titles lacking them.

Finally, we created a new area on OPAC's "visual navigator" page for the Shavzin-Carsch materials. Visual navigators (or "visual searches") are popular in public and school library catalogs; they allow the cataloger to single out parts of the collection by subject, genre, medium, and/or location, so that the user can browse the collection online section by section. The Shavzin-Carsch Collection is available online via the catalog, at http://wisetemple.mysurpass.net. Users should click on the "explore" tab (i.e. the visual navigator in Surpass), and then select the Shavzin-Carsch icon. The collection materials are arranged in three categories: E (primary grade books), J (middle and upper grades), and resource materials for educators and researchers. A link to this visual navigator page is also found on the library homepage, accessible from the temple website, at www.wisetemple.org. Anyone may use the materials of the Shavzin-Carsch Collection in the library's reading room, but it is a non-circulating collection.

Publicizing and Expanding the Collection

In 2012, I produced a flyer describing the collection and disseminated it among scholars and librarians. The flyer may be downloaded from the library's homepage. The collection was mentioned in the Reform Judaism magazine ("Isaac M. Wise Temple Library's Historic Children's Collection" 2012), and an article was published about it in the local Jewish press ("Wise Temple Library Establishes Collection of Historic Children's Judaica" 2011).

The Shavzin-Carsch Collection will continue to grow; there are still items in the Wise Temple Library to consider for inclusion, such as back issues of children's magazines (World Over Magazine, 1942–1982; Keeping Posted: A Jewish News Bulletin for Young People, October 1958 through May 1970). Other areas for expansion may include winners of the Sydney Taylor Book Award, the National Jewish Book Award in children's literature, and books of Jewish content that have won other awards, such as the Newbery and Caldecott.

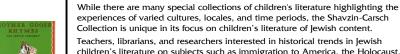


THE SHAVZIN-CARSCH COLLECTION OF HISTORIC JEWISH CHILDREN'S BOOKS



WHAT IS THE SHAVZIN-CARSCH COLLECTION?

It is a major collection of historically significant books of Jewish content written for children and teens. The collection is named for Bess Shavzin and Judith Carsch, who served consecutively as Wise Temple's librarians for 49 years—from 1950 until 1999.



WHY IS THE SHAVZIN-CARSCH COLLECTION IMPORTANT?

experiences of varied cultures, locales, and time periods, the Shavzin-Carsch Collection is unique in its focus on children's literature of lewish content. Teachers, librarians, and researchers interested in historical trends in lewish children's literature on subjects such as immigration to America, the Holocaust, family life, religious teachings, acculturation and identity, Israel, prejudice and anti-Semitism, or in the works of particular authors and illustrators, or in changing styles of writing and illustration for children, will find the materials in the Shavzin



WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE COLLECTION?

Carsch Collection to be valuable sources.

Books of Jewish content for children and teens, written in or translated into English, published from the late 19th century into the 1960s, make up this collection. These materials include textbooks and educational material published for students in Jewish religious schools.



WHO MAY USE THE COLLECTION?

The Collection is open to all researchers, with the caveat that its use is confined to the main reading room of the Ralph and Julia Cohen Library of the Isaac M. Wise Temple, Cincinnati, Ohio. The Cohen Library is one of the largest synagogue libraries in North America. It contains over 21,000 items in all areas of Judaica. Hundreds of new titles are added each year.

The holdings of the collection can be viewed at the www.wisetemple.org website by clicking on the Ralph and Julia Cohen Library tab, then on the Shavzin-Carsch Collection link.

A COLLECTION OF THE ISAAC M. WISE TEMPLE LIBRARY, CINCINNATI, OHIO

Figure 4. The Shavzin-Carsch Collection flyer, available for download at http://www.wisetemple.org/study/ralph-and-julia-cohen-library/shavzin-carsch-collection/shavzin-carsch/

Since there is a scarcity of research that explores and analyzes American Jewish children's literature, the possible topics of exploration are many: the works of important authors or illustrators such as Elma Ehrlich Levinger; treatment over time of subjects such as Jewish immigration, Americanization, acculturation and assimilation; the changing depiction of anti-Semitism across the decades; the presentation of Zionism, *aliyah*, and relations between Jews and Arabs in the Land of Israel; the gradual introduction of the Holocaust as a topic for youngsters; the retelling of biblical and midrashic stories to children in terms of narrative style and illustrations; a comparison of biblical stories as printed by Jewish and non-Jewish publishers; the proliferation of prayer books and haggadahs for young people; the portrayal of Jewish family life over time; and Jewish children's literature as a reflection of the society's cultural values and conflicts. The Shavzin-Carsch Collection will offer the researcher a rich supply of source material for future scholarship in these and other areas.

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APPENDIX

AMERICAN JEWISH JUVENILE BOOKS BIBLIOGRAPHIES, 1946–1968

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^{***} Editor's Note: The list is arranged chronologically.

