

12-31-2017

# Pearl Berger: The Consummate Librarian, Mentor, Colleague, and Friend

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### Recommended Citation

Baker, Zachary M.. "Pearl Berger: The Consummate Librarian, Mentor, Colleague, and Friend." *Judaica Librarianship* 20: 14-15.  
doi:10.14263/2330-2976.1287.

## Pearl Berger: The Consummate Librarian, Mentor, Colleague, and Friend<sup>1</sup>

Pearl Berger served on the editorial board of *Judaica Librarianship* from its very first issue (Fall 1983) until the most recent one (2016). Her contributions to the profession are manifold. Here are a few additional factoids about Pearl's involvement with our profession:

- She was Dean of Libraries at Yeshiva University for three decades, from 1985 until her retirement in 2015. (Before that, she was Head of Technical Services at YU.)
- She is a past-President of the Association of Jewish Libraries, of its Research and Special Libraries Division (as it was formerly called), and of the Council of Archives and Research Libraries in Jewish Studies (CARLJS).
- She was the Feinstein Lecturer at AJL's 2008 conference in Cleveland.

This brief recitation of Pearl's distinguished career scarcely does justice to her impressive professional accomplishments or her extraordinary personal qualities.

Pearl guided the transition of the Yeshiva University Libraries into the twenty-first century, while maintaining her fealty to the ideal of *Torah u-mad'a*—the synthesis of religious and secular scholarship that is that university's motto and hallmark. As the daughter of a prominent rabbi and with generations of rabbinical *yikhus* before her, she was thoroughly grounded in the varieties of learning that make an institution like Yeshiva University tick. And notably, she was the first woman to occupy the responsible position of Dean of Libraries at that university.

Pearl's first job as a professional librarian, like mine, was at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, under the supervision of Bella Hass Weinberg—*JL*'s founding co-editor (together with Marcia W. Posner)—and the late Dina Abramowicz. For three-and-a-half years during the second half of the 1970s, Pearl and I sat at adjacent desks, frequently comparing notes on cataloging policies and practices, chatting about articles and books we'd been reading, and discussing issues of the day. For me, personally, these are highly treasured memories.

In March 1997, Pearl, the late Herbert Zafren (of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, in Cincinnati), and I participated in a fact-finding mission to the National Library of Lithuania, in Vilnius, a trip that took place under the aegis of CARLJS. The collections that we surveyed then continue to be in the news today, with new and exciting discoveries having recently come to light.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from remarks made at the 2010 annual conference of the Association of Jewish Libraries, upon Pearl Berger's being awarded Lifetime Membership in the Association.

Pearl was a very conscientious member of *JL*'s editorial board. She devoted many hours to close reading of manuscript submissions and she invariably offered pertinent guidance at meetings of the editorial board. Her article "[Jewish Libraries and Archives in America](#)," which was published in volume 12 of this journal (2006), provided a concise overview of the profession's historical development and of the main challenges confronting it. Among the many salient observations that she made over a decade ago, the following one rings especially true today: "While some of our Jewish academic and educational institutions take great pride in their libraries and in their research collections, others keep them on the back burner for budgeting and fundraising. Preserving our cultural heritage is a costly proposition, and libraries need care and feeding in order to flourish."

We are deeply grateful to Pearl Berger, for her many years of devoted service to this journal and to the profession of Judaica librarianship.