

The Baltimore Hebrew Institute Collection: A Jewish Studies Library Re-imaged¹

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INTRODUCTION

When the ninety-year-old Baltimore Hebrew University (BHU) Library closed its doors in 2009 and headed eight miles north, it landed in the welcoming arms of the Albert S. Cook Library of Towson University (TU), located in a suburb of Baltimore. BHU's robust Jewish studies collection, numbering some 70,000 items, had until then been situated inside the school's small two-story building in the heart of the Baltimore Jewish community. The Cook Library, a multi-disciplinary collection of more than 650,000 items, occupied the top four floors of a large building on the sprawling university campus. The integration of the two libraries accompanied the union of their parent institutions. This case study of a merger of two academic libraries addresses how the cultural integrity of a highly specialized collection—in this case, a small Jewish studies collection—was maintained within the extensive collections of a larger institution and it examines the consequences of the merger, which physically removed a valuable library collection from the Jewish community that had supported and patronized it.

Mergers of institutions of higher learning are initiated for a variety of reasons, including the acquisition of more resources, the diversification of the university's academic profile, and the expansion of the support community. Other motivations may include streamlining costs, improving facilities and infrastructure, and attracting more students and faculty (Skodvin 1999; Swanepoel 2005). Library mergers in higher education are rarely the primary goal of such a move; rather, they are byproducts of the merger of their parent institutions (Moll 2010). As integral parts of their universities, libraries are affected by consolidation of the two institutions (Uwamwezi 2020). The success of institutional mergers requires giving high priority to the joint academic mission, employing good change management strategies, and ensuring effective internal and external communication (Ripoll-Soler and De-Miguel-Molina 2019). Strong leadership is needed at every step of the process and time must be allocated for post-merger adjustments (Moll 2010). Swanepoel (2005) has determined that best practices for mergers include the awareness of differences in organizational cultures, careful planning, and the use of effective and regular communication with all stakeholders. One study (Skodvin 1999) notes that the greater the differences in the institutions' size and programs, the more likely it is that the merger will be a success.

Several studies address the issues specific to the merger of private institutions with public ones. These include a perceived loss of uniqueness (Skodvin 1999; Bor and Ketko 2019) and the concern that the cultural identity of the specialized institution will be subsumed under the larger one

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(Ripoll-Soler and De-Miguel-Molina 2019). Strategies to counteract these fears and to preserve the “specialness” of the smaller institution are enumerated in the literature among the key components of a successful merger. These include maintaining transparency and involvement of all stakeholders in decisions, investing time for extensive planning and coordination for the move, commitment by the management to embrace sub-cultures and foster a joint sense of identity, and shared access to all resources (Skodvin 1999; Rozum and Brassaw 2013). Additional characteristics that support the likely success of institutional mergers are the geographic proximity of the institutions (Skodvin 1999) the precedence of an academic mission, and the awareness that human attitudes and behaviors are key elements in managing the cultural changes inherent in mergers (Ripoll-Soler and De-Miguel-Molina 2019).

The merger of BHU and TU is an example of a vertical merger, which Pruvot et al. (2015) define as a merger of a large academic institution with a small, specialized one. Planning and implementing the TU/BHU merger and the myriad steps taken to maximize the likelihood of success have already been described (Bor and Ketko 2019). This paper focuses on the efforts to preserve the cultural identity of BHU’s collection after it was absorbed into a much larger library.

The development of Jewish institutions of higher learning in the United States dates back to the end of the nineteenth century, when the American Jewish population was estimated at close to one million. The Jewish population of Maryland at the time was 35,000, following a wave of immigration that brought 20,000 Jews to Baltimore between 1885 and 1899.² Only two decades later, the Jewish population of Baltimore reached 60,000 (Bureau of Jewish Social Research 1920). The influx of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe required that more schools be built and more teachers trained to accommodate the children’s Jewish education.

The founding of the Baltimore Hebrew College and Teachers’ Training School (BHCTTS) a little more than a century ago was thus the result of a phenomenon occurring in several other North American cities around the same time. First- and second-generation immigrant Jews in cities with sizeable Jewish communities began to organize programs to train teachers to accommodate this burgeoning need (Thaler 2014). The earliest school established was Gratz College in Philadelphia in 1895. Over the next three decades, six other schools were founded in the cities of Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and New York (Kozlovsky 1986, 79).

BALTIMORE MAKES ITS MARK: THE HISTORY OF BHU AND BHI

In Baltimore, attempts to organize a teacher training program had occurred as early as 1896. None was successful until 1919, when a group of lay leaders convened to promote the establishment of a college to teach Jewish ethics, thought, and learning to future educators of the city’s youth. The result was the founding of the Baltimore Hebrew College and Teachers’ Training

2. Figures for other port cities (New York and Philadelphia) indicate a comparable increase in numbers, relative to their populations at the time (Jewish Statistics 1899).

School (BHCTTS). Its primary objective was to prepare teachers for their roles as religious educators, regardless of Jewish denomination, as stated in its charter, were “to establish a college for higher Hebrew and Semitic learning; to study the Hebrew and cognate languages and literature; to train and qualify teachers for Jewish religious schools... with power to confer degrees” (BHCTTS Register 1920). Methods of instruction and educational skills were the main goals of the curriculum, which included Jewish philosophy, Hebrew language, Talmud, Bible, and Jewish law (Bloom 1972). The institution’s graduates were eligible to pursue a Bachelor’s of Hebrew literature (BHL) degree or to receive a teacher’s diploma. They could also receive advanced credit at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Dropsie University in Philadelphia, or Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore (Kozlovsky 1986, 80).

The first few years of the school’s existence witnessed several moves, each to a larger facility, and each accompanied by an expansion of its programming. In 1923, when the school shifted northward along with the Jewish population of Baltimore, it included room for a library collection of two thousand volumes, open to students and to the community. The core collection reflected the needs of the curriculum, focusing on Jewish history, Hebrew language, education, and religion. It included volumes from the Jewish Public Library Association of Baltimore, which operated in the early 1900s, and from the private libraries of community leaders.

At the end of its first decade, the BHCTTS came under the sponsorship of the Baltimore’s Associated Jewish Charities (AJC). The AJC (later, The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore), was founded to unify and support Jewish programs in the Baltimore community. Agreeing to the stipulation from the AJC to affiliate with the Board of Jewish Education (BJE), which headed many of the city’s Hebrew elementary schools, the two organizations were united.

Another demographic shift of the Baltimore Jewish population precipitated the next move for the college. As the community moved northwest toward the newer sections of the city, it recognized the need for more centrally located organizations. The AJC raised funds for a new Jewish Community Center and a separate building for the college, and eventually it purchased property that would include both. The BHC-BJE building opened in 1958 in the heart of the Baltimore Jewish community.

The main college programs included a teachers’ track, a teachers’ in-service training, and a high school department; the college was accredited by the Iggud, the National Association of Hebrew Teachers’ Colleges. Already offering degrees of associate of arts, bachelor of Hebrew letters, and a teacher’s diploma, the school expanded its programs to include a Bachelor of religious education degree. By that point, the library had grown to 20,000 volumes, and the new building easily accommodated the growing collection. It was dedicated in 1960 as the Joseph Meyerhoff Library, recognizing the donor’s continued financial support of the school and library.

In 1963, the Maryland State Department of Education granted accreditation to the college. Following the department's recommendation to separate the college and the BJE, the two organizations disengaged into individual agencies. As comparable secular institutions did in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the college dropped the Teachers Training School from its title and became the Baltimore Hebrew College (BHC) (Ogren 2005). Its future partner in education, Towson University, did likewise at around the same time (Esslinger et al. 2017).

When the graduate program was introduced in 1971, students had the opportunity to earn a master of arts in Jewish studies. Accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSACS) and the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), the school shifted from training teachers to providing professional certification in Jewish studies and to training future Jewish communal leaders. It cultivated its undergraduate division, supported continuing teacher education, and forged relationships and strengthened ties with local colleges offering Jewish studies courses. These included Johns Hopkins University, Goucher College, Towson University (then Towson State University), University of Maryland at College Park, and University of Maryland at Baltimore County. In some cases, credit courses could be taken on the BHC campus; in others, BHC faculty taught on the various college campuses. An example of this symbiosis was a dual program, developed in collaboration with the University of Maryland School of Social Work and Community Planning, which resulted in a master's degree in social work from the university and a master's degree in Jewish studies from BHC.

This coupling of programs among different institutions of higher education was also practiced by other independent schools of Jewish studies in the United States, among them, Gratz College in Philadelphia, Siegal College (formerly the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies) in Cleveland, Spertus Institute in Chicago, and Boston Hebrew College (Thaler 2014). With the expansion of its curriculum and the introduction of advanced degree options, BHC changed its name to Baltimore Hebrew University in 1987. It was accredited by the MSACS and the MHEC, as well as by the Ministry of Education of Israel.

This iterative approach of adjusting its focus to accommodate the needs of an ever-changing community worked well for BHU until the beginning of the twenty-first century. As multicultural diversity grew in secular academic education, Jewish studies programs were becoming a presence in larger universities in the United States (Joselit 2009; Baskin 2014; Horwitz et al. 2018). Library resources for Jewish studies were becoming more prevalent even in institutions without formal programs (Taler 2014). As of 2019 more than 250 Jewish studies programs or courses are offered in institutions of higher education throughout the United States (Horowitz 2018). Close to fifty of them are located in the mid-Atlantic states including and surrounding Maryland (Dashefsky and Sheskin 2019).

With conventional universities providing undergraduate classes in Jewish studies, Jewish institutions found themselves unable to sustain their enrollment, forcing them to refocus their missions or risk closure (Joselit 2009). Of the five schools still operating into the twenty-first century,

Gratz College put its efforts into expanding its online programs to include secular education as well as Jewish studies, thereby increasing its reach and accessibility; Siegal College (now the Siegal Lifelong Learning Program) partnered with Case Western Reserve University, discontinuing its degree and certificate programs and refocusing on its adult education offerings; Boston's Hebrew College shifted gears by opening a rabbinical school and cantorial training program and emphasizing its pluralistic appeal to all forms of Judaism; Spertus Institute narrowed its mission to focus on adult Jewish learning and on nonprofit leadership, as reflected in its name change to the Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership (Thaler 2014).

THE TU–BHU MERGER

BHU found itself relying almost exclusively on its master's and doctoral programs, and eventually, the major sponsoring body of the university (The Associated) decided to phase out its support for the school. Faced with the possibility of closure, BHU sought a partnership with an appropriate institution that would provide continuity for its coursework and degree offerings and that would appreciate and elevate the value of its Jewish studies library collection. Institutions with which BHU had an established relationship were the primary choices. Candidates included Johns Hopkins University, Goucher College, Georgetown University, TU, and the University of Maryland at College Park.³

Maintaining the connection to the Baltimore community was also an important factor in the search for a new home for BHU. The desire for BHU to retain a strong identity of its own may account for the decision to partner with an institution that would maintain its integrity rather than merge it with an existing school. Counted among the merits of BHU's eventual choice were preservation of its uniqueness as well as the professional and technical ability to house and maintain the library's specialized materials (Bor and Ketko 2019).

BHU and TU had shared some multidisciplinary programming for many years, and in the summer of 2009, BHU's programs, faculty, and library were absorbed by TU (Mael 2014; Thaler 2011). The Associated helped broker the deal between the two institutions, and in fact did maintain a limited financial interest in the newly-created Baltimore Hebrew Institute at Towson University (BHI) (Memorandum of Intent 2008; Memorandum of Understanding 2009). The alliance between BHI and TU seemed like a natural fit because the two institutions were similar in many respects. They were both founded as teachers' training schools—TU opened in 1866 as the State Normal School, the first school in Maryland for teacher training and certification. BHU and TU both expanded their programming in response to the requirements of the populations they served, and both later offered advanced degrees.

3. Another option was to share a campus with a relatively new local Jewish high school, the Shoshana S. Cardin Jewish Community High School (now dissolved), see Neufeld 2003.

TU had undergone its own change of name many times over the course of its more than 150 years of existence (Knox 2017), reflecting its change of character from a teachers' training school to a regional college to a broad-based academic institution. Significantly, TU also offered an undergraduate minor in Jewish studies. In keeping with its philosophy of expansion in fields of interest to its academic community, TU took the opportunity to develop this program further by absorbing BHU. BHI was thus the result of the decision to expand the Jewish studies framework of courses into a full-blown program (Hirsch 2009; Bor and Shargel 2020). The library collection simultaneously became the Baltimore Hebrew Institute Collection and retained its original name, the Joseph Meyerhoff Collection.

The physical integration of the two libraries raised various possibilities for retaining or reducing the differences between them. One option was to interfile the two collections, expanding the existing Cook Library Jewish studies collection. Another was to maintain the BHI collection as a separate entity to give it prominence. In the end, both political and practical factors played a part in the decision about housing the new collection. The initial agreement between the two universities stated that the BHU library was on permanent loan to TU's Cook Library (Cooperation Agreement 2009). It also specified that for the first three years after the merger, the Associated would provide funds for various activities to maintain the collection. TU's library administration decided to treat those years as probationary and to keep the collections separate. In the unlikely event that the BHI collection would be relocated away from TU, it would be easy to identify those materials for removal. At the end of the probationary period, the administration decided to keep the BHI materials separate and to highlight them as a distinctive collection within the library (Figure 1). Both the original and subsequent decisions to maintain the distinct collections contributed to the preservation of cultural identity for the specialized materials. Reference items were the only exceptions; after the probationary three years, these were interfiled with the general reference collection to place them closer to the help desk on the main floor. More recently, when the reference collection was dismantled and interfiled with the stacks to make way for an academic commons, the BHI reference materials were reunited with the separate collection on the second floor, retaining their status as reference.



Fig. 1. The BHI collection at Towson University Library. Photo credit: Joyce Garczynski, Towson University

The BHI collection required extensive shelving. The TU periodicals collection, originally shelved separately from the rest of the stacks and occupying an entire floor of the library, were interfiled with monographic works, allowing the BHI collection to move into the vacated space. The BHI rare books and special collections were housed in the library's University Archives Department on a separate floor. That department's name was later changed to Special Collections and University Archives (SCUA) to reflect its expanded role.

CURATING THE CULTURAL COLLECTIONS

As a robust Jewish studies research library, BHI's general collection covers a wide range of disciplines, from Bible, rabbinics, philosophy, and history to education, Hebrew and Yiddish languages, music, and art. The special collections and rare books originally came to the library through targeted purchases or from gifts from local donors, who recognized that the university library was a worthy steward of notable books and artifacts.

Before the move from BHU, rare books, manuscripts, and artifacts had been housed in the library's locked Rare Book Room. Other collections, such as yizkor (Holocaust memorial) books, were shelved with the main collection, although they were reserved for in-library research. Still others, such as video recordings of Holocaust survivor testimonies, were stored in the technical services area, available for viewing upon request. The ensuing years at TU opened other avenues of preservation, discoverability, and accessibility of these materials.

Nadia Nasr, the TU archivist responsible for all BHI items considered rare or special, approached these collections with concern for both their protection and their research value. Many of the items needed better preservation. In Cook Library, the process of re-housing the more fragile items in standard or custom-made archival boxes began immediately. Nasr also wanted to raise awareness of these collections. For the local campus community, she filled a display case with artifacts from the collection. For a broader reach, a page titled "BHI Special Collections" was added to the library website, listing rare books, yizkor books, Holocaust survivor testimonies, and artifacts. In addition, Jewish studies was identified on the website as part of the library's special collections, along with others such as university history, performing arts, and history of education in Maryland (Nasr 2011). A library website redesign in 2018 enhanced the discoverability of the BHI resources. Highlighting and promoting the specialized BHI collection was a clear mandate for the library staff.

OWNERLESS HEIRLOOMS

One major group of books and periodicals in the special collections are the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR) materials. They are some of the millions of print volumes stolen by the Nazi regime during World War II from hundreds of Judaic archives, libraries, synagogues, museums, institutions, schools, community centers, and private collections (Glickman 2016; Rydell and Koch 2017). At the end of the war, the Allied forces discovered these items in storehouses all

over Europe and, under the supervision of the Office of the Military Government in the US zone of Germany, they collected approximately three million books. These items were warehoused temporarily in a vast five-story building, later known as the Offenbach Archival Depot (OAD). The OAD restituted approximately 2.5 million items with identifiable provenance. After intense discussion among the US military government overseeing the project and various Jewish political and social agencies, the remaining 500,000 heirless items were distributed to Jewish organizations, institutions, and places of learning throughout the world, including in Israel, the United States, South America, and Canada. The distribution organ was the JCR, the cultural arm of the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JRSO) (Rothfeld 2005; Herman 2008, 224; Herman 2011).



Fig. 2. A JCR bookplate in *Sefer ha-hinukh* by Aaron ha-Levi of Barcelona (Frankfurt an der Oder: Pinḥas Eliyahu ben Ḥayim Naḥman, 1783). BHI Special Collections

BHC received several shipments from the JCR between 1948 and 1952, totaling more than four thousand items. In compliance with the agreement with JCR, BHC placed a specially designed blue-and-white bookplate inside each volume as a way to identify its provenance (Figure 2). Other recipient institutions did not mark their materials in this way, and as a result, many JCR materials are no longer distinguishable (Herman 2008, 246).

With a project beginning in the 1990s, BHU librarians had made a concerted effort to ensure that the JCR books in the collection were appropriately identified with an added corporate entry in the catalog records. The initiative focused on those books easily identified as JCR books as they were encountered by the library staff. These books had been marked with a JCR bookplate, an OAD stamp, or another stamp known to connect it to the JCR collection.⁴ Many of the remaining books had been left in situ in the general stacks, and Nasr was determined to relocate all JCR items to the climate-controlled rooms of SCUA. By searching the database for BHI materials with a specific range of publication dates and locations, she was able to identify hundreds of volumes still in the stacks. The effort to preserve these materials could not have occurred at BHU because the Rare Book Room was already filled to capacity. Fortunately, only one month before the BHI materials arrived at TU, the Cook Library had completed a two-year renovation project for the University Archives department, resulting in a state-of-the-art, environmentally controlled facility with a spacious work area and abundant shelving. There was room not only for the rare books and artifacts, but for the JCR books as well.

4. A corporate entry was added to each bibliographic record: Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc. (New York, N.Y.)

WHITE GLOVES SESSIONS

The remarkable provenance of the JCR collection makes it a valuable tool for teaching about the Holocaust. In 2011, Nasr created a Holocaust Remembrance Day exhibit on the main floor of the Cook Library (Figure 3). Along with photographs of Nazi plunder and Allied restitution obtained from Yad Vashem, the display showcased several JCR books from the BHI collection. To further promote the collection, Nasr, along with Joyce Garczynski, development and communications librarian, and the author have hosted events at which gloved attendees are allowed to handle some of the treasures from the JCR collection (Nasr and Garczynski 2013). At these events, librarians present both the history of the collection and of the artifacts themselves. Emphasis is placed on the Nazi seizure of books in an attempt to destroy Jewish cultural heritage, the Allied restitution efforts after the war, and the fate of the heirless items that remained. Participants are encouraged to examine the books for content and markings.

These sessions have been presented to audiences of varying ages and backgrounds, and they make a strong impact on the attendees. The presentations often lead to requests for additional ones to different audiences, such as synagogue sisterhoods, Jewish nonprofits, and senior citizen centers. A good example of the effect of the “white gloves” sessions was the BHI presentation at the 2014 Summer Teachers Institute at Baltimore’s Jewish Museum of Maryland (sponsored by the Baltimore Jewish Council, the Jewish Museum of Maryland, and the Maryland State Department of Education). A teacher of Holocaust studies at a local Catholic high school who attended the session arranged a similar event for her senior classes. The librarians adjusted the program for high school students to highlight not only the history, but also the stamps, bookplates, and other marks of provenance in the books. This class session has now become an annual event. Feedback is consistently positive, and many participants have noted the effect of “holding history in their hands.” To date, TU/BHI librarians have held white gloves sessions for more than 25 groups, reaching approximately 550 participants.



Fig. 3. Holocaust Remembrance Day exhibit, Albert S. Cook Library, 2011. Photo credit: Nadia Nasr, Towson University

This outreach program is supported by library resources for Holocaust education. The BHI yizkor book collection contains about 120 volumes that memorialize specific European cities and towns that once flourished before their decimation by the Nazis. The books are discoverable through a link on the SCUA website and are available for reference in the library. Not only do these volumes have rich historical and educational value, they are also useful for genealogical research and were highlighted in a workshop for the Jewish Genealogy Society of Maryland.

A complementary collection consists of recorded testimonies of survivors who immigrated to the Baltimore metropolitan region. This BHI collection reflects the natural ties that BHU had to other constituent agencies of The Associated. The Baltimore Jewish Council (BJC) represents the political and community relations interests of The Associated, and it advocates on behalf of Jewish organizations and congregations in the Greater Baltimore area. In 1988, when the BJC participated in a project to videotape interviews with local Holocaust survivors, the BHU library was designated as the logical repository for the tapes (Baltimore Jewish Council Correspondence 2009). Catalogers provided bibliographic records and the library housed and managed access to them. This project was modeled on a similar one begun a decade earlier, when interviewers collected more than two hundred testimonies from survivors in the Connecticut area. Those interviews were donated to Yale University and became the nucleus for the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale. This collection has accumulated more than 4,500 testimonies of concentration camp survivors, liberators, and bystanders who assisted Jews during WWII. Many of the videos were taped by regional organizations, including the BJC (Ercolano 1991), which documented testimonies from 130 witnesses to the Holocaust.

Approximately ten years ago, the Fortunoff Archive migrated earlier formats of testimonies to digital files. Since 2016, the archive has offered streaming digital access to the testimonies and as an affiliate of the project, TU partnered with Yale University to be the only viewing site in Maryland. The implementation of this project was made possible by TU's library IT support and by a staff attuned to special collections management.

New opportunities for leveraging the strengths of the BHI collection have arisen through the efforts of the current university archivist, Ashley Todd-Diaz. In 2017, TU became the first institution in the United States to benefit from the painstaking work of a Bavarian researcher and library director, Cordula Kappner, who documented and disseminated information about the experiences and fates of several regional children who lived during WWII. One outcome of her research was an exhibition of individual banners, originally prepared in German as “Vergissmeinnicht” (Forget-Me-Not). It came to the attention of Todd-Diaz, who grasped the connection between it and the BHI JCR collection. She and Garczynski secured grants from BHI and other interested agencies to have the banners translated into English and mounted on portable pop-up panels. Displayed in an exhibit that drew 150 people at its opening, the panels were relocated to the library for several weeks for an extended exhibition. One of the panels represents Fred Emil Katz, who survived the war and currently lives in the Towson area; this nonagenarian was one of the speakers featured at the opening event (Pensak 2018). To increase the impact of the exhibition, Cook Library staff worked with a BHI graduate student to create various curricula based on the panels. These are available to educators for use in classrooms and other venues, along with the loan of the panels. It is worth noting that the collaboration that supported this project was initiated by the library archivist and the marketing librarian, two positions that did not exist at BHU. The librarians in both positions have contributed significantly to preserving and celebrating the cultural identity of the BHI collection.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE MERGER

In addition to the logistical and technical challenges of merging two academic libraries, the TU/BHU union raised the concern of retaining BHU's cultural distinctiveness. The decision to maintain the two collections as separate entities was a significant factor in preserving the character of the specialized BHU library. The placement of the general stacks on a separate floor sets the collection apart from the rest of the Cook collections, and visual identification markers emphasize this fact. The lobby that leads to the collection contains prominent signage and relevant photos, as well as a four-foot-high brass menorah, an artifact from BHU. The efforts to uphold the collection's unique identity went far beyond its physical location. All items received from BHU are identified in the database as part of both the BHI collection and the original Joseph Meyerhoff Collection. Those parts of the collection with special significance, such as memorial books and Holocaust survivor testimonies, are represented on the website as separate collections, easily accessed by links to those catalog records.

The culturally significant nature of the BHI collection has also figured prominently in the treatment of its materials. The goal from the outset was to support and enhance this smaller collection embedded within a larger one, while carefully preserving it as a discrete Jewish studies collection. Library staff also regard its religious content with respect. Whenever questions regarding the processing, handling, or deaccessioning of BHI materials arise, including removal of duplicate Jewish religious writings (*sifre kodesh*), the Jewish studies librarian is consulted to determine the proper dispersion or disposal of these materials.

One other factor that supports the cultural identity of the collection is its connection to the BHI program itself. The BHI offers advanced degrees in leadership in Jewish studies and in Jewish communal service and education, as well as certificates in Jewish communal service and Jewish education. Non-degree courses, lectures, events, and excursions are also among its offerings. The library supports these academic disciplines and partners with BHI for various programs. Another example of this collaboration is TU's recent virtual symposium on Holocaust education, *Evidence Against Intolerance*, held in early 2022 and attended by participants from around the world.

With BHU's departure from the center of the Jewish neighborhood, access for the community of origin became compromised. Previously located in a residential area on a small campus that included the Jewish Community Center, the Jewish Family Services building, and ample public parking, the library had been a natural draw for residents for decades. From its earliest years, the library was open to the public: Beyond the need for curriculum support, the collection included popular novels and a juvenile section. TU's Cook Library administration wanted to retain the connection to the Jewish community. They considered the possibility of a regular shuttle from the community to the university campus, but that idea never gained traction. Instead, library staff visited public library branches closest to Jewish neighborhoods to convey Cook Library's intent to fulfill interlibrary loan requests initiated by public library patrons. Along the same lines, TU continues to promote the direct loan of materials to external patrons with its community

borrower loan option and encourages the Jewish community to make use of this opportunity. Additionally, the library welcomes individual and group visits from the community to tour and utilize the collection.

Physical accessibility is a significant obstacle to this otherwise hospitable attitude toward the community. Parking is a major problem on this very busy campus and although there are scattered visitor parking spaces, they are not always available. There is also handicap access, but entrance into the library building can be daunting to the less-than-agile person. These are substantial deterrents to using the library for research or simply browsing the collection. Some of the responses to this dilemma are to reiterate ILL services and to encourage community patrons to visit the library in the evenings or on Sundays, when parking is less congested.

Although the library does meet current regulations with parking spaces, ramps, elevators, and computer stations, it offers the best solutions possible in an admittedly aging building. Anecdotal comments and observations indicate that far fewer members of the Jewish community visit the library today than in its previous location. The main casualty of the TU/BHU library merger seems to be physical access by the community it left behind.

CONCLUSION

Taking stock of the BHI collection at TU after slightly more than ten years reveals a number of positive consequences for this treasured library. The former BHU building was in desperate need of renovation, for physical, environmental, and technological reasons. Once it was designated as a liability rather than an asset by its sponsoring agency, no upgrades could be expected. Although it had a Rare Book Room, the environmental system was unreliable. The physical condition of all parts of the collection, from books to periodicals to artifacts, has been aided by the move to a more commodious building with better climate control. At TU, rare and fragile materials have received much-needed conservation to stabilize their condition and preserve them for future use.

Upgraded technology has enhanced access to several of the library's assets for all TU patrons. Digitization of special collections materials was not yet on the library agenda at BHU, although items had been identified as digitization-worthy for some future date. Underutilized collections have been highlighted and promoted at TU, increasing their informational and educational value. Some of these, such as the Louis Rosenthal Miniature Sculpture Collection and the periodical *Martyrdom and Resistance* are now part of the library's digital collections.⁵ Thanks to some targeted special collection projects, a backlog of unevaluated items has been identified, cataloged, and processed, elevating them from anonymity to accessibility.

The cultural identity of the collection has been retained, respected, and encouraged, perhaps even beyond expectations at the time of the merger. Ongoing efforts to further the reach of the collec-

5. <https://archives.towson.edu/documents?collections=Martyrdom%20and%20Resistance&applyState=true>.

tion have resulted in collaborations with organizations both within the TU community and beyond it. All of these outcomes have enriched the BHI library in ways that may not have been possible in its previous venue. The most notable negative result of the library merger is the diminished accessibility for the Jewish community of Baltimore. BHI attempts to stay connected to the community by publicizing its courses, programs, and events in the local Jewish media, and library staff welcomes research queries from community patrons. Overall the library evaluation balance sheet for the BHI library indicates significant and continued growth, access, and use of the collection. A century after its opening, the BHI collection seems to be thriving in its new environs.

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