

REFERENCE DEPARTMENT

Association of Jewish Libraries Bibliography Award, 1990*

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This evening, as we present the first AJL Bibliography Award, it is truly fitting that we honor one of our own, Robert Singerman, for his two-volume work, *Judaica Americana: A Bibliography of Publications to 1990* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990). In the absence of Barry Walfish, who chaired the committee that chose this book for the award, I have been asked to make this presentation. I would like to thank the members of the AJL Reference Book Award Committee—Charles Cutter, Norman Gechlik, Adaire Klein, Ann Masnick, and Barry Walfish—for a job well done.

On a personal note, I first met Bob Singerman about 15 years ago, when he visited the YIVO library while on a research tour for the bibliography that he subsequently published under the title *Antisemitic Propaganda* (New York: Garland, 1982). He was a young man—not much older than I—who by then had already published two book-length bibliographies with which I was familiar: *The Jews in Spain and Portugal* (New York: Garland, 1975)—a topic that we've heard a great deal about at this conference—and *Jewish and Hebrew Onomastics* (New York: Garland, 1977). [His other major bibliography, *Jewish Serials of the World*, published by Greenwood Press in 1986, was reviewed by Barry Walfish in *JL*, vol. 3, no. 1-2, 1986-1987, pp. 25-27, 33.] We got to talking about his research methods. Just how was he able to accomplish so much, in the course of a nine-to-five workday? He did not use these words, but the formula "10 percent inspiration and 90 percent perspiration" clearly applies to Bob's work.

*Based on remarks made at the Banquet of the 26th Annual Convention of the Association of Jewish Libraries, held at the Fontainebleau Hotel, Miami Beach, FL, June 25, 1991.

This is certainly not meant to denigrate the role of inspiration; Bob has, after all, produced several extremely useful reference tools. But beyond coming up with a good idea, Bob shows up early and spends an hour or so before each workday on his own projects. Then there is the extensive travel that is often required to track down fugitive titles, which in the case of *Judaica Americana* required a sabbatical year. Extensive searching of the *National Union Catalog* (NUC) and online databases is also a major part of the task. The final phase of the job involves computer input and indexing of the citations. All in all, it took Bob six or seven years to complete *Judaica Americana*.

Judaica Americana succeeds A. S. W. Rosenbach's *An American Jewish Bibliography* (New York: American Jewish Historical Society, 1926), extending its coverage past 1850, to 1900. The roughly 700 titles in Rosenbach have multiplied to 6,512 (1,170 titles through 1850) in Singerman's bibliography—along with 23,000 NUC locators for libraries owning these works—even as the compiler has redefined the genre of *Judaica Americana*. "Judaic subject matter, and not the author's ancestry, is the determining factor in judging the appropriateness of a work for inclusion," he writes (p. xxviii). (All works in the Hebrew alphabet published during this period are included as well.) Here is what the eminent American Jewish historian, Jonathan Sarna, has to say about *Judaica Americana* and its compiler, in his foreword to the work:

Already recognized as one of America's leading Jewish bibliographers, Singerman took up the challenge that had daunted everyone before him: He undertook to produce a wholly new American Jewish bibliography incorporating all of the existing supplements to Rosenbach, adding materials discovered since 1971,

listing the major libraries where titles were available, and carrying the bibliography all the way to 1900. Rather than relying on earlier compilers, Singerman personally examined the vast majority of items he included to ensure the accuracy of every citation. He also made provisions for detailed indices to facilitate a wide range of scholarly researches. The result—the more than 6,500 entries included here—stands as a remarkable bibliographical achievement. Few if any American Jewish reference books can compare. (p. xviii)

Among the useful features of *Judaica Americana* is its "Union List of Nineteenth Century Jewish Serials Published in the United States," with coverage in English, French, German, Hebrew, and Yiddish. The thorough index includes authors, titles, subjects, and places, along with a gazetteer of American *Judaica* printing and publishing, where imprints are listed under the name of each state, in chronological order.

This is the first year for which a Bibliography Award is being made, and on behalf of AJL I would like to thank Marcia and Lou Posner for underwriting this year's award. Unfortunately, Robert Singerman is not available to receive this award in person, for reasons that will be explained by his colleague at the University of Florida (Gainesville), Yael Herbsman, who will read to us his letter of acceptance.

It is said that a bibliographer's task is never done, and in Bob Singerman's case these words have a dual meaning. On the one hand, new citations that need to be added to a bibliography always have a way of cropping up. (Just a week after the YIVO library received *Judaica Americana*, a thin Yiddish pamphlet published in New York in the 1890s, which was not included in the bibliography, was given to the library by a descendant of the author.) This is not

meant as a criticism—far from it; for the bibliographer, it's a fact of life. And knowing Bob, we can be certain that he will follow up *Judaica Americana* with other, equally important bibliographies.

Editor's Note: See Zachary Baker's comprehensive review of this work in Judaica Librarianship vol. 6 (1992), pp. 68–72. —B.H.W.

Zachary M. Baker, Head Librarian of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, NY, formerly President of the Research and Special Libraries Division of the Association of Jewish Libraries (1990–1992), is Vice President/President-Elect of AJL (1992–1994).

Remarks by Robert Singerman

It is a source of great personal satisfaction to be the honored recipient of the AJL's Judaica Bibliography Award for 1990, in recognition of my two-volume set, *Judaica Americana*. Owing to a scheduling conflict, however, I have no choice but to honor a more pressing commitment to another special audience, and that is my fiancée, as we honeymoon in Hawaii and the southwest. I do wish to convey my appreciation not only to Dr. Barry Walfish and the committee he chairs, but also to Marcia and Louis Posner for funding this year's award. The Posners, by their generosity and tangible support of scholarship, help to remind us of the original meaning of the term "patron," a word limited all too often to the users who access our library collections.

While speaking with Barry Walfish several weeks ago about the award and our respective *simhas* that prevented our both being in attendance tonight, I recalled the day in 1989 when I shipped the completed manuscript of *Judaica Americana* off to Greenwood Press. How does one celebrate the successful end of an exceedingly difficult, not to mention inherently fatiguing, project that absorbed a good five years of my waking attention and energies while hunched over a word processor? This exhausted author, it may be revealed, treated himself to a therapeutic massage to heal his sores, or should I say *tsores*?

I'm fond of comparing the tedious enterprise of compiling bibliographies to diamond or gold mining. Just as tons of dirt and rock are excavated and sifted for a reward weighing no more than a few ounces, the same ratio of effort to reward seems to hold true for bibliographic re-

search. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of books and journal issues are scanned for a single usable citation, and this process of discovery is repeated day in, day out, until the mine has been seemingly stripped of all its precious treasures. To the users of my bibliographies who might ponder in amazement, "How did one person ever find and organize all of that stuff?"—I have no simple answer, but my favorite response, usually delivered with a slight grin, is, "All work is cumulative."

Compiling *Judaica Americana* was neither fun nor easy. Every enterprise, large and small, has its rewards, and since I prefer to work on a big scale, more akin to the muralist than to the painter on canvas, the satisfaction of accomplishment is proportionally great. Think of the bibliographer as a transmitter of knowledge, one who not only transforms and extends knowledge, but perhaps, just perhaps, inspires others to engage in similar bibliographic projects, to the collective enhancement of Judaica librarianship.

Thank you, dear friends, for granting me this award.

Editor's Note: See Robert Singerman's article, "Compiling the Book-length Bibliography: Concepts and Strategies," in Judaica Librarianship vol. 2 (1985), pp. 79–80. —B.H.W.

Robert Singerman, Librarian of the Price Library of Judaica at The University of Florida Libraries, was President of AJL's Research and Special Libraries Division (1988–1990).