

RESPONSA

Jewish Archives and Their Whereabouts

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Q. Where are the archives of the Hebrew Technical School for Girls located?

A. This seemingly simple but eventually vexing question was posed by a museum curator seeking information on a supporter of that long-since defunct vocational school, which for more than three decades (from 1904 to the mid-1930s) occupied an imposing building on New York's Second Avenue and Fifteenth Street, opposite Stuyvesant Square. The school's erstwhile supporter was also an art collector, and some of her *objets* had been donated to the museum where the curator worked.

It took some digging, but ultimately I was able to confirm that the records of the Hebrew Technical School for Girls (HTSG) are held by The New York Public Library, where they are listed under the name of the school's successor organization, the Jewish Foundation for Education of Women (JFEW). The way in which I came upon this answer illustrates some of the differences between bibliographical and archival inquiries. In this column I retrace my steps, so that readers who are confronted with similar requests may gain a sense of what they are up against. In addition to checking card catalogs, published catalogs, computer databases, and in-house checklists, my research underscored the importance of personal contacts—that "invisible college" we all heard about in *Library Science 101*—in finding archival collections.

Where Background Information Can Be Found

Before attempting to locate the archives of an organization, the librarian should try to learn something about the organization. Background information on the Hebrew Technical School for Girls may be found in published directories such as those found in the *American Jewish Year Book*, or *AJYB* (which, until 1927/28, regularly included local organizations—aside from

local Federations, which were included in subsequent lists—in its annual "Directory of Jewish Organizations in the United States"), and *The Jewish Communal Register of New York City, 1917–1918* (pp. 648–649, 654–655). In addition, three publications issued by the HTSG are cited in The New York Public Library's book catalog [NYPL, 1979]; (none, however, in its computerized CATNYP catalog, as NYPL did not do retrospective conversion): the school's *Annual Reports* (1889–1913), *Handbook* (1888), and *Ceremonies at the Laying of the Cornerstone* of the new building (1904).

More on the Hebrew Technical School for Girls

Before proceeding with details of the search for its institutional archives, a brief history of the Hebrew Technical School for Girls (HTSG) is perhaps in order. The school was founded on December 3, 1880 as the Down-town Sabbath School, and in its early years it was also referred to as the Louis Down-town Sabbath and Daily School, after its first president, Minnie D. Louis. Incorporated in 1884, the HTSG was a tuition-free school dedicated to "the elevat[ion of] the character and condition of the children of the Jewish poor in the City of New York by Ethical, Religious and Secular Instruction" (*HTSG Annual Report*, 1900, p. 7). "It was the first successful free school in New York City devoted to the vocational training of women," notes John Stinson of The New York Public Library ([NYPL, 1992], p. 1). The HTSG accomplished its objectives through the teaching "of all appropriate trades to Jewish girls, who have passed through the public grammar schools" (*HTSG Annual Report*, 1899, p. 7).

From the outset, the HTSG curriculum stressed the traditionally feminine domestic and industrial arts: millinery, dressmaking, embroidery, serving, and cooking were taught in its manual track; stenogra-

phy, typewriting, and bookkeeping were the subjects taught in its commercial track. After 1900, classes in arithmetic, drawing, geography, literature, music, social ethics, physical education, and physiology were added to the manual and commercial courses. Upon graduation, students were assisted by the school's Employment Committee "in obtaining good positions, and the same committee tries to have them kept well employed" (*HTSG Annual Report*, 1899, p. 7).

The president of the HTSG, succeeding Minnie D. Louis, was for many years Nathaniel Myers. Members of some of the most eminent American Jewish families were among the school's sustaining members. Names like Mrs. Benjamin Guggenheim, Mrs. Louis Marshall, Mrs. Henry Morgenthau, Mr. Elkan Naumburg, Mrs. A. S. Ochs, Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Schiff, and Mr. Isidor Straus adorn the lists of its life members and trustees. The HTSG's prestige was such that Andrew Carnegie himself contributed to the school's Scholarship Fund, and the president of Columbia University, Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, served on its Advisory Committee on Education.

The Hebrew Technical School for Girls was one of a number of eminent Jewish institutions that benefited from the generous philanthropy of New York's German-Jewish elite—the group immortalized as "Our Crowd" in Stephen Birmingham's book by that title. Their contributions made it possible for the school to erect its six-story building in 1904—a property valued at the then considerable sum of \$400,000. It is hardly surprising to learn that among its wealthy supporters there was at least one significant art collector, who in 1992 became the object of a curator's curiosity.

The School Becomes a Foundation

When in 1932 New York City began to offer vocational training for girls in its public schools, the HTSG's Board of Directors

decided to close the school and continue its mission by rendering scholarship assistance and loans to women enrolled in post-secondary educational programs. In 1939, the HTSG was renamed the Educational Foundation for Jewish Girls; in 1964, when the foundation became non-sectarian, its name was changed again, this time to the Jewish Foundation for Education of Girls. Finally, in 1976, "Girls" was replaced by "Women," resulting in the foundation's present name ([NYPL, 1992], p. 1). The Jewish Foundation for Education of Women, with assets in excess of \$14 million, is listed in *The Foundation Directory* (11th edition, 1987, p. 475). It continues to provide post-secondary scholarship assistance, in the form of student aid and loans, to young women who are legal residents of the greater New York City metropolitan area.

According to Steven W. Siegel, Head of the Bottenwieser Library of the 92nd Street Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association, the transformation of the HTSG into a foundation is documented in incorporation records which are housed in New York County Clerk's Office—State Supreme Court, Division of Old Records. (Indeed, it was Mr. Siegel who first told me that the JFEW was the legal successor to the HTSG, thereby steering me along the track that eventually led to the school's archives.) The foundation's annual reports are filed with the United States Internal Revenue Service and the New York Secretary of State's Charities Registration Bureau. The former HTSG building on Second Avenue was condemned by the city in 1938 and is now the property of the New York City Board of Education, serving as the Manhattan Night Comprehensive High School.

The Hebrew Technical Institute

To confuse matters somewhat, the *AJYB*, *Jewish Communal Register*, and NYPL catalog also contain listings for the Hebrew Technical School (HTI), an organization with a very similar name to that of the HTSG, and some of the same backers, but with no direct affiliation to it. The most obvious difference between the two institutions is that the HTI was a boys' school and the HTSG a girls' school. The HTI operated a Trade School, a Manual Training School, and a Polytechnic Institute—it was only the second high school of its type in the U.S. (after the St. Louis Manual Training School)—and its curriculum stressed mechanics, engineering, and the applied sciences.

The HTI was founded in November 1883 at a meeting of representatives of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum Society, the Hebrew Free School Association, and the United Hebrew Charities, and was housed on Stuyvesant and Ninth Streets from 1889 until it closed in 1939, when its buildings were acquired by New York University. (A plaque on the building identifies it as the former HTI; sadly, no such plaque adorns the facade of the HTSG's one-time home, just five blocks away.) Like the HTSG, it owed its demise to the founding of public schools like the Brooklyn Technical High School.

One of the HTI's early supporters was Nathaniel Myers, the president of the HTSG, who is listed among the members of the boys' school in its 1889 *Annual Report*. In the 1908 *Annual Report*, Myers and the HTSG are thanked for their hospitality in "invit[ing] our boys to use [the HTSG gymnasium] as freely as they desire." This is one of a very few bits of concrete evidence of any relationship between the two schools to be noted within either organization's *Annual Reports*, another being the neighborhood maps that appeared on the back covers of many of the HTI's reports starting in 1907. These maps contained locators for a number of local landmarks, including the HTSG.

RLIN as a Tool for Locating Archives

Now that we have familiarized ourselves with these two schools' backgrounds, how do we go about finding their archives? One answer would be to conduct an online search, although (as we shall see) success is guaranteed, obviously, only if data regarding the archives has been entered into the database.

According to YIVO's Chief Archivist, Marek Web, the records of the Hebrew Technical Institute are held by the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, in New York (Record Group 754). No entry for the HTI records at YIVO appears, however, in the Research Libraries Information Network's (RLIN) database—surprisingly, since the YIVO Archives was one of the repositories included in a New York State Documents Survey conducted during the mid-1980s, at the conclusion of which data concerning these institutions' archival holdings was submitted to RLIN. (One entry for the personal papers of Edgar Starr Barney, the institute's longtime principal, was found in a subject search in RLIN's Archival and Manuscripts Control [AMC] file—he was an alumnus of Union College [Schenech-

tady, NY], and that is where his papers were deposited. Searches in the RLIN Books file yielded entries for three HTI publications.) The HTI records will doubtless be noted in the YIVO Archives' forthcoming published guide; I was able to verify their location only by asking Mr. Web. As we shall see, "Ask an Archivist" is a common technique for finding archival collections.

No entry at all for the Hebrew Technical School for Girls was found in the RLIN database. (One entry for the Jewish Foundation for Education of Women, however, was found in RLIN: a 1982 Voice of America broadcast about the foundation's retraining program for Soviet women emigrants, held by the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, MA.) Still, national databases should not be ignored in a search for archival collections, as more and more of them are cataloged online.

"Nuck-Muck" and Other Printed Sources

The standard printed source for the verification of archival collections in American repositories is the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* (1959/61–), better known by its abbreviation *NUC-MC* (euphoniously pronounced "nuck-muck" by archival cognoscenti). This source is an annual register of archival collections by name, with alphabetical, cumulated indexes. No references to the HTSG appear here, however. *NUC-MC* records are now entered into national databases, including RLIN, further underscoring the central role that networks now play in American libraries. (For this reason, one assumes, the New York Public Library ceased to acquire the hard-copy cumulations of *NUC-MC* after 1984.)

In attempting to find specific collections of institutional records or personal papers, subject and geographical approaches must also be considered as possible search strategies, since these collections' locations may never have been reported to a central agency. Published guides that are arranged by the names of institutions, rather than by collections, supplement the use of national registers such as *NUC-MC* and databases such as RLIN. The most comprehensive example is the *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories* (1978; 2nd ed., 1988), which includes a detailed index of subjects, institutions, and personal names. The heading "Jewish history" would lead one to the names of repositories that *might* house the collection

being sought. Another source for identifying potential locations of archives is *Subject Collections* (1985), compiled by Lee Ash and William G. Miller, where repositories are listed under Library of Congress subject headings and personal name headings. Although specific archival collections are named under repositories that are identified under subject or name headings, they are not included in this work's index.

Several surveys of Jewish and Israeli archives have also been published, but all are now outdated. These include the *Directory of Jewish Archival Institutions* (1975), the *Guide to Jewish Archives* (1981), and the *Guide to the Archives in Israel* (1973). The first and third of these are indexed, and if a specific collection is named within an entry for an institution it will also appear in the indexes.

Surveys restricted to particular geographical regions or subject specializations form a subset of the comprehensive Jewish (or Israeli) archival-guide genre. Examples include *Genealogical Resources in the New York Metropolitan Area* (1989; despite its title, the work emphasizes Jewish institutions in that region) and the *Directory of Holocaust Institutions* (1988), which takes note of archives in a separate "Index of Institutions by Activity." The next echelon of archival guides comprises those that are devoted to the resources of individual repositories, e.g., the Jewish Theological Seminary's *Preliminary Listing of Holdings* (1978), the two published inventories of the American Jewish Archives, in Cincinnati ([AJA, 1971]; [AJA, 1979]), or the Leo Baeck Institute's recently published *Catalog of the Archival Collections* (1990). Sometimes, printed guides to individual collections within archives are available (e.g., YIVO's *Documents of the Lodz Ghetto*, 1988). Most often, though, such specialized guides are not available.

The HTSG collection was not located in any of these published or online sources, however. To be sure, the HTSG is mentioned several times in the published guide of the American Jewish Archives (1971), within that institution's catalogs of the personal papers of Louis Marshall (two entries for letters addressed to Marshall between 1895 and 1903), Jacob H. Schiff (a single cross-reference to "Education, Box No. 451"), and Felix M. Warburg (five cross-references, including two to subject files, one to the papers of Adolph Lewisoohn, and two to boxes in the Warburg collection). All

three of these prominent American Jews were among the school's supporters. Nevertheless, while the references contained in the AJA's published catalog are useful to the researcher seeking to reconstruct the history of the Hebrew Technical School for Girls, they do not reveal the whereabouts of the school's institutional archives—or whether, indeed, they are even extant. On the other hand, they illustrate the importance of consulting published catalogs of individual archival institutions when searching for a discrete body of materials, since these HTSG-related materials are not mentioned in other archival registers.

Even when using standard reference tools it is not always easy (or possible) to determine where a specific archival collection is housed.

The Mystery Solved

It was only through a conversation with the historian Jenna Weissman Joselit (to whom I was referred by Steven W. Siegel) that I was able to ascertain that extant HTSG records are in the possession of NYPL. But where? They are not listed in any readily accessible NYPL catalog: not in the massive book catalog, not in CATNYP, not in the published catalog of NYPL's former Manuscript Division ([NYPL, 1967]), and not in the card catalog of that Library's present-day Manuscripts and Archives Section. Rather, the accession record and inventory of the HTSG collection are found only in a filing cabinet kept in the Manuscripts and Archives Division's reading room, where they are identified under the heading Jewish Foundation for Education of Women—but not under Hebrew Technical School for Girls. The original *Accession Sheet* [NYPL, 1984] indicates that a subject heading for the HTSG was to have been made for the Section's card catalog, but that was not done, probably owing to the advent of automation, and Library staff have not yet entered data on the JFEW collection into RLIN's AMC file.

So, one might reasonably ask, how on earth was Dr. Joselit able to locate the HTSG's records, given the time-consuming detective work that was required to answer this RESPONSA inquiry? The answer is simple: Dr. Joselit did not find the school's archives; they found *her*—or rather, representatives of the Jewish Foundation for Education of Women contacted Dr. Joselit, requesting that she write

an institutional history. She was given access to files still on hand at the JFEW, and was referred by the Foundation to NYPL for those files that had already been deposited there. Would that my quest had been so simple!

Lessons to Be Learned

Even when using standard reference tools it is not always easy (or possible) to determine where a specific archival collection is housed. An array of published and online sources is available, and yet an extant individual archival collection may not be cited in any of these sources. Personal contacts—scholars and archivists—assume a relatively greater significance for seeking out archives than is normally the case for library materials such as books and newspapers.

At the same time, institutions often do not appreciate the value of the information that they generate, and thus do important archival collections get discarded. Even when these collections are deposited in archives, as the late Nathan M. Kaganoff noted (1992), the funds are often lacking to process them—or even catalog them at the collection level, rendering their contents all but inaccessible. A successful search strategy for an archival collection thus requires creativity, imagination, patience, time, and luck. It is an art, not a science.

Should the museum curator now choose to consult the Jewish Foundation for Education of Women collection at The New York Public Library, there is, sadly, no guarantee that she will indeed find the sort of background information that she needs, regarding a one-time supporter of the Hebrew Technical School for Girls. According to Dr. Joselit, who consulted the HTSG records both at NYPL and at the JFEW's offices (before a second major chunk of the collection was donated to NYPL, in November 1991), much material has been discarded over the decades. This is also attested to by descriptions of the JFEW collection by the NYPL staff member who accessioned it. The bulk of the records, he reports, date from after 1931, i.e., one year before the school closed and transformed itself into an educational foundation. Researchers will likely have cause to regret the disappearance of many of the HTSG's earlier files, for they would have been invaluable in documenting the education and acculturation of two generations of American Jewish women.

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