

# HOUSES OF THE BOOK

## New Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America

*Edith Degani*

*Jewish Theological Seminary of America*

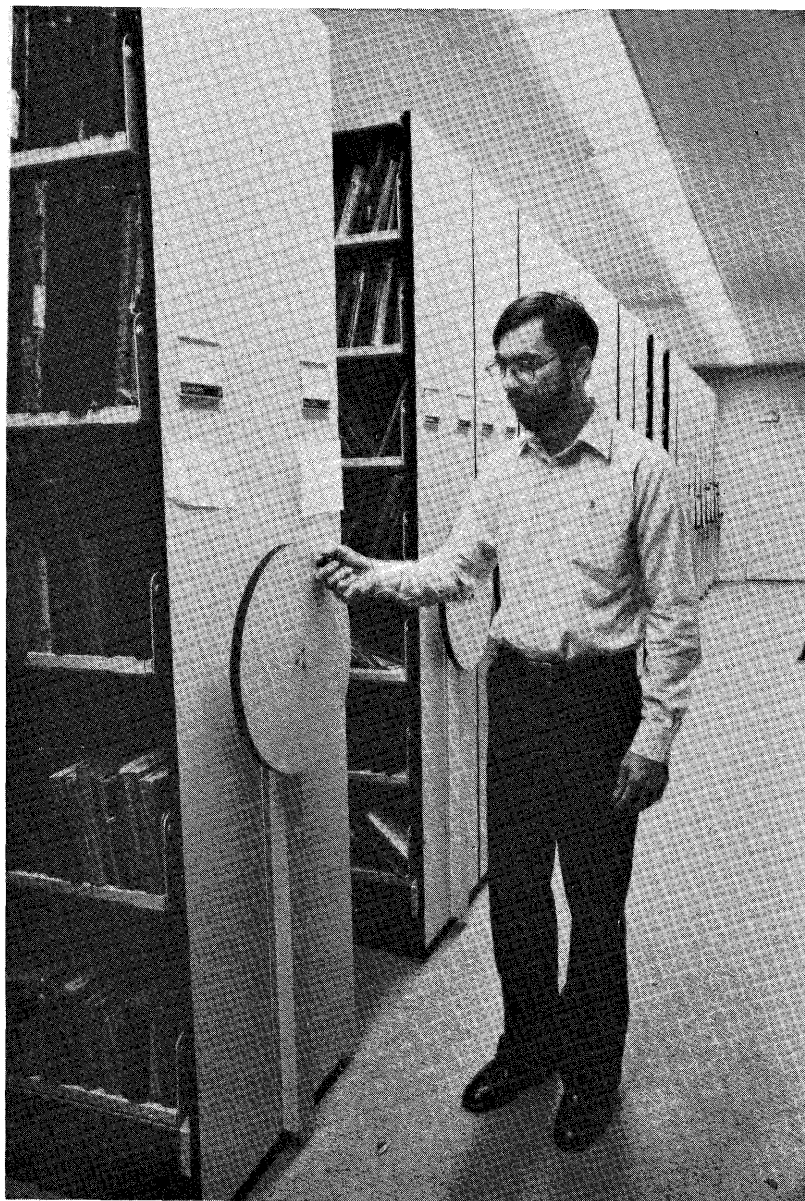
When the Seminary Library went up in flames over seventeen years ago, the general mood was one of despair. It seemed as though the Library would never again be fully functional. Seventy thousand books had been totally destroyed, one hundred twenty-five thousand more badly damaged, and the stacks ruined beyond repair.

Yet today the Library not only thrives, but is entering into an exciting new period as it operates in its magnificent new building. Even before the fire the Seminary administration had recognized the need for providing expanded modern quarters for the Library. The fire provided the impetus to get the project underway. Several architects were invited to submit plans. The design offered by the distinguished firm of Gruzen Partnership was unanimously chosen by the selection committee. The final result has shown the wisdom of this choice.

The new building, in effect, is a continuation of the original Seminary structure. It occupies space directly to the East of the old plant, connecting at each end with the old building. It is called a stepped building, because each floor is set back above the floor below. The setbacks are emphasized by attractive skylights. Outside each floor is a terrace on which greenery will be placed. The terraces, skylights, and large windows combine to give a light airy feeling in which outdoors and indoors blend in beautiful harmony. The courtyard enclosed within the buildings is being landscaped and will become an attractive, inviting area.

The Library occupies four floors of the structure. The Technical Services staff, housed since the fire in a pre-fabricated building, is located on the first floor in spacious, well-lit quarters. The second and third floors are for Public Services.

The second floor houses the reference department, periodical collection, and some of the circulating books. A



**Compact shelving.**

microform reading room will contain modern reader-printer equipment, as well as the Library's valuable collection of

films and fiche. In addition, there will be a music room complete with discs, cassettes, listening devices and a

selection of cantorial scores and sheet music. An impressive two-story high lounge and exhibit area will feature displays on East European Jewry. The circulation and reference desks are of beautiful white oak cabinetry. The end panels of the stacks are in the same white oak, as are the card catalog cabinets. Timed light switches are on the end panels and should be a boost in energy conservation.

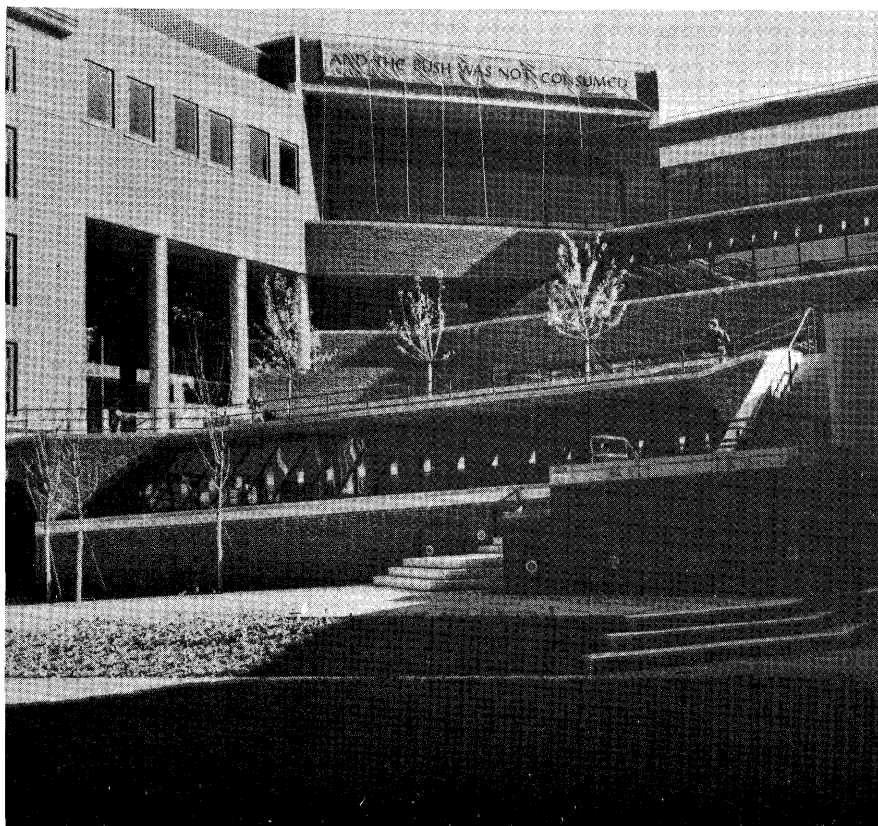
The floor above, which is reached by a magnificent staircase, holds the circulating collection. All books are on open shelves, easily accessible to students, faculty and other library users. Also on this floor are high-density shelves for compact shelving arranged in an ingenious system so that entire ranges can be moved effortlessly to reach the area desired. Here are shelved books which were stored for many years in a warehouse some distance from the Seminary. Some of these books had remained in the cartons in which they had been packed after the fire. Now they are all on shelves and accessible for the first time in seventeen years.

Both these floors feature three types of seating. There are standard tables and chairs, in four separate reading rooms, individual study carrels and lounge furniture. Both the seating capacity and the shelving capacity have been tripled in the new facility. The top floor has been designed to hold the very valuable and unique rare book and manuscript collection. This material is being protected with the most modern climatic, security and fire suppressant systems. In addition to the stacks there is a comfortable reading room for the use of the patrons who will be doing research in this collection. Dr. Menahem Schmelzer, Seminary Librarian, and his research staff, have offices on this floor. Also located here is a small, amphitheater-style auditorium.

The Technical Services and Readers' Services sections are already fully operational in the new facility. The Rare Book and Manuscript area is not yet completed. The building is beautiful, functional and a joy in which to work. We are very proud of it and look forward to having the opportunity of showing it to our colleagues.

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*Edith Degani, Assistant Librarian of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York City, was intimately involved in all phases of the new library building — from the planning stage through its completion.*



**Exterior view.**

**Interior view.**

