This paper is based mainly on experiences I had during my 30 years at the Wurzweiler Central Library of Bar Ilan University and might be termed a stroll through library history or, taking as a model the title of a popular Broadway play of the 1960’s alternately entitled
Some
“funny” things
happened on
my way to retirement

Dedicated to the memory of Dr. Sara Fraenkel, (π"y) Curator of Bar Ilan’s Manuscript and Rare Book Collection, 1979-2002

This paper will describe the assembling of a world class collection of manuscripts. The author was privileged to play a minor role in this process, the main role being played by Dr. Sara Fraenkel, whose, knowledge of and enthusiasm for the subject, were memorable.
Sara came on aliya from France at the age of 23, having already earned both BA and an MA degrees from the Sorbonne in Religions, and had spent a year at the Hebrew University studying Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah. For many years she taught French at Bar Ilan but in the 1970’s decided to begin a new career in librarianship. Upon completion of a Graduate Librarian’s Certificate (the equivalent of an MA without a thesis, the advanced degree in librarianship then being given at Bar Ilan) she was offered employment in Hebrew Cataloging Department of Bar Ilan’s Wurzweiler Central Library. Her interest in rare books and manuscripts became evident immediately and work with these items was directed her way. In 1979 she was formally appointed Curator of Manuscript and Rare Book collection, which at that time numbered about 5,000 items and which at the time of her retirement in 2002 had grown to about 20,000 items.

Sara’s PhD theses was on Hebrew printing in Djerba, and to make sure that she had consulted all possible sources on the subject she undertook a trip to that island, part of Tunisia, a country officially at war with Israel. There she consulted with people involved in the trade, some of whom had knowledge passed on by their predecessors, gathering valuable first hand information for the thesis. She was also able to bring back books not found in Israeli libraries which were divided between the Jewish National and University Library (JNUL now National Library of Israel, NLI) and the Bar Ilan Library. Her work was considered the definitive source on the subject and at one time the Library of Congress arranged their Djerba imprints according the order Sara established in her thesis.

At the 1994 AJL Convention in Atlanta Sara made a presentation on Research on the Hebrew Book. She also served for a number of years as the Head of the Judaica Librarians’ Group in Israel (AJL’s local branch) and taught courses in the Library Science Department at Bar Ilan.
During the year after her death the family underwrote the preparation of a memorial volume, 
A Wise-hearted Woman (A Wise-hearted Woman) to which contributions were made by known researchers in the fields of her endeavor such as Binyamin Richler and Yitzhak Yudelov of NLI, as well as by librarians in Israeli university libraries who had been her students.

Before I begin the description of the manuscripts I want to mention that many details included in the presentation are not documented. Much information was obtained through interviews with people who worked in the library before I arrived in 1974, some of whom had worked with staff members who establishment the library and heard details about the early years from them. I also wish to express my thanks to Mr. David Ben-Naim, who for many years was Sara’s assistant and who assumed responsibility for the collection upon her retirement, for his assistance in gathering material for this paper.
Without a doubt the most important manuscripts in the Bar Ilan Library are those in the Moussaieff Collection. These were donated by Shlomo Moussaieff, a noted collector of antiquities from the Biblical period. An article in the first issue of Segula, a Jewish history magazine aimed at the general public, described Moussaieff’s collection as “. . . one of the largest – and most controversial – private collections of biblical antiquities in the world.” The controversial comment relates to the fact that the collection contains some items generally accepted to be forgeries. But this doesn’t bother the collection’s owner. His own background is somewhat controversial. In the 1950's he left Israel because of legal complications resulting from his dealing in antiquities. He settled in England where he established a very successful jewelry business. It was said that if you don’t have at least $500,000 to spend don’t go to Mossaieff’s jewelry store. One of his most noted customers was Elizabeth Taylor who obtained about 90% of her jewelry from him.

The manuscript collection that he donated was built by his Grandfather, also named Shlomo Moussaieff. The Grandfather had been a Rabbi and successful merchant in Bukhara and out of religious conviction decided to come on aliyah in 1888. Legend has it that he came with a caravan of 50 camels loaded with chests of gold and that he hired 100 horsemen to protect the caravan and make sure it arrived safely in Jerusalem. He was one of the founders of the Bukharin Quarter in Jerusalem.

How this collection came to the notice of Bar Ilan is in itself legendary. One day Sara Fraenkel saw a small item in a daily newspaper noting that the Moussaieff manuscript collection, stored in a room in the Diamond Exchange in Ramat Gan, had been damaged when a water pipe broke. What was a manuscript collection doing in a store room in the Diamond Exchange?!
Sara decided that the collection deserved a better home so contacted Mr. Moussaieff in an effort to convince him that the Bar Ilan Manuscript and Rare Book collection would be the proper place. Unknown to her when she began this campaign, but soon to come to her attention, was the fact that that University was at the same time trying to add Mr. Moussaieff to its list of major donors. Eventually both projects succeeded and the University received a $1,000,000 donation and the library got the manuscripts. Of the $1,000,000, $50,000 was earmarked for the library for the restoration of the manuscripts and for equipment for photocopying and digitizing them. The main donation established the Shlomo Moussaieff Center for the Study of Kabbalah.

The collection had previously been deposited with a yeshiva in Jerusalem and then in JNUL but in both cases the family didn’t approve of the arrangements for the care of the manuscripts and requested that they be returned. When the manuscripts arrived at Bar Ilan many were in poor condition.

After an amazing job executed by Bar Ilan’s in-house bindery they looked took on an entirely different look.
The collection contained 228 manuscripts, most dealing with Kabbalah. The exact number was known because in תשנ"ב (1992) Mr. Moussaieff commissioned the preparation of a catalog of the collection by Yosef Aviva, an expert in manuscripts. In the typical Moussaieff manner, the catalog was printed in five (5!) copies. When the collection was catalogued at Bar Ilan a satisfied photocopy of the original publication had to be used. About 220 of the manuscripts arrived at the library in the first batch. Others had been loaned out and most were recovered one by one and transferred to the library. But one, a copy of סגולות (Segulot) by Haim Vital, the chief student of Rabbi Yitzhak Luria, the Ari, had been loaned to a Moussaieff relative who evidently thought that he too deserved to benefit from some of the value of the collection so he took the manuscript apart and sold it page by page.

A typical example of a manuscript in the collection is שעריםמבוא (Mevo Sha'arim), also by Haim Vital.
In the left margin can be seen two ownership stamps, the upper of an institution and the lower that of Shlomo Moussaieff (the Grandson) which consists of the reproduction of a biblical relic in the center surrounded by the words

EX Libris

Shlomo Moussaieff.

In addition to the Mousaieff manuscripts Bar Ilan’s collection contains many individual manuscripts that are of major importance.

A factor that ties them all together is the unusual way in which they arrived at the library. None of them was purchased from the acquisitions budget, which wasn't/isn't big enough to allow the purchase of major rare items. They all arrived in what might be termed an unexpected way, as did the Mousaieff Collection resulting from a small item in a daily paper.

A significant example is a copy of ספר עזונות (Sefer Evronot). One day this just arrived at the library!

Sefer Evronot is a uniform title used to tie together similar works dealing with the calculations involved in fixing the Jewish year. They are illustrated manuscripts and each starts with a quotation or verse so that if they were cataloged by the supposed title, the first words on the title
page, their records would be located throughout the catalog. Bar Ilan has three copies of this work, one from Yemen written in תר"א (1850) entitled חומש התColorado. The second is also from Yemen, תרכ"ץ (1929) entitled simply לסוב. Both of these are from the Margoliot Collection which will be discussed later. This third, and most important of the manuscripts, was written in Germany in the 1600’s and its opening words are הַקְּבֵדּ הַגֵּזִּירָה תֵּקָוֹת וְמוֹלֵדָה וֹלוֹדוֹת.

Prof. Michael Sokoloff, a member of Bar Ilan’s Hebrew and Semitic Languages Department had, not long before this work arrived at the library, published a dictionary of Babylonian Aramaic, referred to by some as the modern Jastrow. He subsequently published dictionaries of Palestinian Aramaic and the Aramaic of the Dead Sea Scrolls. So his name was known in the field of Hebrew and Semitic linguistic research. One day large mail bags full of books marked US Post Office began arriving at his office in the University. He didn’t have room to open them and examine the contents there so he asked if he could have them forwarded to library for that purpose. We made a deal. What he wanted, as they were addressed to him, he would take. What we wanted and he didn't we’d take. But in a case where he wanted something we thought would be put to better use in the library we’d fight about. We were old friends having been undergraduate students together.

The books were classical composition on the Hebrew language, works by Buxtorf, Gesenius, etc. But among them appeared this beautiful illuminated manuscript of Evronot. And the only thing we knew about the collection was that the mail bags had a return address Lilly Chester, Baltimore, MD. After an extensive search we found that Lilly Chester and her husband were
Holocaust survivors and that Mr. Chester had loved the Hebrew language and collected works about it. When he passed away Mrs. Chester wanted to give the books to an institution that could put them to good use. She consulted a friend who was a Professor of Hebrew at the Baltimore Hebrew College and he had been impressed by Prof. Sokoloff’s recently published dictionary so he told her that he thought that Bar Ilan would probably be the best to send them. So she packed them up and off they went.

Evronot includes many charts and even concentric wheels that can be spun to figure out the dates of new moons, holidays, etc. in different years. Usually the charts in these works begin with the year the manuscript was written so this manuscript is probably from 1627.

I am indebted to Michelle Chesner of Columbia University for bringing to my attention the recently published work *Palaces of time, Jewish calendar and culture in early modern Europe* by Prof. Elisheva Carlebach of her institution. In this work Prof. Carlebach refers to wheels such as the above as early analog computers on paper.

Another example of *happenstance*. In the 1980’s Prof. Michael Albeck, a noted chemist and son of Hanoch Albeck who is known for his scholarly commentary on the Mishna, was President of Bar Ilan. One day a friend called him and said they had an old manuscript in the family and that he thought it being in a library might be more appropriate. He wondered if the Bar Ilan Library might be interested. What a question! The work was כתוב לעיניים, a Kabbalistic commentary on
בראשית (Genesis). Much of the commentary takes the form of a Grandfather explaining to his Grandson why Genesis can’t be properly understood without knowledge of Sod, Kabbalistic teachings. The library already had two manuscripts of this work from the 17-18 centuries, part of the Moussaieff Collection. One is even thought to have been written in the circle of Shabbtai Zvi.

But the new copy outshone them both. Upon examining the colophon it turned out that the scribe was Moshe ben Yaakov the, the personal scribe of the Maharal of Prague, and that the manuscript had been written for Yom Tov Lipmann Heller, later to gain fame as the author of *Tosafot Yom Tov*, a classic commentary on the *Mishnayot*. And in the margins of the manuscript are notes, many in the hand of the scribe but some in the hand of the Tosafot Yom Tov himself.

The next item I want to talk about is not a manuscript but a facsimile edition of a manuscript. To explain why I chose to include it a little background is necessary. I also want to take this opportunity to pay homage to a man who was very significant in the building of Judaica libraries.

Ludwig Jesselson (d. 1993) was well known for his philanthropic activities, both involving Jewish and non-Jewish causes. He was at various times both Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Yeshiva University in the United States and of Bar Ilan University in Israel. Among the causes he chose to support was the acquisition of rare items for major Judaica libraries, among them NLI and the libraries of Yeshiva University and Bar Ilan. When he passed away I thought
it would be appropriate to write a eulogy for *Judaica Librarianship* in the form of a tribute from Judaica Librarians. The research for this article included a 3 hour interview in the Jesselson apartment in Jerusalem with his widow Erica (ע"ה,ע"ה), herself very active in Jewish causes.

To give an example of the kinds of things Mr. Jesselson donated, on the 100th anniversary of Yeshiva University he presented its library with a letter written by Thomas Jefferson in 1818 to Mordechai Manuel Noah.

In 1818 Mordechai Manuel Noah was probably the most prominent Jew in the United States. Between 1813-1815 he had been the US Consul in Tunis. Apparently the State Department in those days didn’t know much more about the Middle East than it does today because his recall was based on a feeling that his religion would keep him from performing his duties "favorably".

When Congregation Shearith Israel, the Sephardic congregation in New York City, dedicated its new building in 1818 they invited Noah to deliver the inaugural address. He talked a bit about Jewish history, the freedom the Jews experienced in America, etc. Copies of the address were printed and Noah sent one to Jefferson who had then been out of the White House for nine years. Mr. Jefferson wrote Noah in return saying that he had learned interesting facts about Jewish history from the address and was happy that American laws provided an antidote to the persecution from which Jews had suffered for so many years. This Mr. Jesselson felt was a significant document in American Jewish history and bought it for YU.

At the end of our conversation Mrs. Jesselson opened the drawer of the desk at which she was sitting and removed a small box.
Inside was a copy of the facsimile edition of מאה ברכות, a manuscript written in Germany in the 1700’s. Each Jew is supposed to make at least 100 brachot (blessings) a day. It was a custom for a groom to have a special illustrated book containing 100 brachot prepared for his bride. Mrs. Jesselson said that she owned the original manuscript and had given permission to Facsimile Editions of London to reproduce it on the condition that a portion of the profits go to the Sha’are Tzedek Hospital in Jerusalem, one of the Jesselson’s special projects. For those of you who are familiar with facsimile editions on the market today, I think you’ll all agree that those prepared by Facsimile Editions are the closest to the original manuscripts.

The sample page below shows the faithfulness of the facsimile to the original and the brilliant colors involved.
בלוי: במאה ה-

 Indies, indicating the inclusion of foreign elements.

 א"ס

 ידיעת השכון, שלום מ"ב בית-הברכה, דוד ב"א

 קיוון:

 יוזף.
The above picture shows the fine work executed in reproducing the cover, which when you remember only measures 1.4 x 1.6 inches is truly remarkable.

The manuscript collection of Bar Ilan began almost with the establishment of the university. Bar Ilan was set up in the mid 1950’s, primarily as a project of the Mizrachi Organization of America. The first President was Prof. Pinchas Hurgin of Yeshiva University. Unfortunately Prof. Churgin died during the first year of the university's existence.

In those days if you had money you knew that you’d have more tomorrow, not like today when no one knows what tomorrow will bring. And the wealthy American Jewish philanthropists were interested in investing in making Bar Ilan a success, including its library. In the late 1950’s, or maybe early 1960’s, the library of Prof. Mordechai Margolius, in Hebrew Margoliot, was offered for sale. Prof. Margoliot died in 1958. He was born in Poland, moved to Israel with his family while still a young boy. He had been educated in Israeli yeshivot and had been in the first graduating class of the Hebrew University. His teaching career was in the field of Talmud and he spent the last 10 years of his life at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Prof. Margoliot was known for the bibliographical encyclopedias he edited, one (2 v.) of the Rabbis of the Mishna and Gemora, and another (4 v.) whose English title page reads *Sages and Scholars from the 9th - 18 cent.* He was also noted for publishing authoritative editions of midrashim, *Vayikra Raba* and *Midrash haGadol.*

Prof. Margoliot’s library included hundreds of volumes and about 800 manuscripts, mainly from Yemen. As we know, some of the earliest manuscripts of the Rambam’s works have been located in Yemen. There was nothing of that caliber in the collection but some manuscripts date back to the late 1700’s. As there was never Hebrew printing in Yemen, except in the sea port Aden, if you wanted a *humash* or prayer book you had to commission a scribe to write it. And some of the resulting works weren’t of the highest quality. An example is seen below.
Here you have two pages from the weekly Torah portion γֶּפ (Miketz) in Genesis. At the head of each page is the name of the weekly portion. But if you look closely, the scribe transposed letters and the title at the head of the left-hand page is קמץ (kamatz), the name of a Hebrew vowel. How this slipped by the scribe is a mystery to me.
This manuscript is from 1792. But that isn’t the date given in the work. In the Middle Ages, and to some extent even into the 20th century in Yemen, dates were given according to the מניין השטרות, roughly translated “document date”. This era begins in the first year of the Seleucid Empire, that which took over the rule of the southern area, including Eretz Yisrael, of Alexander the Great’s Empire. In the Gregorian calendar this corresponds to 311 BCE. So to figure the date

you make the calculation seen above, but not on the last page of the manuscript as was done here.

A final interesting item I’d like to mention came into the Bar Ilan Library as part of the donation of Mr. Walter N. Williams of England during the library’s early days.
Mr. Williams was the President of the Anglo-Palestine Bank, the chief financial agent of the Yishuv, as the pre-State Jewish community was called. When Israel came into existence the Anglo-Palestine Bank became Bank Leumi. We don’t know exactly how many items Mr. Williams donated but the donation was considered significant enough to name the Reading Room in the Main Library for him.

Among the items was a Torah scroll.
This Sefer Torah, 19 inches high, belonged to the Czar of Russia. It was a custom that when the Czar visited a Jewish community a Torah would be written in his honor and presented to him during the visit. This particular one was given to Czar Nicholas II when he visited a community in 1904.
Inscribed in Russian on the *Atzei Chaim*, the staves upon which the Torah is rolled, is a dedication to the Czar.

When the Communists came to power they had no need for holy scrolls but they did need money. So the Torahs were auctioned in London and Mr. Williams bought a group of more than 20, which he over the years donated to institutions around the world.

Thus, only because of the limitation of time, and probably your patience, comes to a close my stroll through a bit of library history, a history in this case of many important acquisitions, none of which arrived by the ordinary channels. May your library be so blessed.