

The Price Library of Judaica Anniversary Project

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Introduction [slide 1]

To celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica at the University of Florida we have launched the first stage of a project to digitize an important, special collection of over 200 anniversary editions of Jewish newspapers from around the world. These anniversary issues have remained un-catalogued by the University of Florida Libraries and until now have been ‘hidden’ from users. The first stage of the project focuses on 38 representative issues of 25 Jewish newspaper titles, including (with a nod to our host location) the 40th anniversary issue of the Canadian Yiddish newspaper, *Vokhenblat*. Allow me to introduce you to this collection by outlining its history, describing our mini-project, showing you the database, and by summarizing a few aspects of the collection that show why this is such an important resource.

Background [slide 2]

The University of Florida established a Center for Jewish Studies in 1973. With its foundation it quickly became necessary to acquire a solid research library to support its teaching program. To this end, the Libraries engaged Harvard’s Judaica bibliographer, Charles Berlin, to review Rabbi Leonard C. Mishkin’s book collection in Chicago which was coming onto the market.

Rabbi Mishkin (1906-1996) was at that time the owner of the largest private library of Judaica and Hebraica in the United States. A professor of Jewish history at the Hebrew Theological College with doctorates in Jewish philosophy, history and education, Mishkin had amassed over 40,000 volumes in a range of languages covering every area of Jewish scholarship, but with a major strength in Jewish periodicals.

Festschriften [slide 3]

Mishkin had also collected virtually every scholarly festschrift published in Jewish Studies, as well as any other type of festschrift that he could find, including booklets and pamphlets celebrating landmark events, Jewish institutions, and illustrious Jewish rabbis and leaders (for example, you see here a tenth anniversary volume of the short-lived, scarce yearbook, [*The*](#)

[Kallah Annual Convention of Texas Rabbis](#)). Other types of festschriften collected by Mishkin were *Yizkor* books commemorating lost Jewish communities, and pamphlets or booklets published to remember the anniversary of an individual's death (like this rare booklet [Komets-'alim le-zekher Leah Stupniker](#) in memory of a young girl who died on Ellis Island). Lastly, Mishkin extended his festschrift collecting philosophy to include any and all anniversary issues of a wide range of Jewish newspapers.

Charles Berlin submitted an extensive report to the University of Florida in which he noted in his covering letter that Mishkin's collection was "superb". With its purchase, he foretold, "Florida would be catapulted into the ranks of the larger university collections in this field ..." surpassing long established programs. Berlin also noted that "thousands of items in the Mishkin Collection – although of recent vintage – are, in fact, more rare than incunabula".

In 1977, the University received one of the first National Endowment for the Humanities grants as well as matching state funds to put towards the purchase of the Mishkin collection and to pay for a bibliographer to care for the collection.

The 3-M Collection [slide 4]

The following year, the University of Florida (UF) also purchased a collection of books formerly owned by Dr Shlomo Marenof, a Russian Jewish émigré and lecturer in Hebrew and Near Eastern Civilization at Brandeis University. Marenof's personal library of more than 3,000 works included important titles in Hebrew, with concentrations in biblical studies, Midrash and Modern Hebrew literature.

A large endowment for this rapidly growing Judaica collection was created in 1977 by two university alumni, local real estate developers, Jack and Samuel Price, in honor of their parents, Isser and Rae Price. Isser and Rae were both instrumental in creating a Jewish Center in Jacksonville in the 1920s and had raised their family with a deep commitment to Jewish education and philanthropy.

In May 1979, the University hired Robert Singerman from the Klau Library, Hebrew Union College. Fresh on the job, one of Singerman's first accomplishments was to secure a third major

private collection to complement the Mishkin and Marenof collections. Singerman had learnt that Bernard Morgenstern, the owner of a secondhand bookstore on New York's lower east side, was keen to sell his entire inventory (around 10,000 imprints, mostly from the 19th and 20th centuries, including books, pamphlets and other ephemera of which about 60% was in Yiddish). In Morgenstern's bookstore —where books were precariously piled everywhere on the floor, in corners, on shelves beyond reach—Singerman found many treasures, including editions of all the major Yiddish novelists, poets and dramatists as well as many little-known authors and scarce titles.

The “3-M Collection” (as these three large acquisitions, the Mishkin, Marenof and Morgenstern, were dubbed) was officially dedicated as the *Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica* in March 1981. Over the next 27-years, Singerman took the Price Library of Judaica from strength to strength. An extraordinary bibliophile and bibliographer, Singerman had a rare eye for collecting. He was also keen to build upon and extend Mishkin's collecting philosophy and thus regularly added scarce periodicals and festschriften to the collection. Realizing their historical potential, Singerman kept a particular eye out for anniversary issues of Jewish newspapers.

By the time of his retirement in 2006, the Price Library of Judaica had amassed a collection of over 200 such newspaper issues from around the world. Yet, due to the demands of managing a large circulating library with few staff, these newspapers remained largely unprocessed in storage. Singerman had, however, assigned numbers to each issue and had created a simple card catalog which listed basic bibliographical information such as title, date and page numbers. Approximately, 150 newspapers were preserved in binders; the rest were stored flat in boxes.

Singerman has keenly impressed upon his successors the importance of making this unique collection more visible and accessible, particularly before the acidity of the newspaper degrades these rare print copies to the extent that they become unusable and unreadable.

The Project [slide 5]

I was hired as the librarian in 2010, and in 2011 the Price Library has celebrated its 30th year. An anniversary of this kind afforded a good opportunity to extend our outreach and raise the library's profile, particularly with regard to revealing some of its hidden gems. One of the main

programs that we have initiated during this celebratory year has been to kick start the preservation and digitization of this special anniversary newspaper collection by applying for a UF Libraries mini-grant for a pilot project.

Card catalog [slide 6]

In preparing the proposal, a small corpus of representative issues had to be selected. In order to make that selection, I converted the card catalog into an Excel database to allow for sorting. The first criterion for selection- the item's dimensions -was imposed by the UF Digital Library Center. In order to create a small corpus within the time and budget limitations it would be necessary to scan the newspapers using the quick, small bed scanner. Thus, the newspapers had to be measured first before other criteria could apply.

Once the choice was narrowed down by size, issues were selected to represent a variety of languages and places of publication. Another criterion was anniversary date to reflect a range of milestones. Other categories included the date of the newspaper (with the aim of achieving a range between pre- and post-Second World War publications); the history of the newspaper in question: its reputation, longevity and contributors, and the type of newspaper (whether a daily, weekly or other). The final list had to undergo further alteration once it was discovered that a few titles that were still current (The American Israelite, for example) might not be willing to give permission for their older copies to be freely available online. However, the newspaper issues that were published before 1977 without a copyright notice and which were not published in accordance with US formalities for registering copyright were deemed to be in the public domain.

Research was also conducted to see whether there were any other similar databases freely available on the internet. It was determined that there were approximately 7 US databases featuring Jewish newspapers, but they were either based on local newspapers, or single titles, or were only allowing access to recent issues. The London based Jewish Chronicle is online but can only be accessed through subscription. The Israeli Historical Jewish Press database is freely accessible, and it presents a good range of historic Jewish newspapers; none of these, however, include anniversary issues.

The final mini-grant proposal can be read online as part of our [Institutional Repository](#) at the University of Florida. The grant to digitize the select corpus of anniversary issues was awarded in November 2010 and work began on the project in January 2011.

The newspapers that were fragile and disintegrating (about 70% of them) were disbound by the preservation unit before digitization. The scanning began in February 2011 and the images were mounted as a distinct Judaica sub collection, the [Price Library of Judaica Anniversary Collection](#), in May. The end result is a small, representative corpus of 38 anniversary issues of 25 newspaper titles that can be read online and, in the case of the English language papers, fully searchable by keywords. Work on adding Hebrew character recognition is ongoing.

Significance of the Project [slide 8]

This collection of anniversary newspapers is highly significant for a number of reasons. The 200+ newspaper titles represent a wide cross-section of Jewish newspapers from around the world which, by the 1960s, amounted to nearly 600 titles. The Jewish press of the twentieth century was an extremely vibrant entity and an important tool of social change: not only did it report on the key events of the day, but it often led the way in major political movements, gave leading Jewish authors their first publishing platform, offered a major outlet for struggling little-known authors, provided a means for Jewish women to have a voice, assisted Jews with assimilation into the surrounding culture and provided a vital link back to the community for those already assimilated. The editors of these newspapers were often major Jewish writers of their day and as such these editions are great sources for their portraiture.

Why do we have such an abundance of these anniversary issues and what can they teach us about Jewish history when viewed as a distinct entity or collection? Certainly, the marking of milestones – the notion of an anniversary – can be traced back to biblical law and the observance of the jubilee year. Furthermore, the twofold biblical injunction to remember and not to forget has forged a distinct Jewish identity based on collective memory. This collective memory has been reinforced throughout the ages by the cycles of Jewish ritual and recital. It is not surprising then that, in addition to a great thirst for current news, Jewish people would enthusiastically produce a sub-genre of newspaper that celebrates the achievement of a milestone with a firm eye on the past and the concern to bring meaning to a particular period of history.

It is this aspect of the anniversary editions of Jewish newspapers that make them such interesting and important resources for research. Concentrated in one special issue are articles, editorials, comments and features that shed light on the history of the particular newspaper in question (and sometimes these are the only sources available to provide that history) as well as providing a focused history of a community or movement.

Example 1: Indiana Jewish Chronicle [slide 9]

A good example in our database is an anniversary edition of the weekly English language Jewish newspaper, [The Indiana Jewish Chronicle](#). This special edition includes for its readers 51 pages of a condensed, month by month review of local, state and world Jewish events during its 30 years from 1921 to 1951. The editor notes that “we believe this is the first time in the history of the Press that an extensive record of events transpiring during the past three decades has ever been published by a Jewish weekly”. The fascinating range and juxtaposition of historical information can be seen in is this excerpt from June 1922 which reads:

Indianapolis-Mrs. Jennie Barnett became the Publisher and Morris Strauss, the Editor of the
Indiana Jewish Chronicle. They succeeded Rabbi Jacob Bienenfeld.
Washington, D.C.-President Harding endorses Keren Hayesod
Indianapolis-Indianapolis Jewry mourns the death of Mrs. Meyer Efroymsen
Mr. Wolf Davis elected President of Talmud Torah.
Indianapolis-Mrs. A. W. Khan, prominent Jewess, dies suddenly.
Norman Hapgood decries Ford’s anti-semitism.
Little Rock, Ark.-U.S. government donates plot to L. N. Levi Hospital.
London-Israel Zangwill says Mexican offer to settle Jewish immigrants should be accepted

Example 2: Der Argentinier Magazin [slide 10]

A similar but less meticulously detailed historical account is found in the 25th anniversary of the monthly periodical [Der Argentinier Magazin](#) which – as you can see here – contains a six-page summary of the years during its publication in Buenos Aires from 1935 to 1960. We also have the 10th anniversary issue digitized which shows the evolution of this title from a Yiddish only bi-weekly to a monthly edition with additional pages in Spanish. Both anniversary editions are thick volumes: the 10th edition contains 290 pages and the 25th edition 420 pages; the 10th anniversary edition also offers over 80 pages of photographs of members of the Argentinian Jewish community and more than 30 pages of personal messages and local advertising.

Example 3: Zionist Record [slide 11]

In the case of the South African *Zionist Record*, we have digitized two very interesting issues in terms of historical content. The first celebrates the 40th anniversary of the [Zionist Record](#) and the 50th anniversary of the South African Zionist Federation late in 1948, and the second issue marks the 50th anniversary of the [Zionist Record](#) which occurs ten years into the establishment of the State of Israel. On the front cover, you can see an interesting historical photograph of David Wolffsohn, Theodore Herzl's successor, during a visit to South Africa in 1906. In addition to a wealth of articles dealing with the Zionist movement and with the history of South African Jewry in the 50th edition, there is also an article devoted to listing and describing the "Jewish Periodicals in South Africa" (pp. 97-98).

Example 4: Centraal Blad Voor Israëlieten in Nederland [slides 12-13]

Articles in the 40th anniversary edition of the weekly Dutch Jewish newspaper [Centraal Blad voor Israëlieten in Nederland](#) concentrate upon this newspaper's history and even, as you can see here, reproduce an image of the first issue from 1885 then entitled the 'Israelietisch Vliegend Blad Voor Nederland'. This 40th edition is beautifully produced on good quality, durable paper and is particularly notable for its striking art deco graphics.

Example 5: Der Veg [slide 14]

Another facet of most anniversary issues that can aid historical and genealogical research are the advertisements and announcements placed in the newspapers by local Jewish and non-Jewish businesses. Many of these are published together with congratulatory messages. An example that I have to show you here is from the 10th anniversary issue of the erratically produced Mexican Jewish newspaper, [Der Veg](#). The advertisements show a range of Jewish Mexican businesses in 1940 – from clothier to clockmaker to hotelier – published in Spanish together with their personal messages in Yiddish.

Example 6: Vokhenblat [slide 15]

Prominent and active members of the Jewish community are also featured in anniversary editions, usually extending congratulations, often accompanied by a photograph. A good example is provided by the 40th anniversary edition of the weekly Jewish Canadian communist newspaper, [Vokhenblat](#). In the example that I've selected here, you can see photographs of the various members of the Canadian communist party together with their messages of

congratulation and occasional comments upon the historical achievement. Such material will enable researchers to develop further a detailed reconstruction of that movement's history.

The anniversary issue of the *Vokhenblat* itself provides articles concerning the history of the Jewish communist movement, in addition to articles dealing with the history of this newspaper. Primary material such as this can only enhance current research into the history of Canadian Jewry.

Example 7: Dos Naye Lebn [slide 16]

In certain cases, the anniversary edition of a newspaper sheds new light on the history of a publication that has perished and about which little is known. The example that I've selected here is the Yiddish newspaper [*Dos Naye Lebn*](#). It is known that it was founded in 1919 and produced daily thanks to the incredible efforts of its prodigious editor and contributor Pesach Kaplan. In fact, *Dos Naye Lebn* was the most popular and widely circulated paper in interwar Bialystok but, due to financial difficulties, probably sometime after our 10th anniversary edition was produced, a cooperative was created to keep production going and the paper was renamed *Unzer Lebn* in 1931. The newspaper and its editor perished in the Bialystok ghetto during the Second World War. Our 10th anniversary edition, the 3000th issue (!), offers us a unique insight into the early history of this Yiddish newspaper, particularly the in-depth editorial written by Kaplan, which you can see here.

Example 8: Yidishe Bilder [slide 17]

Some of the anniversary issues celebrate events, like the short-run [*Yidishe Bilder*](#) – a unique pictorial Jewish magazine. This unfortunate weekly only had a life of two years between 1937 and 1939 due to the expense of its production, but during that time it managed to produce an anniversary issue to celebrate 20 years from the death of Mendele Mocher Sforim. As you can tell from the historic photographs in the slide, this special edition also celebrates the 20th anniversary of the British Mandate in Palestine!

Concluding remarks [slide 18]

You can see from just the few issues that I've highlighted that there is a great deal to discover in the anniversary newspapers and that they are rich in history. Indeed, I struggled greatly to narrow down the selection of highlights! But this small digital collection is just the tip of the iceberg. We

have in storage another 160+ of these newspapers and we are very keen to add them to the database. Funding, as ever, is a major issue, but it is hoped that a concerted effort to raise publicity for these newspapers will attract an interested donor. To this end, we will be starting with a poster session at the ALA, then linking our website to other websites, sending out publicity materials and press releases.

Of course, the ultimate dream would be to collaborate with other institutions holding similar materials – how about a national effort to emulate the German ‘compact memory’ but extended to include world Jewish periodicals? And on that ambitious note ...

For more information, please contact:

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