

The American Jewish Archives

By JACOB R. MARCUS *

American Jewish Archives

FOUNDED in 1947 on the Cincinnati campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the American Jewish Archives has become, during this first decade of its existence, a major center of research in American Jewish history. Although its patron, the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, is the scholastic arm of the Reform movement in Jewish life, the Archives actually functions as a separate and national institution without distinction as to religious background and orientation. The Archives is interested in collecting material reflecting the life and history of American Jewry. It is as much concerned with Orthodox and Conservative Jewish life, and even with strictly secular Jewish life, as it is with Reform Jewish life in America. Consequently, its patronage by Reform Judaism notwithstanding, the American Jewish Archives is not in any substantial sense an ecclesiastical or church-oriented organization. It takes as much interest in secular developments, such as the Jewish labor movement, as it does in religious activities, such as the synagogue and the synagogue school.

It is possible, even desirable, for the Archives to avoid an exclusively religious concern inasmuch as the Jews in America as elsewhere constitute not only a religious group but also — and equally so — an ethnic and cultural group. The Archives construes the terms Jew and Jewish life in their widest possible connotations — inclusive of economic, secular, religious, and cultural activities. What roles have Jews played in American economic life? What secular forms have involved Jewish interest and participation? What has been the scope of the Jewish religious scene in America? What cultural enterprises, both general and Jewish, have engaged the energies of American Jews? All these questions are to be taken as germane to the work of the American Jewish Archives.

The author, Adolph S. Ochs professor of American Jewish history at the College-Institute in Cincinnati, has been director of the Archives since its founding. Though his field of interest and research

* Paper read for the author, Aug. 18, 1958, by the Rev. Alcuin Greenburg, O. S. B., at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Salt Lake City. The author is Director of the American Jewish Archives.

was at first European Jewish history, he became increasingly convinced during the 1930's and early 1940's that the American Jewish community was destined to play an ever more central part in modern Jewish history. Even before the end of World War II he realized that American Jewry, which qualitatively if not quantitatively had been from its midseventeenth-century foundations little more than a postscript to European Jewish life and culture, would shortly find itself in a position of hegemony on the world Jewish scene. This realization was completely — and grievously — confirmed by the disclosures at the war's end of the terrible fate of the once proud and populous Jewish communities of Central and Eastern Europe. The communities were in effect no more.

documents and source materials, a constantly expanding collection that runs to millions of pages. Not all these materials, to be sure, are in their original form. A large proportion of the Archives' holdings consists of microfilmed and photostated materials.

In the Archives is the largest existing collection of the minute books of American Jewish religious and social organizations. Some of this material dates back to the colonial period, as in the case of New York's Congregation Shearith Israel, now known as the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, and Newport's Congregation Yeshuat Israel, by Congressional act a national historic site, now known as the Touro Synagogue. Other materials are very recent, for example the congregational and board minutes of the Ohev Israel Synagogue in Newark, Ohio — material originating in the 1950's. Taken all together, the Archives' collection of congregational and societal records includes more than 500 volumes and consists of material in Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew, German, Yiddish, and other languages, as well as English.

The Archives has also a vast collection of papers relating to individual American Jews — prominent businessmen, jurists, rabbis, and the like. Its files include the correspondence and business ledgers of such important colonial citizens as the Newport merchant-shipper Aaron Lopez; the New York merchant Uriah Hendricks, founder of a family famous in American industrial annals; the Georgian Jewish Leader Mordecai Sheftall, a Revolutionary War hero; and the Canadian entrepreneur Samuel Jacobs, to mention only a few. The Archives includes important eighteenth- and nineteenth-century papers — the letters of Rebecca Gratz, Haym Salomon, Myer Myers, David Salisbury Franks, Mordecai Manuel Noah, Uriah P. Levy, Judah Touro, Solomon Etting, and Judah P. Benjamin, again to mention a bare handful. The files of the Archives contain, furthermore, huge and significant collections such as the papers of Jacob H. Schiff, Felix M. Warburg, Louis Marshall, Boris Bogen, and the Franks, Minis, and Gratz families. Among its holdings are the papers of a host of American rabbinical leaders — William Rosenau, Max Heller, Moses J. Gries, David Philipson, Hyman G. Enelow, Gotthard Deutsch, Kaufmann Kohler, Isaac Leeser, Isaac Myer Wise, Marcus Jastrow, and many others.

Well represented also are wills, diaries, naturalization papers, marriage contracts, peddlers' licenses, biographies and autobiographies, genealogical charts, newspaper clippings, pamphlets, brochures, broadsides, and other documentary sources, all relating to the Jewish experience in America. There are Revolutionary War

papers, Civil War documents, Admiralty materials, Congressional records. There are scores of memoirs. The Archives also collects pictures touching on all phases of American Jewish life; its pictorial collection is outstanding. Except for a few items on which the donors have put special restrictions, all this vast store of material is available to, and widely used by, Jewish and non-Jewish scholars all over the world.

The Archives does not consider its sole function to be the assembling of historical materials. It is also a research center and expends a good part of its resources in publishing projects. In June of 1948 the first issue of the Archives' semiannual journal, *American Jewish Archives*, was published as an important part of the Archives' plan to disseminate scientific information about American Jewish history. Appearing now in April and October as a magazine of about 100 pages, the journal contains articles of *genre* as well as professional interest and includes lists of recent acquisitions. Beginning with the sixth volume each volume contains a comprehensive index, and an index to the first five volumes is now in preparation. To mention briefly a few of the outstanding projects that have been carried out in the journal during the first ten years of its publication, the issues of June 1954 and January 1955 were devoted to the Tercentennial of the American Jewish community and included such items as a translation of Isaac Mayer Wise's autobiographical "Meine Bücherei," an essay, "The Social Philosophy of Emil G. Hirsch," and a discussion of a number of hitherto little-known documents preserved in the Netherlands that shed light on Brazilian, West Indian, and New Amsterdam Jewish history. The October 1956 issue of *American Jewish Archives* was devoted to Jewish history in the American West and presented, on the basis of original documents, a panorama of Jewish life and experience in the pioneer Territories that later formed 17 of the Western States. The June 1955 issue of the journal featured an imposing monograph on "The Social Justice Movement and the American Reform Rabbi." The Archives magazine, we believe, is welcomed by the National Archives and the Library of Congress and by libraries, scientific institutions, and scholars all over the world.

A scholarly semiannual journal by no means exhausts the list of publications offered by the American Jewish Archives. The Archives itself has published a number of historical works, such as Bertram Wallace Korn, *The American Reaction to the Mortara Case: 1858-1859*; Jacob Rader Marcus, *Jewish Americana; an American Jewish Bibliography*; and *Essays in American Jewish History*, this last a

Festschrift in honor of the Archives' tenth anniversary. Its publishing endeavors have constituted a substantial contribution to the small but growing number of books comprising the scholarly literature of American Jewish history.

In the spring of 1956 the Archives took on a new dimension through the establishment of the American Jewish Periodical Center. This agency, financed by a special grant from the Jacob R. Schiff Fund, was founded to collect, largely on microfilm, American Jewish periodical literature. It is planned to assemble as complete a collection as possible of American Jewish periodicals from 1823 to 1925, with a selection of periodical materials after that year as a continuing project. Although most of these items are in English, a sizable proportion is in Yiddish, Hebrew, Ladino, German, Polish, Hungarian, and Serbo-Croatian. These materials are available to scholars through interlibrary loan.

In a programmatic statement, the Director of the Archives has said that "the task of the Archives is as endless as history itself." In fact, the Archives not only devotes itself to the materials of the past, but with equal interest and concern sets itself to collect contemporary materials, so that scholars years hence can turn with confidence to its files in writing what will then be the history of our own day. The Archives does not propose to wait for the materials of the present to be assembled by the scholars of the future. Thus it looks forward as well as backward in its service to a scientific study and compilation of the records of American Jewish history.

No Miraculous Endowment

Now we have no illusions that a mere study by research workers of the letters, messages, memoranda, and books deposited by many individuals here will miraculously endow their readers with wisdom.

Factual information must be energized by the force of reason, understanding, and interpretation. To the true historian, trends are more important than the recorded deeds of any period. A study of events of the past half century shows that the compelling forces have been at work, causing trends which will carry into decades ahead with persistent momentum.

— President Dwight D. Eisenhower at the ground-breaking ceremonies of the Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kan., Oct. 13, 1959.

Editor's Forum

Editorial Succession

The new editor succeeds to responsibilities never taken lightly by his predecessors. The late Theodore Calvin Pease edited this journal from its first issue, of January 1938, through that of April 1946; his successors were Margaret Cross Norton (July 1946-April 1949), Karl L. Trever (July 1949-October 1956), and G. Philip Bauer (January 1957-October 1959). Their standard of excellence the new editor can but strive to sustain. From Dr. Bauer's editorial staff the services of Elizabeth Hawthorn Buck as associate editor, Henry P. Beers as review editor, and Karl L. Trever as advertising editor continue. Grace Quimby continues as compiler of the annual bibliography, Dorothy Hill Gersack succeeds to the editorship of "News Notes," and Lester K. Born edits the revived department of "Abstracts of Foreign Periodicals." Julia Ward Stickley comes to the staff as editorial assistant.

Florence E. Nichol of the National Archives continues as a member of the editorial board. The new board members are John C. L. Andreassen, Director of the Louisiana State Archives and Records Commission; David C. Duniway, Oregon State Archivist; and Richard G. Wood, Director of the Vermont Historical Society.

Annual Bibliography

The list of "Writings on Archives, Current Records, and Historical Manuscripts, June 1958-June 1959" will be published in the April 1960 issue. This will be the seventeenth annual bibliography to appear in the *American Archivist*. As was the practice until 1957 the bibliography will be a consolidated list comprising titles published in the United States and in other countries. The content cutoff has been advanced to June 1959; each future list, scheduled to appear hereafter in the January issue, will have a cutoff of June 30 of the previous year.

Polish Archives

The editor has received from H. Altman, Director General of the Archiwów Państwowych at Warsaw, the following letter, dated January 30, 1959:

The Main Directorate of State Archives in Poland has just received No. 2. 1957* of the periodical "The American Archivist" with the paper: "The Preservation of the State Records in Poland" by Mrs. Janina Wojcicka. We must express our sincere satisfaction that the Society of American Archivist[s] whose organ is the periodical "The American Archivist" has taken an interest in the Polish Archives, their organization, and activities of the Polish Archives Service.

We, however, cannot but express our regret that the paper of Mrs. J. Wojcicka, although containing a number of more or less accurate figures and chronological and historical data from several years ago, nevertheless displays before the readers of "The American Archivist" a picture of Polish Archives not conforming to the reality. Not having the exact knowledge of the postwar activities of these archives, the author throws upon them onesided and inaccurate light . . . misinforming . . . the American archivists who take an interest in the structure and role played by the Polish archives in the cultural and particularly in the scientific life of the country.

The conditions in which the Polish archives are working, the objects they have to attain, and the tasks they are realizing, are constantly discussed in the periodical "Archeion" the organ of the Main Directorate of State Archives; in its columns moreover the accurate, precise and extensive reports of the activities of the Polish archives service are published every year. The characteristics and the part played by the Archives in the life of the Polish Popular Republic have been discussed also in the publication based on precise documentation, issued in 1956 in French under title "Les Archives de la République Populaire de Pologne."

The Polish archives which have been until recently under the direct supervision of the highest executive organ: the Prime Minister (they are now under the supervision of the Minister of the Highest Education) gained an influential position they had never possessed before the 2nd World War. This position gives to the Main Directorate the opportunity for an efficacious and far-reaching influence in the activities of separate archives with the exception of those to which the access in every political system is being limited by special restrictions. To obtain such a position in the administrative hierarchy a number of Main Archives Directorates in separate capitalist countries are aiming at, what has been expressed in many instances, e. g. at the international "Round Table" archival conferences.

If the up-to-date material[s] produced by the Home Ministry, the Ministry of National Defense and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs are not accessible in Poland for scientific research, it must be said that this phenomenon is quite general all over the world with this difference only that in several countries the rigours in this respect are considerably more severe and sharp than in Poland.

If the archives of the political parties in Poland are not subjected to the control of the Main Directorate, it is well known that an analogous state of

* *Editor's note: i. e., no. 3, 1957.*

affairs exists generally all over the world. The American archivists will certainly not deny that the archives of the Republican or Democratic Party in USA are subjected neither to the supervision of USA Federal or State Archives nor to the control of other public archives.

On the other hand, all source material[s] in the Polish archives without exception, including also the records which have originated as a result of the activities of industrial, technical, and economical enterprises, are accessible to the scientific research of all scientific workers without exception, with the consideration of standing orders for all archives, among others, for archives in . . . Western Europe.

It would be impossible not to add to the above that a long series of scientific publications issued in the post-war Poland, and based on the sources preserved in Polish archives, are the most striking and accessible . . . proof of a free use of those archives. Whoever wishes to be informed conscientiously and objectively about the Polish archives, without any political tendency, may achieve this on the basis of the available source material.

The conclusions reached by the author of the mentioned paper in "The American Archivist" proclaim that: "our [i. e. American] National Archives has nothing common with the State Archives in Poland." If this conclusion is to be correct it should be supplemented by the assertion that the American archives have no common traits with any European archives whatsoever. We base this assertion on the one hand on the repeated statements at the international meetings of archivists (International Archives Council, Conferences of "Table Ronde des Archives") in which Poland is actively participating; in which our colleagues from other countries have emphasized the common traits and interests of archivists in all European countries including Poland, especially as concerns the archival methods, the availability of archival material, and the role of archives in the historical research. On the other hand, a great number of scientific workers from many capitalist countries in Europe and in other countries who are repeatedly visiting the workrooms of the Polish State Archives bear witness to the usefulness of the Polish archives for the scientific research. We take the liberty to express a doubt whether the American historians would agree with the conclusion of the author as they are visiting the Polish archives with ever growing frequency to get from them the material necessary for their scientific purposes.

We call attention to those most essential aspects of the structure and activities of the Archives not only in Poland but in all other countries as well, and express a hope that the Editor of "The American Archivist" will not refuse to publish this enunciation in his periodical.

H. ALTMAN

The foregoing letter, which is printed also (in Polish) in *Archeion*, vol. 30 (1959), has been referred to Janina Wojcicka of the Slavic and Central European Division, Library of Congress, author of the article referred to. Dr. Wojcicka, on November 17, 1959, provided the editor with the following statement:

Mr. Altman is to be congratulated on the implicit acceptance of the objective that Polish archives should be freely available to all, including scholars from noncommunist countries. He makes some other points which are at variance with my article, "The Preservation of the State Records in Poland." These points are discussed below in the order submitted by Mr. Altman.

1. In the second paragraph of his letter the article is described as "inaccurate" and "misinforming." No specific complaint is cited but a general claim is made that the author does not have "the exact knowledge of the postwar activities of these archives."

It is admittedly difficult to respond to such general criticism. The article dealt with the archival situation prior to the Revolution of 1956. It is the consensus of most western scholars that a distinction should be drawn between conditions prior to the events of 1956 and those of the Gomulka era. It is disappointing to see a letter on the degree of freedom in Poland which ignores these differences. It is even distressing to find the entire period lumped under "postwar activities."

2. In his fifth paragraph, Mr. Altman raises a second criticism of the article on the ground "that in several countries the rigours in this respect [restricted availability of current police, military, or state archives] are considerably more severe and sharp than in Poland."

It is difficult again to respond to this criticism without knowing which countries Mr. Altman has in mind. However, while one might agree with Mr. Altman in deploring these restrictive policies, it is necessary to add that the article in question was not concerned with the archives of these countries.

3. In the sixth paragraph, it is argued that if the archives of the political parties in Poland are not subjected "to the control of the Main Directorate," an analogous situation exists all over the world, as in the case of the Republican or Democratic parties in the United States.

This comment seems to refer to the statement, on p. 197 of the article under discussion, that the archives of the Communist Party are not included in the State Archives. No reference was made to "the political parties in Poland." While Mr. Altman's delicacy is understandable, the records of the Republican or Democratic parties are not comparable to those of the Communist Party. The failure to put the records of the Communist Party under the supervision of the Main Directorate of Archives and the failure to make at least the older documents available to historians may present a loss to scholars of significant historical records. This is the point made in the article: The records of the Communist Party are not included in the State Archives. Does Mr. Altman deny this fact?

4. In the eighth paragraph, the claim is made that scholarly publications have been issued which were based on sources preserved in Polish archives. It is added that one may be objectively informed "on the basis of the *available source material*" [*italics mine*].

This encouraging policy statement was not available at the time of writing

of the article. Rather, the statement of the Chairman of the Archival Council of the Main Directorate, Professor Tadeusz Manteuffel, who is also Director of the Historical Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences, was used (p. 198). Professor Manteuffel announced in 1955 at the Third Methodological Conference of Archivists that the archival science is a service science to the science of history and that history has two objectives: first, to prepare a Marxist synthesis of Polish history, and second, to destroy the falsification of the so-called bourgeois historiography. Is this what Mr. Altman means by objectivity "without any political tendency?"

5. In the ninth and penultimate paragraph, Mr. Altman points to the participation of Polish archivists in the second International Archives Round Table and the fact that more material is being made available to American scholars.

The participation of Poland in the Round Table Conference took place in 1955 and consequently was noted on p. 198 of the article under discussion. The expansion of archival service since 1956 would similarly have been mentioned if the article had been written on the basis of the post-1956 situation.

In sum, my article emphasized that the Polish archives as of 1956 differed markedly from the American concept in two important respects: the greater degree of restriction in dissemination of information in the archives, and the political objectives which are intended to govern the Polish archival collections. To corroborate the latter point many statements in *Archeion* could be cited to demonstrate these propaganda and political tendencies. For instance I would like to quote here an official statement made in 1951 by Rafał Gerber, Chief of the Main Directorate of Polish Archives that ". . . any archival exhibition, which contributes to solving a particular scientific problem, also serves as a propaganda tool. It must have a clear political tendency. Only in this case will archival exhibitions serve their purpose." [*Archeion*, vol. 19/20, p. 16 (1951).]

JANINA WOJCICKA

Back Issues

Inside the front cover the Society advertises for certain back issues of the *American Archivist* needed to replenish its dwindling stock. Members and others wishing to purchase, rather than sell, single issues should send their orders to the Treasurer, Leon deValinger, Jr., Box 710, Dover, Delaware. Xerox-reproduced copies of vols. 1-20, as a complete serial or in single issues out of print, are for sale by University Microfilms, Inc., 313 North First St., Ann Arbor, Michigan, from whom quotations may be obtained. In addition, vols. 1-21 are available on 35-mm. positive microfilm at a cost of \$65; orders for these microcopies should be sent to the Secretary, Dolores C. Renze, 306 State Museum Building, Denver 2, Colorado.