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UNIVERSITY
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INSTITUTE
FOR JEWISH
RESEARCH

CENTER FOR JEWISH HISTORY

CJH NEWS

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“...A Time to Build”

A New Center for
Jewish Learning
and Culture

It has been heralded as the future Library of Congress and Smithsonian of the Jewish people. Prominent members of the academic community predict it will become a magnet for scholars from around the world. The mayor of New York City, among others, hails it as a new cultural landmark.

The excitement is about The Center for Jewish History, the outgrowth of an unprecedented partnership among four leading Jewish cultural and research institutions to create a vibrant campus complex devoted to the advancement of Jewish scholarship, art and culture.

By the end of 1997, the collections of these four unique yet complementary institutions — the American Jewish Historical Society (specializing in American Jewry), Leo Baeck Institute (specializing in German-speaking Jewry), YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

(specializing in Eastern European Jewry), and the Yeshiva University Museum (interpreting and exhibiting Jewish art, culture

and history) — will be housed together.

An extensive renovation project is transforming two existing Manhattan buildings into one imposing 105,000 square foot facility for documentation, preservation, research, teaching, exhibitions and public programs.

“We are constructing a preeminent institution to honor the vital history the Center will house,” says Bruce Slovin, YIVO’s board chairman, who has spearheaded the \$40 million dollar fundraising effort to support the renovation project and to create its operating endowment. “Our Center will become the central address for exploring the richness of Jewish life and letters and the enormous contribution modern Jewry has made to Western civilization.”

Holdings of the four institutions include more than 80 million archival items, over 500,000 library volumes, and close to 10,000 artworks and artifacts. Scholars and students will be able to research these materials in the skylit Lillian Goldman Main Reading Room, generously endowed by the Lillian Goldman Charitable Trust. The 250-seat state of the art Leo and Julia Forchheimer Auditorium, named in memory of Leo and Julia Forchheimer, will host academic conferences, public lectures, films and cultural and educational events.

The Center will mount major gallery exhibitions and permanent displays on historic and artistic themes. A continuing flow of public programs will explore the fullness of Jewish experience during the past 400 years.

“We’re very excited to be in a center of Jewish learning where scholars and serious aficionados from various institutions and disciplines will grapple with important issues of Jewish identity that only history can help us address,” says Michael Feldberg, executive director of the American Jewish Historical Society.

Justin L. Wyner, the Society’s president, believes the full continuum of history documented at the Center can be the bridge which

Continued on next page



CJH dedication ceremony, April 28, 1996. From left to right: Bruce Slovin, YIVO; Dr. Ismar Schorsch, LBI; New York City Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani; Erica Jesselson, YUM; Kenneth Bialkin, Esq., AJHS.

© Star-Black



Cynthia Ozick

“Imagine the severed threads of an honored old tapestry now nobly stitched together; or consider the restoration to dazzling wholeness of the four sides of a golden box; or conceive of a people’s unnaturally divided storehouse at last richly united — all that is the meaning of the amalgam, in the newly formed Center for Jewish History, of four separate archives of Jewish scholarship. An unprecedented American institution of vast cultural magnitude is in the making!”

Continued from previous page connects young, uncommitted Jews to their precious heritage. "When young people learn about the contributions Jews have made to modern civilization, especially in America, they develop a new source of pride in identifying as Jews," he says.

That a scholar in America will be able to research modern and contemporary diaspora Jewish history at one location is unprecedented. The symbolism is powerful as well. The Center proposes to dissolve the cultural and physical barriers that traditionally have separated these four institutions and the communities they represent.

"It is our hope that by pooling our assets, by enlarging our impact, we will firmly position ourselves on the American Jewish landscape," says Dr. Ismar Schorsch, president of the Leo Baeck Institute.

Erica Jesselson, chairperson of the Yeshiva University Museum board, concurs, stressing the need to "teach future generations our common history: the richness, the beauty, the intellectual commitment, the meaning of the People of the Book, and the Jewish cultures that were created before the Holocaust." Much of this history, she notes, will now be housed together for the first time.

Dr. Allan Nadler, research director of YIVO, has also reflected on the extraordinary symbolism of the Center's mission. "The trend in contemporary Jewish life is one of increasing divisiveness," he notes. "Here, in the middle of that unfortunate climate of politicization and factionalism, you have four institutions spanning the spectrum — from Orthodox to Reform to secular Eastern European to the American Jewish tradition — coming together under one roof."

The timing for this bold undertaking also makes good sense from a practical point of

view. The vast holdings of the three research institutes have outgrown their respective facilities. Many items, fragile with age, are stored in warehouses. The Center will provide state-of-the-art preservation and access to the millions of books, documents, objects and works of art that these four institutions have collected. It will also become a repository for new acquisitions, a central location where individuals, families and organizations can donate materials with the assurance that they will be preserved in an environment engineered to insure longevity.

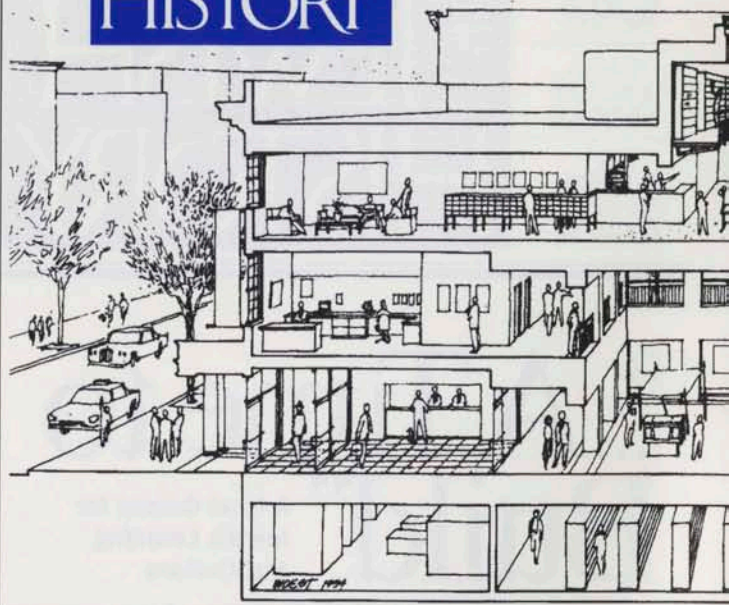
The new facility will also place the holdings in a vibrant neighborhood within walking distance of major colleges and universities, offering opportunities for intellectual vitalization of the four Center organizations and collaborative academic programs.

The presence of the Yeshiva University Museum in the partnership, with two spacious galleries and a children's workshop center, insures that the Center will be brimming with public activity and Jewish cultural programs, and will serve as an arts resource for the neighboring community.

Another factor considered by the leaders of the academic and philanthropic Jewish communities that helped bring the four institutions together was that partnership would result in significant financial savings. Each institution will remain a separate entity, but needless duplication will be avoided by centralizing vital archival operations such as preservation, restoration and microfilming services, and by operating in one facility.

"After two years of planning, the pieces have come together," says YIVO's Bruce Slovin. "The timing is right to gather our cultural records under one roof, where they will be accessible to all who wish to partake of our glorious history." ■

CENTER OF JEWISH HISTORY



A Design that Reflects Historic Identities and A Bold New Vision

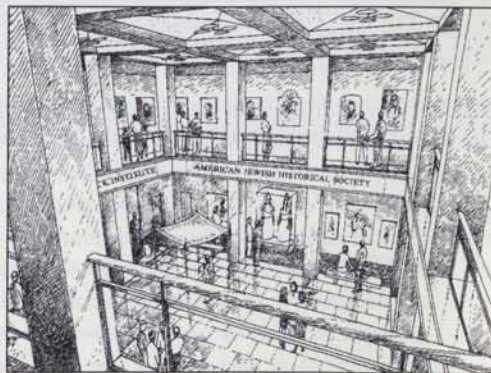
The exciting architectural plan for renovating a four-story landmark building on Manhattan's 16th Street, just west of Fifth Avenue, and its adjacent twelve-story structure on West 17th Street, maintains the well-established identities of the four partner institutions while accommodating a new vision for common programs and public space.

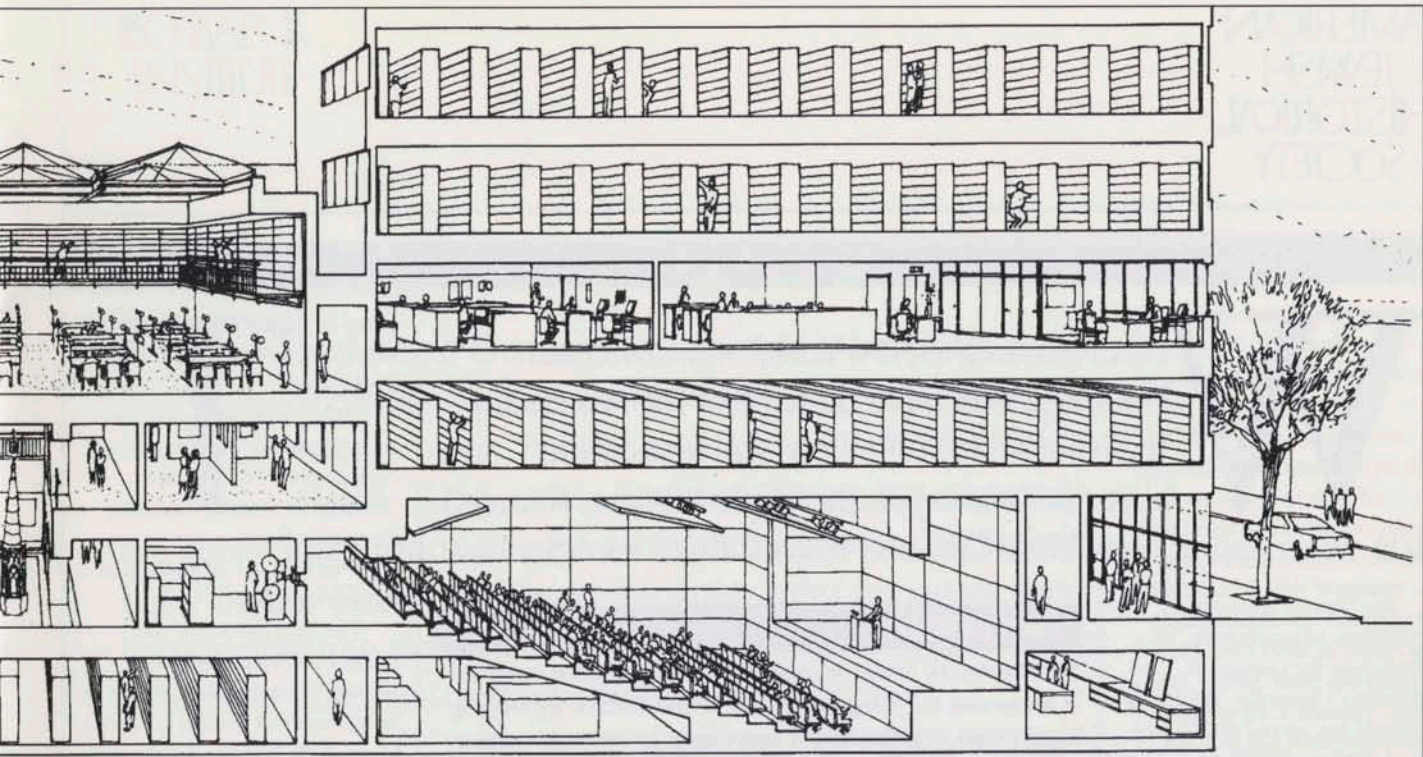
"We have kept the existing two structures more or less as they were — historic spaces like the institutions themselves," explains architect Richard Blinder of Beyer Blinder Belle.

"But the area in the middle, the real core of the complex, is all new construction. This is the common space that houses the great hall, gallery space, and the Lillian Goldman Main Reading Room above. It has its own special character, and a decidedly modern vocabulary."

A Walk Through the Center

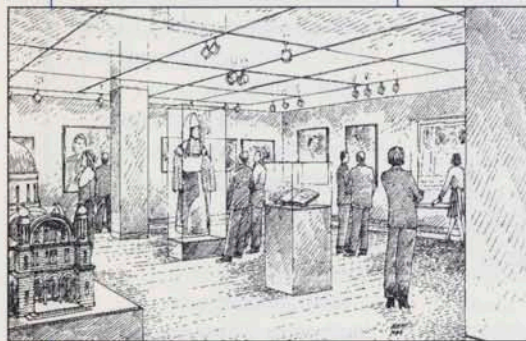
Visitors will enter the Center through its neo-Georgian facade and central lobby, where each institution will be identified. This entry room leads to the imposing two-story atrium area. In this striking and modern open space, the so-called great hall, the visitor will have a chance to view exhibits that reflect the work and collections of the American Jewish Historical Society, Leo Baeck Institute, YIVO Institute for





Renderings courtesy of Beyer Blinder Belle, New York

Jewish Research and Yeshiva University Museum. The atrium area will also be used for recep-



tions and other public functions.

The core atrium leads to a ground floor gallery, one of two galleries that will be used exclusively by the Yeshiva University Museum, and to the 250-seat Leo and Julia Forchheimer Auditorium, a state-of-the-art facility for presenting lectures, conferences, musical performances, film presentations and modest theatrical productions. The auditorium will be equipped with infrared technology for the hearing impaired, and will allow for simultaneous translation of foreign language presentations.

The ground floor also houses a meeting room for smaller lec-

tures and conferences of up to 50 people, an in-house cafeteria, and a children's workshop space. The Center fronts on two streets, allowing groups of children and other tour groups arriving by bus to access the facility through a 17th Street entrance.

A grand staircase — as well as an elevator — rises to the second floor of the atrium, which is surrounded by exhibit space for the three research institutes, and accesses the second large exhibition gallery for Yeshiva University Museum and a small outdoor sculpture garden. There is additional gallery space for special exhibits presented by the other institutions.

The impressive two-level skylit Lillian Goldman Main Reading Room, located above the atrium in the new center core of the building, will be shared by the three research institutes. With a mezzanine gallery around it, this central reading room has been

designed as an attractive and functional facility, where the treasures housed in the Center can be studied in comfort.

Private and Public Spaces

The higher floors will house administration offices, the collections' stacks, and shared facilities for cataloging, preservation and restoration work. A lower level features classrooms for education programs and a publications design center for use by all four institutions.

"One of the design concepts we've tried to carry throughout the building is a balance among space for the public, space that is shared by the institutions, and private study areas where scholars can conduct their research," says architect Richard Blinder. While each institute will have separate administration and work areas, other spaces will be

utilized cooperatively, such as rooms for the sound and photo archives.

High Technology for 21st Century Research Needs

Work has already begun on designing the technical infrastructure capable of carrying the Center into the 21st century. A tailored computer network will provide worldwide access to Internet resources, digitized archives, and databases that will



further the work of all the institutions. The goal is an advanced computer and communications environment that will facilitate research at the Center and foster collaboration among the partners. ■

Custodian of the records of the Jewish experience in America

“Ware returning to New York,” says Michael Feldberg, executive director of the American Jewish Historical Society, the first ethnic historical society in the United States, founded 104 years ago in New York City and housed there for 75 years.

The Society relocated to Waltham, Massachusetts, in 1968, near the campus of Brandeis University. While that address has served the Society well, the new Center provides compelling opportunities for this national archives of American Jewry. “We’ve outgrown our current home,” says Dr. Feldberg. “The Center will provide a state-of-the-art conservational environment that we can’t provide.”

The AJHS holdings include some 40 million archival documents, 30,000 books and thousands of paintings and memorabilia that bear eloquent witness to Jewish contributions to life in the Americas. Among the rich symbols of that heritage are trial records from the Mexican Inquisition (1590), and the first American book published in Hebrew (1735). A highlight is the handwritten original of Emma Lazarus’s “The New Colossus” (1883), whose invitation to Europe’s “tired...poor...huddled masses” graces the Statue of Liberty.

The nation’s most complete collection of American Jewish newspapers and periodicals captures Jewish life in the way mere memory cannot. There are also records of major Jewish communal organizations and the oldest surviving

Leon Botstein

“The Center for Jewish History is a crucial initiative on behalf of preserving the living tradition of Jewish history. By bringing together the most important repositories of archival material in one modern, accessible center for research, the Jewish community will have created in New York

a focal point for linking past and future. The vitality of the Jewish community depends on the constant renewal of its engagement with its history. The center makes it possible for us to secure a continuity with our heritage and to open up the riches of our past to the world at large.”



Top, left: David and Phila Franks, members of the prominent Levy-Franks family, ca. 1735. From the AJHS colonial portrait collection. The Franks were among the first Jewish settlers in America. Above: 1909 Jewish New Year postcard from the New Year card collection of the American Jewish Historical Society.

group of family portraits on the American continent, painted in the 1730s.

While preservation and conservation needs were significant considerations for the move, the AJHS leadership stresses the extraordinary synergy between the four institutions as most compelling.

“The fit is just right,” says Society president Justin L. Wyner. “This exciting project brings together several hundred years of the history of Jews and their contributions to the making of the Americas.” Notes Dr. Feldberg, “The AJHS collections are complementary collections to those of the LBI and YIVO. It is the ultimate expression of continuity.”

“We are using online communications, microfilm, video and scanning to bring American Jewish history alive for future generations,” observes Mr. Wyner.

AJHS programs are designed to inform the public of the outstanding contributions of America’s Jewish community. Its journal, *American Jewish History*, is the most respected in its field. On the occasion of its centennial in 1992, the Society published a five-volume history, *The Jewish People in America*, edited by Henry Feingold, chronicling a rich tradition that reaches back to the 17th century. In 1998, the Society will publish *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, edited by Paula Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore. ■

Documenting the life of German-speaking Jewry

The Jews of Germany, Austria and other German-speaking areas of Europe had a long and dynamic history before it came to a fiery end with the Third Reich. Today, when Jewish suffering has captured the public imagination through Holocaust museums and memorials, the Leo Baeck Institute is the single most important source for documenting the vibrant life of German-speaking Jewry that existed for hundreds of years prior to its annihilation.

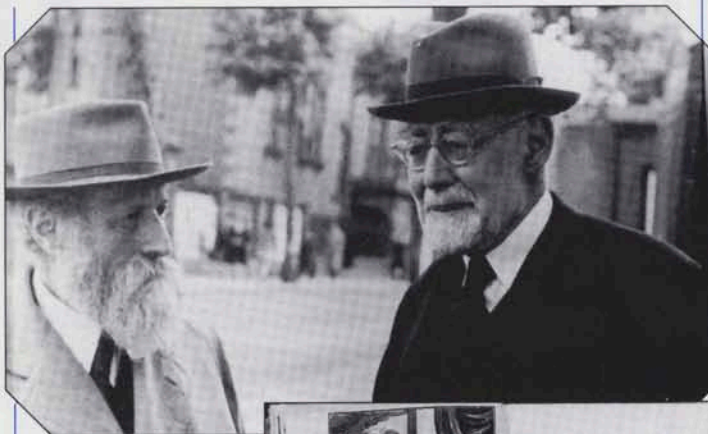
Founded in 1955, the Institute is named after the spiritual leader of the Jewish community during the Nazi period, and has been nurtured by its founding group for the past 41 years.

"Now it is time to transplant the LBI to American soil at the Center, where the entirety of the modern Jewish experience can be researched, and each component enriched through comparative study," says Dr. Ismar Schorsch, Leo Baeck Institute president.

"Jewish studies is more than reading books; it is having access to primary sources," says Dr. Schorsch. "These sources abound in the collections of the LBI and will enhance the historical continuum available for interdisciplinary research at the Center. It will be a place of incredible intellectual synergy."

While sister institutes exist in London and Jerusalem, only the New York Institute houses a library, archives and museum. The 60,000 volume library tells the story of almost every Jewish community in Germany. There are family histories, business reports and a rare collection of more than 700 periodicals from the 19th and 20th centuries.

Above: The Leo Baeck Institute evolved from an idea first discussed by Martin Buber (left) and Leo Baeck (right). Right: Frontispiece of an illustrated book on "Jewish Ceremonies," published in Nürnberg in 1724. From the Library of the Leo Baeck Institute.



Individuals, families and organizations have deposited their personal and historical treasures in the archives. Letters, documents and a collection of 1,000 memoirs dating back centuries have been invaluable in the writing of hundreds of historical studies.

Supplementing these materials are 30,000 photographs and a large and diverse art collection.

The LBI has long been known as a treasure trove for genealogical study. The archives include letters not only from such prominent names as Heinrich Heine, Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein, but from Jews from all walks of life. Family trees and family histories trace ancestry back to the 18th and sometimes earlier centuries. There are birth, marriage and death records compiled by Jewish communities, municipal records and much more.

Ongoing efforts make these materials more accessible. The computer catalog of the archive and library collections is now online in Europe. And the entire 40-volume series of the prestigious *LBI Year Book*, published in London, is available on CD-ROM.

The Institute utilizes its resources to present aspects of German and Austrian Jewish history to the community through exhibits and public lectures. It has published over 125 books.

Preparation of a comprehensive history of German Jewry in English, German and Hebrew, a major undertaking involving an international group of scholars, with Michael A. Meyer as project editor, became a reality in 1995 when the first of four volumes was published during the Leo Baeck Institute's milestone 40th anniversary year. ■

Jack Nash

"To remember the Jewish European cultural heritage is to keep alive those responsible for its richness and beauty and to share forever the gifts they left."

Educating audiences of all ages with dynamic interpretations of Jewish life, past and present

The presence of the Yeshiva University Museum in the Center partnership has added a rich dimension — the potential for attracting audiences of all ages, Jewish and non-Jewish, to a wide range of cultural offerings and programs. That is what YUM has brought to its present home on the campus of Yeshiva University in Washington Heights, where it was founded in 1973.

Since then the Museum has been expanding its mandate, educating the public through multi-disciplinary exhibits on historic themes, introducing them to the work of contemporary Jewish artists, and presenting a full schedule of creative programs.

“Our primary focus is the interpretation of Jewish history from a multi-disciplinary perspective, and we produce two types of exhibitions, usually shown concurrently,” explains Museum director Sylvia Herskowitz. “One exhibit examines a Jewish community or historic event; the other features emerging artists. Our most ambitious exhibit ever, which is on view through December 1, is ‘Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World.’ It traces synagogue development through the first six centuries through archaeological artifacts and early manuscripts culled from leading international collections, including the Israel Museum, the Louvre and the Vatican.”

What is planned to open the Center for Jewish History? “We hope to recreate a wonderful exhibit we mounted in 1984, ‘The Art of Celebration,’ and a



Top, right: Beth Alpha Synagogue Model, ca. 6th century C.E. One of ten superbly crafted models of historic synagogues created for YUM’s 1973 inaugural exhibition. The Beth Alpha model is currently on exhibition in “Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World.” Above: Assistant curator of education, Joseph Van d’Roman, demonstrates an art technique to inner-city eighth grade students participating in a Museum workshop.

Martin Peretz

“When the lives of millions of Jews were destroyed in the Catastrophe, the culture of these people was also destroyed. Tentatively but energetically in Israel and in America this culture has begun to sink roots and sprout branches. Nonetheless, the people of the Book is now largely an ignorant people. Of the many institutions trying to re-enrich the Jewish people with its literature and languages, philosophy and history, its traditional and secular treasures, the Center for Jewish History stands out in its boldness and practicality. It is not an exaggeration to say that on the success of the Center for Jewish History rests the question: will the Jewish people be once again a learning people?”

new contemporary exhibition in which artists will explore an aspect of Jewish history.”

YUM has an additional

focus as well: community outreach and education. These programs include working with New York City public schools



to provide a hands-on arts component; conducting a summer program for local youth; offering a panoply of crafts workshops, lectures and artists talks for adults, and sponsoring an ongoing education program for the dozens of docents who conduct group tours.

At the new Center, which will be far more accessible to the public than its current uptown home, the Museum hopes to fulfill its ambitious mission much more successfully. Ms. Herskowitz envisions the new Center as a rich amalgam of exhibitions — those produced by the Museum in its two spacious galleries, those mounted by the three research institutes, and those that are cooperative ventures among the partners. Additionally, a much longed for space — a separate children’s workshop area — will be located on the main floor adjacent to a tour bus entrance.

“We hope to initiate exhibits, festivals and other events, creating a public window for the Center’s rich collections and the presentation of Jewish culture and history in a creative format. That’s what we do best,” she says. ■

Understanding the Eastern European roots of the contemporary Jewish experience

From its founding in Vilna, Poland in 1925 — with a branch established in New York that same year — YIVO's founders worked tirelessly to collect the documents and archival records of hundreds of Jewish communities in Eastern Europe long before anyone could have predicted the devastation that would befall them.

"If you want to discover the civilization the Eastern European Jews created that was so suddenly destroyed, the answers are here," says Dr. Allan Nadler, YIVO's director of research. "If you want to see the images of that world, they are here in our collection of 200,000 photos. If you want to understand the philosophies, the political ideologies, the cultural life, the religious life, you name it — the answers are here in 350,000 books and 22 million documents."

Now these YIVO treasures, enriched by the combined integrated presence of the American Jewish Historical Society, Leo Baeck Institute and Yeshiva University Museum, will be available to a much broader Jewish public.

"It is an exciting time, says Bruce Slovin, YIVO's board chairman. "We have the opportunity to prepare for the future and we're doing that. For a new generation not to know where they come from, not to appreciate the scope of Jewish art, music, literature and spirituality — that makes our job more challenging. We have to help them reach back into their heritage and culture and to understand. That's



Laurence A. Tisch

"The Center for Jewish History will be an unrivaled resource for the preservation of the splendid cultural, literary and spiritual legacy of the Jews in the modern period. Bringing together these four institutions will profoundly enrich all segments of the American Jewish community."



Above: Reading room of the Strashun Library, housed in the Vilna synagogue complex and founded by Mathias Strashun (1819-1885). Vilna, 1939. The new Center will include a Strashun Study Hall.
Top left: Poster for Hechalutz Organization Month with the famous verse of H.N. Bialik, "Let us come united to the aid of the people." In Hebrew. Designed by A. Tus. Poland, ca. 1930. From the YIVO Archives.

what YIVO is all about." As the only pre-Holocaust scholarly institution to transfer its mission to the new world, YIVO is at the core of the renaissance of interest in the lives of Eastern European Jews. Each year hundreds of scholars, students and writers, among others, call upon YIVO to assist in their research. The institute's wide-ranging programs, including research, publications, conferences, graduate and post-graduate training, are offered to the scholarly community worldwide.

Even as the Center becomes a reality, YIVO is making its holdings more accessible. The institute has a new Web site on the Internet. Work has also begun on digitizing segments of the archives, including the thousands of rare photographs and posters. "Visitors" to the Web site will be able to access these images from anywhere in the world!

But the mission of caring for the actual books and papers remains a top priority. The return early this year of the second shipment of YIVO's pre-World War II archival documents from Vilna — items believed to have been destroyed during the war — was a vivid reminder of the importance of preservation and conservation efforts. At the Center, as they keep alive the precious Jewish heritage of their forebears, YIVO and the other institutions will have state-of-the-art preservation facilities for microfilming, book repairs, paper conservation and other on-site preservation needs. ■

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