

Inaugural Gala Raises Two Million Dollars

Addressing an overflow dinner gathering that extended beyond the walls of the Pierre Hotel ballroom, Center Chairman Bruce Slovin announced that the Capital Campaign for The Center for Jewish History had raised well in excess of \$50 million dollars.

The occasion was the Inaugural Dinner benefitting The Center. Before saluting dinner honoree Ronald O. Perelman, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of MacAndrews & Forbes Holdings, Mr. Slovin thanked the close to 800 guests present for their generosity in helping turn what was a bold idea into a working reality. Said Slovin about Mr. Perelman, his colleague and friend of twenty years, "his quiet wisdom, generous heart and devotion to his people have done so much to make possible the birth of what will be known as the Jewish Library of Congress in the Diaspora."

One forceful theme resonated throughout the remarks of every speaker who graced the dais: the link between Jewish scholarship and learning, Jewish identity and Jewish continuity. Princeton University President Harold T. Shapiro, who introduced the honoree, spoke eloquently of The Center as a place that will nurture the great expanse of Jewish thought and culture and history amassed over countless generations.

"A people without its story or its history is like a person without a memory, unable to understand who they are or where they should head," he cautioned. "The Center and the extraordinary institutions that are coming together to give it life," he continued, "are devoted to finding and preserving and passing on some of the key stories that have defined the long sweep of Jewish experience."

Those key stories come to life in the collections of the institutions that will be housed in The Center, including ca. 100 million archival documents spanning centuries, 500,000 library volumes and tens of

\$4 Million Federal Grant

The Center for Jewish History is the major beneficiary of the October 1998 Congressional appropriation to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, a federal granting agency entrusted with preserving and making accessible the nation's documentary heritage. The spending bill authorized a \$4 million dollar directed grant earmarked for The Center. "A significant portion will be applied to a multi-year project to create one unified online catalog that provides integrated access to the magnificent holdings of The Center," says Chairman Bruce Slovin. "This catalog will link together the many disparate archives housed at The Center and make the riches of our collections accessible to all." ■



Princeton University President Harold T. Shapiro (left) presented honoree Ronald O. Perelman with a Yemenite Shofar from Israel, inscribed with a quotation from the liturgy: "Sound the great shofar... Draw our scattered people together from among the nations."

Continued from previous page

thousands of photos, posters, works of art and historical artifacts. Together, these treasures comprise one of the largest Jewish archival collections outside Israel. Dinner guests were treated to an exhibit previewing some of the archival and library highlights as well as the Center facility itself.

The organizations that will relocate to the new 125,000 square foot state-of-the-art building on West 16th Street in Manhattan, scheduled to open to the public next year, personify the long sweep of Jewish history. The Center for Jewish History will house the American Jewish Historical Society, specializing in American Jewry; American Sephardi Federation, specializing in Sephardic Jews; Leo Baeck Institute, specializing in German-speaking Jewry; YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, specializing in Eastern European Jewry; and Yeshiva University Museum, assuring a public window for the rich collections, including its own, and providing arts programs that will attract audiences of all ages.

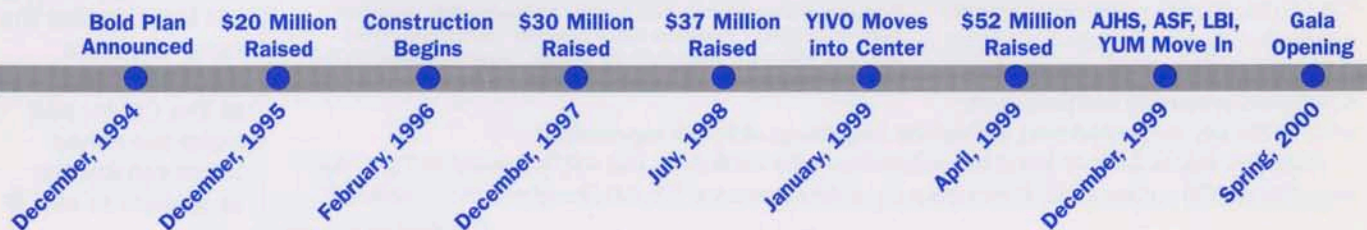
A highlight of the gala evening was the very personal and compelling talk by guest speaker Richard C. Holbrooke, Designate U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Ambassador Holbrooke spoke about the importance of memory and reconciliation, and of remembrance, quoting Elie Wiesel, "...without memory there is nothing." "I salute those of you who had the vision to keep alive the thread—stretched so



Left to right: Guest speaker Richard C. Holbrooke, honoree Ronald O. Perelman and Center Chairman Bruce Slovin at the Inaugural Dinner.

thin, made so tenuous by the Holocaust—of a continuous Jewish history," said Mr. Holbrooke. "This remarkable Center," he concluded, "will help bring together and perpetuate much of collective memory, to preserve it for future generations, to enrich our heritage and benefit all of society." ■

Center Timeline



Genealogical Keys to the Past...

The Center's genealogical services will offer visitors the opportunity to begin their own family history project. Located on the third floor, the genealogical department will provide research tools, resources and staff assistance that can facilitate a search. The public is invited to visit and explore the rich genealogical collections of The Center's member institutions.

Keys to The Past

The Importance of Preserving Records

A gentleman recently contacted the American Jewish Historical Society seeking help with a very pressing matter, reports associate archivist Michelle Sampson. His 96-year-old father, destitute and declining in health, was trying to gain access to funds now being provided by the Swiss Fund for Needy Victims to the Holocaust. The only problem was that he was having trouble proving he had been a Jew in Europe at that time. Administrators of the Fund indicated that if he could provide copies of documents declaring him to be a *Voll Jude*, who had been persecuted in Europe, he would be eligible for the benefits.

Luckily, the family had donated a collection of materials to the Society some years ago, including passports for

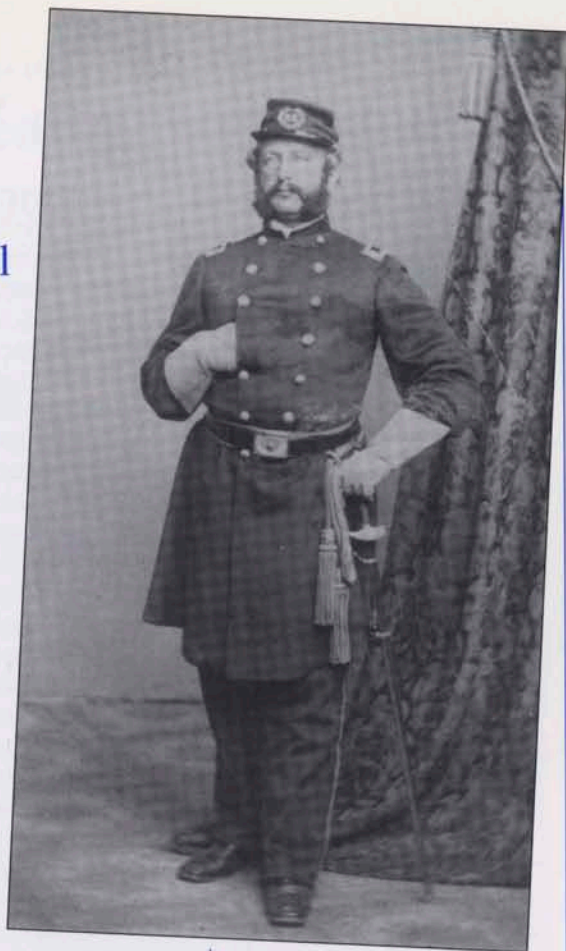
the now elderly man and his wife. The passports, from the 1940s, were stamped with the red "J" for *Jude* and indicated that both husband and wife were Austrian; both were fleeing from the Nazis. The Society provided the copies, and he was able to claim his benefits. Because the records were preserved by the archives, there was a happy ending to what could have been a sad epilogue to his life.

A very different search involved an elderly woman looking for material about the father she had never known. The only bit of information she had was that her father had been a farmer in New Jersey. With that single clue, the archivist suggested she search through the Baron de Hirsch Fund Records. This Fund was responsible for establishing agricultural colonies in upstate New York and New Jersey, as well as throughout the country, and

helped many Jews make their living via agriculture.

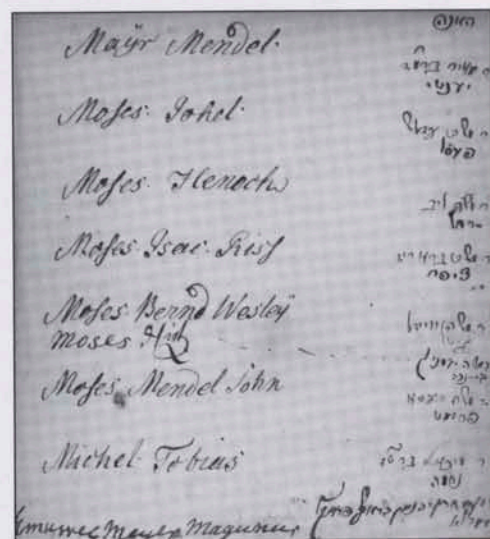
The woman spent hours looking through boxes. Finally, under "Correspondence—Property Owners," she found a folder with her father's name. It was filled with letters her father had written to a Fund agent, revealing events and the comings and goings of his everyday life on the farm. She was ecstatic to learn about her father's life in such detail.

These small, but touching examples of genealogical records found in the Society's collections underscore the importance of preserving and making available not only family papers, but institutional records as well. ■



Above: Major Isaac Moses, Jr. of New York — Union Soldier, ca. 1862. (American Jewish Historical Society)

Below: Eighteenth century register of Berlin Jewish heads of households listing philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. (Leo Baeck Institute)



Keys to The Past

Family History on View

Yeshiva University Museum is a teaching museum, whose environmental exhibits and dynamic educational programs over the years have furthered public knowledge of the rich diversity of Jewish life past and present. There have been major shows focusing on the distinctive strands of Jewish culture and history, with family collections as a highlight. Several museum collections span four or five generations, providing a window on a family's development over 100 years.

The exhibit *Ashkenaz—The German Jewish Heritage* included a remarkable collection of documents brought to America and preserved by the descendants of the *Schutzjude* (Protected Jew) Aron Loeb Lehmann (1752-1810) and his wife, Rechle. Family papers ranging from 18th century

real estate bills of sale to 19th century certificates for membership in the Frankfurt Jewish community, and a proclamation of civil rights for Jews, demonstrated how the lives of one family were interwoven with the threads of German and Jewish history.

A recent major exhibit, *The Sephardic Journey*, focused on Sephardic life from 1492 to the present day. In addition to family photos and photo albums, a tree emblematic of the span of one family's history traced the Corcos family back to 13th century Tortosa, Spain, and through the many communities of the Sephardic diaspora, including Holland, Morocco, Israel and Jamaica.

And last year, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the death of the Vilna Gaon, Lithuania's great Talmudic scholar and spiritual leader, the Museum exhibited a 130-foot family tree tracing the Gaon's progeny, as well as



Dancers at a Settlement in Palestine, ca. 1940. (YIVO Institute for Jewish Research)

that of his siblings. The tree included many famous families in the religious and secular Jewish world—individuals including rabbis, doctors, lawyers, professors and teachers as well as British knights, farming pioneers, movie actors and authors. A companion book included 100 genealogical charts and a surname index of over 1,800 entries—a boon for genealogists worldwide. ■



Political Cartoon by Arthur Szyk satirizing British Mandatory Power denying a group of Holocaust survivors entrance to Palestine, 1946. (Yeshiva University Museum)

his family roots.

Another visitor regretted that his ancestors had left no information about their place of origin. Was there a photo with a gravestone inscription, the librarian asked—perhaps a plot marked by a gate with the place name inscribed on it? There was a gate, but he could not read the inscription. The problem was soon solved: the photograph revealed the name of the local *landsmanshaft* (mutual aid association) that had erected the site. With patience and knowledge, the key to discovery was found. ■

Keys to The Past

What's In a Name?

Dina Abramowicz, YIVO Reference Librarian and former librarian in the Vilna Ghetto in Poland, has helped hundreds of visitors learn about their family origins. "Ninety percent of American Jews originally came from Central or Eastern Europe," she says. "But there are obstacles for second and third generation Americans unfamiliar with the languages, history and geography of Eastern Europe."

The search usually begins

with a family name. Some are easily located; others, derived from Yiddish versions of first names, are more difficult. Still others are misspelled, or have been changed. One query involved the name "Shrryro," transcribed by its bearer from the Hebrew with no vowel between the two "r's." The grandson making the query could not find that spelling in any reference book. But the name was right there as "Shriro," with a derivation leading back to a medieval Hebrew scholar.

Pronunciation can also present problems. A visitor said his ancestors hailed from

"Kalish," and was informed that city was the seat of one of the oldest Jewish communities in Poland. But Ms. Abramowicz thought it unusual that the visitor had never heard about the city's proud tradition. Did he perhaps know who was the ruling authority before WWI, when Poland was divided among three powers? Yes, he remembered talk about Austria and terrible times during the Russian invasion of World War I. That memory was sufficient to identify "Kalusz," located in Eastern Galicia, rather than "Kalisz." While not as old as the celebrated "Kalisz," the YIVO Library did have a memorial book about "Kalusz," so the visitor did learn more about

Generations of Ancestors

Karen Franklin, Director of Family Research for the Leo Baeck Institute, comes to the task with passion, having traced her own family back twenty-six generations through the LBI Archives.

“German Jews are fortunate to have such easy access to a computerized catalogue and to family trees, community and family records and a 60,000 volume library,” she says. “Once we identify that family tree, we can use our rich resources to expand our knowledge about Jewish family life in centuries past.”

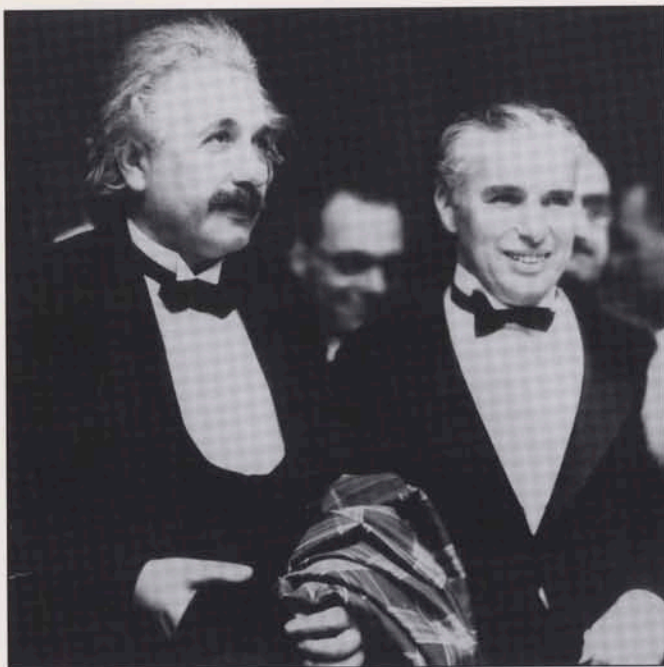
Her search took an exciting direction following a visit to the old Jewish cemetery in Frankfurt, Germany, where she discovered the grave of her great-great-great grandmother, Rosalyn Gumpertz. Back at the Institute, she dis-

covered Gumpertz’ parents listed in the 22-volume *Ele Toledot*, the extensive compilation of indexed genealogies of Frankfurt Jews for the years 1241 to 1824. (LBI New York holds the only complete copy in the world.) The research was exhilarating, as the thousand-year history unfolded.

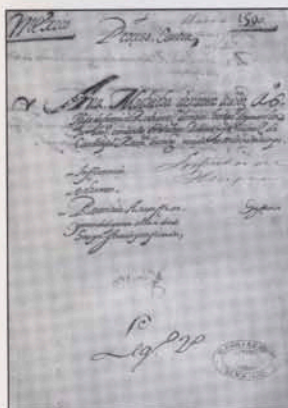
Much information was found in a 1907 classic—*Stammbuch der Frankfurter Juden* (Album of Frankfurt Jews), located at the LBI in the original German as well as a 1988 English edition.

“The successes and tragedies of the generations came to life,” according to Franklin. “But I really became puzzled when I discovered that two ancestors—a father and son—died on the same day in the year 1349. Further research confirmed that the day in question, July 24, was the date of a pogrom in response to the Black Death.”

Delving even more deeply, she was shocked to learn that it was her very own ancestor who was accused in the libel which incited the pogrom. “To see these ancestors in the context of Jewish history is thrilling. And we can help others experience this personal discovery. This is why we look at the past—to bring history home to future generations.” ■



Above: Albert Einstein and Charlie Chaplin, New York City, 1933. (Leo Baeck Institute)



Left: *Proceso* Against Anna de Mattos, Mexico City, Mexico, 1590. The Spanish Inquisition followed Jews to the New World. (American Jewish Historical Society)

Below: Wedding of the Dassa family in Salonika, Greece, ca. 1923. (American Sephardi Federation)



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

When will the Center be open to the public?

The Center will be fully operational in the year 2000. The public is invited to make use of the two-story Reading Room, the Galleries, a 250-seat Theater/Auditorium, genealogical services area and other public spaces. Make sure your name is on The Center mailing list so you can be invited to the opening.

What kinds of material does The Center have?

The combined holdings reflect the history of the Jewish people from Eastern and Western Europe, America and Sephardic countries over the last 400 years, and include ancient and medieval artifacts and documents, as well as materials from all four corners of the Diaspora. Among the ca. 100 million archival items and 500,000 library volumes

are genealogical materials, musical holdings, rare books, microfilm, posters, photographs, documents, letters, artifacts, works of art and other materials.

Can I donate my personal archival, library, art or artifact collections to The Center?

Both your small treasures and major collections may be welcome additions to our

archives or library, where climate controlled storage and state-of-the-art conservation equipment are available for their safekeeping. When you call our offices, we will refer you to the appropriate partner organization for its evaluation. If your collection is appropriate for The Center, we will guide you through the process of donating your materials to one or more of the member institutions. ■

Technology FAQs

Does The Center include a state-of-the-art computer system?

The Center is equipped with an infrastructure capable of carrying any type of computer or telephonic data required, assuring present and future users virtually unlimited flexibility.

What kind of computers will be used?

Existing computer workstations will be augmented by new computers specified to meet the exact requirements of the user. Administrative work tasks, for example, require rather basic computers while digitization of the archives requires more powerful technologies.

What about Web sites for The Center or The Center's institutions?

Web sites will be easily housed. Current web sites associated with The Center or its institutions will be fully accessible.

Will the Reading Room area permit scholars and researchers access to The Center's computer system or the Internet?

Each study desk is equipped with data jacks that may be deployed for virtually any kind of electronic connectivity.

Will the galleries and auditorium include computer and multimedia technologies?

Both areas have been designed to provide all the drama and learning capability of great sound and graphic electronics through high-speed connectivity. The Center's infrastructure also supports video conferencing. ■



Above: The Paul S. and Sylvia Steinberg Great Hall

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The Center for Jewish History thanks the following major donors for their most generous participation in this exciting endeavor to preserve our Jewish past.

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The Center Campaign

The Center for Jewish History's opening festivities are planned for the spring of 2000. We need your involvement **now**, so you can become a participant in this remarkable project and play an important role in the development of The Center—a living tribute to the Jewish past that will enlighten future generations.

We hope you will join the thousands of contributors across the country who have already made a commitment to The Center. There are many opportunities for participation and we invite you to call The Center's Development Office to discuss your gift. You may name The

Center as a beneficiary in your existing **Will**. Or you may choose from a variety of **naming opportunities, endowment gifts and planned giving programs** including **charitable remainder trusts, charitable gift annuities, charitable lead trusts** and other plans. We will work closely with you to determine your level of giving and find the appropriate gift opportunity for you.

The Center will be a place for sharing rich cultural experiences and for exploring a vast reservoir of irreplaceable treasures. We need your help to make this vision a reality. Please call The Center at 212-588-1253 and become involved today. ■

New Fellowship Endowment

The last issue of the *CJH Newsletter* reached thousands of readers nationwide and touched the heart of one in particular. The late Dr. Sophie Bookhalter sought out The Center for Jewish History to help perpetuate her commitment to Jewish outreach and education for the benefit of future generations. She endowed the Sophie Bookhalter, M.D. Fellowships for Jewish Outreach and Culture to encourage qualified and talented graduate students from universities nationwide to pursue studies at The Center in the fields of Jewish history, literature and the arts. Dr. Bookhalter's generous bequest to The Center for Jewish History will help inspire Jewish scholars of tomorrow and promote Jewish culture and education in our community. ■

"It is the right moment for redoubling our efforts to teach others, particularly the young, about the valued—indeed essential—role that the Jewish people have played in the history of humanity." —Harold T. Shapiro, President, Princeton University

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