Future of Memory
Internet & Beyond
@ Spring Conference

The times, as Bob Dylan might say, are definitely a-changing. Teaching is no longer restricted to classrooms and chalkboards. While online learning has already become an option, if not the norm, even within Jewish circles, the digitization of visual and historical material, and its integration into the Jewish classroom, will have equally enormous impact on the future of Jewish teachers.

The many uses of archival information was the focus of NYMA’s Spring Conference, “Digitizing Jewish History: The Future of the Past,” held May 18, 2006, at the King Juan Carlos Center, New York University. In this four-part workshop, attendees were treated to an intensive overview of the inroads technology has made into Jewish research and education.

Innovation

In “Revolutionary Learning for the Next Generation: An Introduction to the Innovative Work of COJS,” Michael Kay, Coordinator, gave a background history of the Center for Online Judaic Studies (COJS), articulating its mission and describing some of the projects. He credited George Blumenthal, an entrepreneur with high tech experience who is also a collector of Jewish artifacts, with the vision to understand how to connect the potential of digital photography to telecommunications in order to bring Judaic artifacts to life and make them available worldwide.

A major impulse for the project is also the preservation of ancient and fragile documents. These primary sources of the Jewish past would thus become available to scholars and researchers who would not otherwise

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A Few Words

2005-2006 was a very successful year all around. Most recently, we benefited from the 2006 Reference Workshop which was held at the Jewish Theological Seminary and chaired by Ina Rubin Cohen and Rachaim Kurtz. Rabbi Moshe Schapiro, Reference Librarian at the Mendel Gottesman Library of Yeshiva University, used both print and electronic resources to help us access classic rabbinic and modern texts. Diane Romm, author of The Jewish Guide to the Internet, introduced us to free and fee web-based resources and updated us on well-known websites and CD-ROMs in Jewish Studies.

The Annual Day School/High School Workshop, chaired by Leslie Monchar and Roz Friedman, took place at Ramaz. It featured a presentation by Chaya Wiesman, Librarian at Ramaz Upper School, on teaching library skills by using PowerPoint, and a discussion led by Esther Nussbaum on fostering cooperation between faculty and librarians in the school.

Our Spring Conference, which I chaired, featured the Center for Online Judaic Studies, an Internet project to “democratize” Jewish studies by bringing primary and secondary resources to everyone through his/her PC. COJS utilizes cutting-edge digital imaging, internet, and multimedia technologies.

We at NYMA have also been making use of electronic resources. Steven Bernstein has been posting all our activities on our new website, ajlnyma.org. Invitations were sent out for several of our activities exclusively by email. This made our task that much easier, allowing us to concentrate on the programming aspects rather than on reproducing and mailing out flyers. Rita Lifton also sent our notice to other listservs, generating interest among librarians who had never attended an AJL event before.

Our NYMA News editor Hallie (Chayah Sarah) Cantor has also been very busy, producing two issues of the newsletter. We try to keep her apprised of all our events and, hopefully, our good news on a personal level as well. And Judy Fixlef, our Treasurer, has been taking in checks and paying our bills. Our tasks run more smoothly thanks to our Corresponding Secretary, Chaya Wiesman, and our Recording Secretary, Tina Weiss. I wish to extend my appreciation to the whole team who contributed to making this such a productive year.

The culmination of this year was the 2006 annual AJL Convention in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I was pleased to see so many faces from NYMA. As part of the conference, I attended the Chapter Presidents’ meeting where different chapters swap ideas and discuss recent successful programs with Toby Rossner, head of Chapter Relations. I also made the rounds of the book vendors and artists at the exhibitors’ tables. A particular joy is to catch up with our old friends in the field from around the world.

Of course, we are planning a great year at NYMA, starting once again with the Fall Conference. We welcome suggestions for programming and the participation of anyone who wants to get involved in our dynamic organization.

Yes, it was a very good year....

Marlene Schiffman
President, AJL-NYMA
Will the Past Be History?
Ancient Questions, (Free) Timeless Answers
@ Reference Workshop
by LEAH SCHECHTER BENNETT, Public Services Librarian, Jewish Theological Seminary of America

Quick: what was Ramban's argument with Rashi? And what if you can get anything you want on Isaac Bashevis Singer without having to break the bank? These and other options were explored at the AJL-NYMA Reference Workshop, held March 21, 2006, at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Timeless
In Part one, "From Ancient Texts to Electronic Resources: Crossing Time Zones for Rabbinic Reference," Rabbi Moshe Schapiro, Reference Librarian at Yeshiva University's Gottesman Library, demonstrated how he crossed "time zones" in answering a particular question posed by a patron: What is the meaning of the two upside-down nun letters in the Torah scroll in the verse Vayehi binsoa ha-aron ("When the Ark would travel..." Numbers 10:35)? He used classic and rabbinic texts, commentaries, and responsa, as well as scholarly articles from e-databases, to answer a question "traditionally, halachically, scholarly, and spiritually." First, he said, the term must be defined. What is this "upside-down nun" called? The traditional text, Mikraot Gedolot, identifies it as a "nun hafukhah." From here, one can proceed through several other sources where nun hafukhah is discussed. Since his goal is to make the patron happy and uplifted, he also sought some spiritual component in the homiletic sources. All in all, Rabbi Schapiro gave a fascinating and thorough exploration of the inverted nun with all the relevant reference sources.

Priceless
In the second presentation, the question was asked: how would a librarian respond to an offer of volumes of different encyclopedias, dictionaries, reference works, periodicals, etc., without sacrificing an iota of space -- and for free? Why, the librarian would cry, "Indubitably!" Diane Romm, author of The Jewish Guide to the Internet, provided a tour of these resources in "Free and Fee: Electronic Resources for Jewish Libraries."
On The Web
It's here! NYMA online! Check us out at www.aitnyma.org. Back issues of NYMA News, as well as announcements of upcoming events, are now all just a mouse click away. A big todah rabbah to STEVEN BERNSTEIN, our very own webmaster extraordinaire!

Yeshiva University is pleased to announce that a digital view of its Prague Bible manuscript is now up on the web. To view the Bible, click on the 0ig.M Projects link at www.vu.edu/libraries. One of the finest examples of a complete Hebrew manuscript was a 3-volume work completed in Prague in 1489, including leaves with illuminated panels and Rashi's commentary, of interest to scholars due to its textual variants. The manuscript was photographed by Bar-Hama Blumenthal Digital, and the project was partially supported by a grant from the Metropolitan New York Library Council's Digital Metro New York.

Hot Off The Press!
Shimon Lakerson, Catalogue of Hebrew Incunabula from the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. The catalog documents the unsurpassed collection of Hebrew manuscripts housed at the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary. It includes incunabula of all 15th century presses that were known to have produced Hebrew books. Shimon Lakerson serves as Senior Researcher at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Russian Sciences, and as a Corresponding Member of the Hebrew Paleographical Project (Jerusalem). He is an expert on the history of the Hebrew book in the Middle Ages and author of numerous books. The 2-volume set costs $800, including shipping (surface mail) and is available through the Jewish Theological Seminary.

From YIVO
Two outstanding seminars were sponsored by the Max Weinreich Center for Advanced Jewish Studies and the YIVO Archives and chaired by Dr. Allan Nadler, Professor of Religious Studies; Director, Jewish Studies Program. Drew University, Madison, NJ. May 16th Dr. Robert Shapiro - Assistant Professor of East European Jewish Studies, Holocaust Studies and Yiddish, Department of Judaic Studies, Brooklyn College - spoke of his recent translation of Isaiah Trunk's Lodz Ghetto: A History, soon to be published by Indiana University Press and the United States Holocaust Museum. The YIVO Archives holds the Nachman Zonabend Collection on the Lodz Ghetto, one of the primary resources used by Dr. Trunk, a Research Associate at YIVO, in his book.

June 20th Dr. Mark Steiner, Professor of Philosophy at Hebrew University - author of The Applicability of Mathematics as a Philosophical Problem and translator of Emune un Apilkorses, by Rabbi Reuven Agushewitz - spoke on "Was Spinoza a Materialist? A View of Rabbi Reuven Agushewitz's Faith and Heresy. Agushewitz published three philosophical works in his lifetime. Jacob Shatzky, Research Associate at the YIVO Institute for Research with an interest in the works of Spinoza, wrote the introduction to one of Agushewitz's works, Di Alte Grikhish Filozofe: fun Thales biz iber di Pitagorer.

Purim Past
Purim in Jerusalem, Photographs by Yankl (Peter) Conzen, was held Feb. 26-Mar. 31, 2006, at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Yankl (Peter) Conzen was born in Frechen, Germany, in 1946. An accomplished artist and photographer, he composed a vivid series of photo celebrations of Purim in Jerusalem. Conzen studied Yiddish literature at JTS and developed warm relations with several students and professors. He died in July 2005. The event featured a program paying tribute to Conzen and an exhibit of his photographic work, a viewing of the exhibit, and a reception. The exhibit was sponsored by friends of Yankl (Peter) Conzen.

Take a Bow
HALLIE (CHAYAH SARAH) CANTOR, editor, has just completed the revised and expanded Gutnick Chumash. Now in one compact volume, it features all the haftarahs, with additional commentary. Published by Kol Menachem.

Bella Hass Weinberg, Past President of the American Society of Indexers, former Chair of its Indexer Education Committee, and the 1998 recipient of its Hines Award, held her seminar "Book Index Structures: In Print and on the Web," July 6th and 7th.

Mazel Tov
To EDITH LUBETSKI, whose son Uriel is the new principal of Yeshivat Rambam in Baltimore.

Condolences
To IDELLE RUDMAN, on the passing of her husband Rabbi Dr. Reuben M. Rudman, BTA, YC, BRGS, RIETS. To LESLIE MONCHAR on the passing of her sister-in-law Ann Monchar. May they be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.
Pictures at a Convention
The culmination of this year was the 2006 annual AJL Convention in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Not only were there many NYMA faces, but quite a few of us attended as part of Avi Chai. NYMA also took part in sessions, as seen below.

(l to r) **LEAH ADLER** with **SHULI BERGER**, who is about to present her session on the Lower East Side.

Our very own president **MARLENE SCHIFFMAN** chairs the session.

**NYMA/NYC CREW** proves the old adage, “Laugh and the whole world laughs with you.”
Helping Teacher & Student Stay the Course (work)
Library & Faculty Skills @ Day School/High School Workshop
by Shimon Vogel, Assistant Librarian, Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy

On April 26th the Ramaz Upper School Library hosted the AJL/NYMA High School/Day School Workshop, “Teaching Library Skills in the Day School: A Demonstration.” Librarians from schools in New York City, Westchester, Nassau County and New Jersey gathered to participate in two sessions presented by the Ramaz librarians Chaya Wiesman and Esther Nussbaum. The topics focused on how to effectuate library instruction among students and how to integrate library holdings and programs into faculty requirements.

Powerful Presentations
In part one, Chaya Wiesman demonstrated the PowerPoint orientation lesson that is required of all incoming students to the RAMAZ Upper School. The lesson presents a summary of the resources available in the RAMAZ library and its website, including the OPAC catalog, subscription databases, online encyclopedias, and library links.

Step by step instructions are given on how to access and use each of these resources. Included is a section on Web evaluation – instructions on how to evaluate the validity and accuracy of a particular website before using it as a resource. Chaya explained that the orientation had evolved both technologically and academically to the point that now the lesson is taught in the school’s computer lab, each student is given an individualized assignment and each assignment is included in the student’s computer grade. As proof of the orientation’s effectiveness, the library staff no longer has to constantly respond to basic use questions and can concentrate more on higher-level evaluative questions from the students.

Positive Results
Esther Nussbaum addressed “Promoting Positive Relationships Between the School Library and the School Faculty.” She broke down the topic into three components, all essential to maintaining open discourse between faculty and librarians:

1) Outreach; being proactive by involving the faculty in the library’s acquisitions, and being responsive to the faculty by basing acquisitions on the needs of the curriculum. It is crucial to maintain an ongoing dialogue with faculty and administration to know what is happening within the school.

2) Promote your expertise and your library; keeping abreast of what’s new in the library field, making the library attractive, and becoming an active participant in school life. An especially effective tool is the library’s doing its own PR.

3) Keep records and write reports: circulation statistics, acquisition reports, etc., including activities within the library, meetings librarians have attended — anything and everything that will make the librarians appear efficient to the function of the school and current in their profession.

A description of “Book Day” at Ramaz, a phenomenal program organized by Esther Nussbaum, concluded this informative discussion.

(Reference workshop, cont’d from pg. 2)
These resources are divided into two groups:
1) secular, commercial databases that include Jewish periodicals and newspapers; and
2) free Judaica resources on the internet.

For instance, the New York Public Library’s website contains many databases with at least some Jewish content. The library websites of the Jewish Theological Seminary and Yeshiva University have the benefit of considerably greater Jewish content. For a so-called "source of sources," there is one highly recommended site: www.jewishinternetguide.com/main/hslibrary.htm.

The opening page has links to other resources on a variety of Jewish topics and is free information on the internet for the Judaica librarian.

After the presentations and a lively Q&A, the attendees broke into smaller groups for quick brainstorming sessions on topics of interest. A hearty yasher koach to the presenters and to the organizers, Ina Rubin Cohen of the Jewish Theological Seminary Library and Rachail Kurtz of the Yeshivah of Flatbush High School Library, whose efforts made the workshop a great success.
(Spring Conference, cont’d from Pg. 1)

have any access to them. According to Mr. Kay, it is a
democratization of the research process and it
will, in some areas, correct the inaccuracies that exist
on the Internet.

Mr. Kay emphasized that the center’s aim is not
simply to be a service provider, but to be a
collaborative effort, bringing together people and
institutions and establishing networks whereby the
transferring of resources and knowledge can take
place. Connecting educational scholars who could
provide classroom application with technology
scholars who understand cognitive psychology will
ensure a user-friendly interactive website.

Mr. Kay also emphasized that COJS is non-
ideological: the material should be useful to everyone
in any setting. He also assured the attendees that the
highest standards of digitization and indexing
terminology are being adhered to.

Mr. Kay spoke about the creation of student mod-
ules, self-contained educational activities which can be
utilized by students. Two examples of these student
modules were shown: one, a high school unit designed
to help students “become” the historians and draw
conclusions on their own. After a video introduction to
the history of Assyria and Judaea, users can participate
in a virtual “excavation” and learn about historical
dating, translations, and Biblical source material.
Another example of a module was a student-created
newspaper about the Dreyfus affair, in which the
student is encouraged to take a particular point of view.
Primary sources were made available, and the finished
produced had an actual newspaper look.

Living the Dream

The above-mentioned George Blumenthal was in
fact the second speaker. In part two, “The Future of the
Past: Digital Preservation and Interactivity,” he
described his passion for the technological revolution.
Mr. Blumenthal, founder and chairman of Cellular
Communications Inc. and other related companies, is
not only steeped in digital technology but has been
involved with advanced communication technologies
for over 20 years. As he said, “This is the first time in
history where the capabilities go beyond what we are
able to do.”

Mr. Blumenthal got hooked on the idea of digitizing
Jewish artifacts and by extension famous texts (which
are themselves important artifacts) one day while
browsing in a Jerusalem antiques shop. There he
started chatting with the shop owner, who was the
nephew of the famous Jewish collector Shlomo
Moussaieff. When the owner invited him to visit
his uncle’s home and see the collection, he
accepted and, as they say, the rest is (Jewish)
history. With his background in commu-
nications technology, Mr. Blumenthal im-
mediately saw the possibilities of bringing
digital images of these artifacts to a worldwide
audience over the Internet. That is what sparked
the creation of the Center for Online Jewish
Studies. There these images are being made and
available free of charge, which is remarkable
and very commendable.

The outstanding quality of the images that
his team is capturing allows a level of
interaction with these artifacts that was not
available before. Even the few scholars who did
have access to these treasures will now have
their exposure enhanced by the technology that
Mr. Blumenthal and his remarkably skilled
photographer, Ardon Bar Hama, have put in
place. As the Center grows, it is expected
become an integral part of teaching and
research in all areas of Jewish History.

Historical Moment

In Part Three, “Digital Imaging, the internet,
and Jewish History Education: Encouraging
Interactive Discovery in the Classroom,” New
York University Professor Robert Chazan, in
his capacity as Director of School Outreach for
COJS, welcomed the opportunity to talk about
the project and to encourage others to
contribute to it as well.

One of the chief goals of the project is to
help Jewish educators in their work. According
to Dr. Chazan, teachers are an overworked,
derpaid and undervalued segment of Jewish
education. Rather than merely being informed
about the new website, they need to be targeted
specifically for a more focused outreach effort.

Yona Shem-Tov and Michael Kay, both
doctoral students at NYU, have led the effort to
accomplish this goal. Since the Fall of 2004,
educational outreach activities have taken three
main directions:
1. Direct involvement with administrators and
teachers, and the creation of a network for their
mutual interaction.
2. The creation of online student modules that
can be freely used in classroom settings.
3. The creation of educators’ resource guides.

A fourth, more amorphous, goal is to be
receptive to perceived needs in the educational
community and to be flexible enough, where
necessary, to respond to student and faculty requests.

Yona Shem-Tov, who meets with administrators and teachers from all over the New York area to gather feedback, spoke about the creation of resource guides for teachers. They are designed to bridge the chasm between pedagogy and knowledge of content. The main goal is to introduce students to the methodology of the historian, and to entice them with the fun, drama and magic of history.

The creation of teaching modules will make the COJS website an electronic resource that teachers can use at their own discretion. It will provide not only materials for the content of lessons, but also ideas for activities that can be used in a classroom setting. By providing both primary sources and scholarly articles, COJS will allow educators access to the best possible materials. By creating a network for communication, the internet will be used as a virtual space for professional educators to share ideas. It will also facilitate the delivery of new historical and educational advances directly to the teachers.

There is another advantage of these modules: since many students are “visual” learners, the use of images will accommodate their learning style. The modules can also be used in a non-technical environment in case there are no computers in the classroom. In conclusion, the COJS project will surely accomplish its goal: to promote excellence in the teaching of Jewish history.

Dr. Chazan spoke of a summer workshop for educators, which has since been held July 9 to July 13, 2006. Registration was cut off at 23 participants. The workshop involved teachers and administrators from all across North America, representing day schools and supplementary schools of all denominations. Educators were introduced to the digitization process, the web materials, and how to use them in the classroom. This is expected to be a multi-year project which will establish a warm and supportive working relationship and a permanent network for teacher communication.

To the Point

In “College and Beyond: The Impact of Digitization on Judaic Studies Research: The Future of an Academic Transformation,” NYU Professor Lawrence H. Schiffman discussed the database being assembled by the Center for Online Judaic Studies, which will present material on Jewish Studies from across the chronology of Jewish history and experience in all lands. At the present, it is limited to English sources.

The advantage of this database over other internet search engines is twofold. First, it searches a pre-selected database entered by scholars in each field. Therefore, matches to the search term reveal articles, film clips, videos, interviews, etc. that are equal to scholarly standards and most up-to-date. While internet search engines may bring up thousands of references, their accuracy is inhibited by the fact that anyone may post anything on the internet, some of which can be purely biased opinion. An example of Google Scholar on a search for Dead Sea Scrolls and radiocarbon dating yields some highly unreliable sources. A similar search for images of the scrolls on Google reveals entries from the following sites: Blog.yarn.com, defendingyourfaith.com, and puritanjournalspace.com — clearly not the perspective scholars are seeking.

The second advantage to the COJS database is that it is designed to pinpoint the material the searcher actually wants. The search leads to other articles and sites that have a connection to the topic. These may be broader or narrower terms designed to enhance the search, not to lead to digressions farther and farther from the original topic. It will be accomplished by use of expanded Judaica subject headings of the Library of Congress, the terminology of the Getty Art and Archaeology catalog, and the application of keywords.

The program intends to create for each subfield in Judaic Studies an overview in the form of a macropedia from which descends a micropedia with more specific articles, documents, pictures, etc. The project is intended to serve a variety of audiences from junior high school and up, including non-Jews. Therefore, it is classified from novice to expert to aid in finding the right level for the reader. The historical screens include a time line and often maps, which can be enlarged for more detail. Words in bold link to further articles, maps, etc.

The database consists of three layers. The top layer is the website (what the user sees). The middle layer is the programming (which houses the programming that links individual terms to each other in meaningful ways, creating the dynamic aspect of the database. Eventually, this layer will hold information about the relationship of materials so that the system can suggest to the readers things they ought to be interested in. The third layer consists of the individual items that will be

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linked to the topic such as several articles, and an audio file, an image, a film clip, and perhaps some original documents. The database will be managed by metadata information behind the scenes. Metadata makes it possible for the program to determine what a reader is interested in and what options to offer. The interaction of human and computer systems allows the computer to suggest options as the reader advances farther into the topic. This feature constitutes another difference from other databases.

The unit on Roman Judea is working at a lower level, but there is also an advanced prototype that is not yet online. A working prototype of the Dead Sea Scroll database is being completed. In addition, the overall database holds information on Medieval Western Christendom, Zionism, Bible, and Mysticism and is rapidly growing as a new front end is being built. These databases are also available for new educational activities.

The conference left attendees in awe over the rapid, contemporary cyber-developments in academic research. Clearly it portends a busy future and an ever more intensive relationship between librarians and educators.

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