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## Building a Home for the Past: Archives and the Geography of American Jewish History

JASON LUSTIG

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In 1951, leaders of the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS), the American Jewish Archives, Yeshiva University, and the Yiddish Scientific Institute (YIVO) came together under the aegis of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service to discuss creating a central archive of American Jewish life.<sup>1</sup> It was a time of rising interest in American Jewish history, when scholars like Salo Baron, Jacob Rader Marcus, and others hoped to invigorate American Jewish historical studies and spoke of creating tools and cultivating institutions to foster professional scholarship. And so, these research groups assembled with the hope that they might convince Jewish communities and institutions to preserve their records for posterity, and perhaps themselves join forces. However, it soon became clear that a single central archive was not feasible. They may have shared a common aim of advancing American Jewish historical research, but it was impossible to overcome the question of who would lead the charge. These groups and their leaders, each with a distinct perspective and pedigree, were divided in methodological, ideological, and even geographic and religious terms. The approach of historians like Baron and Marcus, for example, differed from YIVO's sociological orientation. And it was unclear how the venerable but struggling AJHS, many of whose leaders were closely tied to Conservative and Orthodox circles, would relate to Marcus's recently-founded American Jewish Archives at the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. In the aftermath of the collapse of the central archive effort, these same issues plagued the AJHS's effort to secure a suitable building, culminating in a rancorous battle in the early 1960s over whether the group should remain in New York City or relocate to Philadelphia's Independence Mall or Brandeis University outside Boston. This debate, too, held practical considerations and potent symbolism, as the location of the past could reflect on which city stood for the epicenter of American Jewish life and its history. Together, these two episodes bookending the 1950s offer an

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1. The NCJSW changed its name in 1952 to the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, and in 1992 became the Jewish Communal Service Association. Today, it is known as the JPRO Network. For the purposes of clarity, this article will refer to it throughout as the National Conference. See Joel Ollander, "JCSA—A Century of Service," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service (JJCS)* 76, nos. 1/2 (1999): 5–9.

enlightening frame for an era of growth in the field of American Jewish history, gesturing at the concerted efforts to organize its study and its contested landscape. They demonstrate the desire to develop this field, the diversity of projects developed in its pursuit, and the conflict thereby engendered—how the efforts to build a home for the past, whether by bolstering the institutional and documentary basis for its study, creating a central archive, or erecting a building to house the American Jewish Historical Society, all stood in for divergent and disputed visions of the nature of American Jewish life.

In 1996, almost a half-century after the National Conference's failed effort to form a central archive, the Center for Jewish History was established with almost exactly the same groups as founding partners—the AJHS, YIVO, and Yeshiva University alongside the Leo Baeck Institute (formed in 1954) and the American Sephardi Federation (1973). Nevertheless, the earlier attempt should not be cast aside as a curious but forgettable prehistory; neither should the dispute over the AJHS's move to Boston be written off as simply an internal squabble, or as a precursor to the National Museum of American Jewish History, founded in Philadelphia in 1976 on nearly the same location once offered to the AJHS. Instead, these two case studies illustrate the importance of archives as markers of who could tell the American Jewish story and how it would be presented to the public. They also show the enduring character of such dreams—to create a central archive and to erect a monument to American Jewish life—as well as the persistent conflicts such ambitions provoked. They present struggles over spaces of memory (*lieux de mémoire*) of American Jewish life. Initiatives like the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati and YIVO and the AJHS in New York City each fostered distinct visions of what American Jewish history would look like, and what might be its narrative thrust.

The possibility of collaboration, then, took place against the backdrop of a debate over the nature of American Jewish history; likewise, arguments over the location of the AJHS's headquarters stood for which city could take center stage in the story of American Jewish life. An examination of the changing field of American Jewish historical studies after World War II, including both the attempt to create a central archive and the acrimonious debates over the AJHS's location, thereby reveals the contesting visions of the field's content and methodology. Earlier examinations of postwar American Jewish historiography emphasized one institution or another, or looked to highlight specific scholars as the leaders of these efforts.<sup>2</sup> This study, by contrast, considers how the

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2. See, especially, Jeffrey S. Gurock, "From *Publications* to *American Jewish History*: The Journal of the American Jewish Historical Society and the Writing of American Jewish

impulse to preserve the American Jewish past crossed ideological and denominational lines. It examines a range of figures and institutions that worked to invigorate the study of American Jewish history. In a similar vein, scholars like Jeffrey Gurock have surveyed the transformation of American Jewish historical studies in the course of the twentieth century, and in the critical postwar years especially, through the AJHS and its journal *Publications* (the predecessor to *American Jewish History*).<sup>3</sup> This article looks at the history of archives, another kind of scholarly effort just as important as the promulgation of research. In reading the development of American Jewish historiography against the grain, it becomes clear that figures like Jacob Rader Marcus, Salo Baron, and Oscar Handlin may have all railed against “apologetics” in American Jewish historical scholarship, and insisted on a new “scientific” or scholarly approach, but their push to create archives and to determine where they should be based was by no means ideologically or historiographically neutral.

The archival debates of the 1950s took place at a time when leading scholars called for more intensive study of American Jewish history, and when groups like YIVO also turned their attention towards American Jewish life. In 1942, Columbia University’s Salo Baron spoke of American Jewish history’s significance before the Synagogue Council of America, and *The Jewish Community*, his three-volume history of pre-Emancipation Jewish life, signaled his new interest when it concluded not with the French Revolution but with a discussion of America.<sup>4</sup> That same year, Jacob Rader Marcus of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati taught his first class in American Jewish history, what he later claimed was the first such course ever offered at an institution of higher learning.<sup>5</sup> By the end of that decade, Baron reflected on what he termed American Jews’ “awakening historical interest,” and Marcus—himself trained as

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History,” *American Jewish History* 81, no. 2 (1993–1994): 155–270, which looks exclusively at the AJHS. Hasia Diner, “American Jewish History,” in *Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman (2009), doi:10.1093/oxfordhdb/9780199280322.013.0019, emphasizes Baron and Handlin with barely a mention of Marcus. By contrast, those based at the American Jewish Archives have tended to emphasize Marcus above all else, for instance in Gary Zola, ed., *The Dynamics of American Jewish History* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2004), and Kevin Proffitt, “Jacob Rader Marcus and the Archive He Built,” in *New Essays in American Jewish History*, ed. Pamela S. Nadell (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 2010), 5–18.

3. See Gurock, “From *Publications* to *American Jewish History*.”

4. Salo Baron, “American and Jewish Destiny: A Semimillennial Experience,” in *Steeled by Adversity: Essays and Addresses on American Jewish Life*, eds. Salo Baron and Jeanette M. Baron (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1971), 15–25; Baron, *The Jewish Community* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1942), II: 365–366.

5. See “A *Moment* Interview with Jacob Rader Marcus,” *Moment*, March 1981, A81.

a scholar of European Jewry and now director of the American Jewish Archives, which he established in 1947—reported that all his courses were dedicated to the subject, and he declared himself “devot[ed] solely and completely” to its study.<sup>6</sup> Marcus had at one time claimed that German Jewry could survive the Hitler regime, and Baron that Jewish culture could be rebuilt in Europe.<sup>7</sup> As the scale and scope of the Holocaust became clear, Jewish leaders in the United States, Britain, and Palestine moved towards the position that Jewish life could only be reconstructed outside Europe. In this context, Marcus wrote that he wanted to examine a cultural center still “young, virile, and growing” instead of one upon which the book of history had seemingly closed forever; likewise, groups such as Baron’s Jewish Cultural Reconstruction worked to reallocate Jewish cultural and communal property looted by the Nazis to new lands, part of a wide-ranging remaking of Jewish culture.<sup>8</sup> It all amounted to a radical reorientation towards American Jewry’s new position of communal and cultural leadership lending its history new gravity and according a certain urgency to the preservation of its historical record. At a critical juncture, professional historians surveyed the field and saw a scholarly vacuum: In 1948, Harvard University’s Oscar Handlin derided as “distorted and misleading” the received picture of American Jewish history, Baron lamented the longstanding lack of public interest in this history in 1949, and Marcus declared somewhat dramatically in 1951 that American Jewish historical study was “literally in its swaddling clothes.”<sup>9</sup> These scholars called, each in his own way, for the professional study of American Jewish life and the creation of resources for scholars.

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6. Salo Baron, “American Jewish History: Problems and Methods,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society (PAJHS)* 39, no. 3 (1950): 207–266; Marcus to Baron, March 10, 1953, MS-210 1/6, American Jewish Archives (henceforth AJA), Cincinnati, OH; Marcus to Baron, April 21, 1953, MS-210 3/1, AJA.

7. Salo Baron, “Reflections on the Future of the Jews in Europe,” *Contemporary Jewish Record*, August 1940, 355–369; Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Rise and Destiny of the German Jew* (Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1934), esp. 293; cf. the 1974 reissue, when Marcus recalled his belief in the 1930s that German Jewry would survive.

8. See “The Program of the American Jewish Archives,” *American Jewish Archives Journal* 1, no. 1 (1948): 2–5. On JCR and the meaning of the restitution of cultural property, see Dana Herman, “*Hashavat Avedah*: A History of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc.” (PhD diss., McGill University, 2008), Elisabeth Gallas, “*Das Leichenhaus der Bücher*.” *Kulturrestitution und jüdisches Geschichtsdenken nach 1945* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).

9. Oscar Handlin, “Our Unknown American Jewish Ancestors: Fact and Myth in History,” *Commentary*, February 1948, 104–110; Salo Baron, “American Jewish History: Problems and Methods”; Jacob Rader Marcus, *Early American Jewry* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1951), I: viii. Also see Hasia Diner, “Oscar Handlin: A Jewish Historian,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 32, no. 3 (2013): 53–61.

Of course, it was not an entirely untilled field. Founded in 1892, the AJHS was one of the first American ethnic historical societies and an early example of “community archives,” at which community groups actively gathered historical material as a means of taking ownership of their past.<sup>10</sup> By the 1940s, though, the AJHS had under the leadership of the Philadelphia book dealer A.S.W. Rosenbach developed a reputation as a haven for amateurish and antiquarian scholarship.<sup>11</sup> Oscar Handlin lamented that most extant work was “steeped in apologetics and in a false provincial pride,” and he complained of the “low status of writing in American Jewish history...an open secret for two decades or more.”<sup>12</sup> Handlin later made veiled reference to the AJHS when he wrote that American Jewish history was dominated by “devoted, but not often competent amateurs.”<sup>13</sup> Marcus once claimed that he had formed the American Jewish Archives to support “accurate, objective, scientific research in an area that had previously known little more than apologetics.”<sup>14</sup> The AJHS also faced grave logistical and financial challenges. Since 1903, the AJHS had been based at the Jewish Theological Seminary, but its archive had far outgrown the two rooms it was afforded there, and its collections were mostly kept in cold storage.<sup>15</sup> The group was also severely underfunded, with just one part-time employee, the librarian and rabbi Isidore S. Meyer. In the early 1940s, Meyer spoke of creating a “Gesamt-archiv” of American Jewish life, looking for inspiration to the *Gesamtarchiv der deutschen Juden* (Central Archive of German Jewry),

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10. On the AJHS’s founding, see Nathan M. Kaganoff, “AJHS at 90: Reflections on the History of the Oldest Ethnic Historical Society in America,” *PAJHS* 71, no. 4 (1982): 466–485; Elisabeth Kaplan, “We Collect What We Are, We Are What We Collect: Archives and the Construction of Identity,” *American Archivist* 63, no. 1 (2000): 126–151; Isidore S. Meyer, “The American Jewish Historical Society,” *Journal of Jewish Bibliography* 4, nos. 1–2 (1943): 6–24. On “community archives,” see Andrew Flinn, “Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges,” *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 28, no. 2 (2007): 151–176. Dominique Daniel, “Shaping Immigrant and Ethnic Heritage in North America: Ethnic Organizations and the Documentary Heritage,” *IdeAs* 6 (2015), discusses the AJHS within the frame of other ethnic societies.

11. On this period in the AJHS’s history, see Gurock, “From *Publications* to *American Jewish History*,” esp. 185–204.

12. Oscar Handlin, “New Paths in American Jewish History: Afterthoughts on a Conference,” *Commentary*, January 1949, 388–394.

13. Oscar Handlin, “Foreword,” in Moses Rischin, *An Inventory of American Jewish History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), viii.

14. Jacob Rader Marcus, “The American Jewish Archives,” *American Archivist* 23, no. 1 (1960): 57–61.

15. See Isidore S. Meyer, “Memorandum: Housing Needs of the AJHS,” March 30, 1949, I-1 109/18, AJHS (New York). For a description of the AJHS’s holdings, see Morris Fine, “Special Jewish Libraries in New York City: A Survey,” January 15, 1942, I-527 108/10, AJHS.

which was founded in 1905 in Berlin; but it was impractical given the AJHS's problems.<sup>16</sup> Marcus—himself intimately familiar with the AJHS and its issues, as he served as a vice president from 1949 to 1955, and then as its president from 1956 to 1959—despaired on numerous occasions that the AJHS was basically bankrupt and “out of business.”<sup>17</sup>

These figures all called for a program of action and reform, much of it aimed at the AJHS or with its troubles in mind, aimed at shoring up the sources and resources of American Jewish history. When Marcus established the American Jewish Archives in 1947, he argued that the AJHS could only serve scholars in the New York area; his archive was to provide services to a new region of the country and he hoped that another archive would soon arise on the Pacific coast.<sup>18</sup> The following year, Handlin called for scholars to turn away from “respectably heroic individuals” towards “the great mass of humble men and women,” and encouraged the study of American Jewry from the perspective of American history at large; Handlin subsequently organized a conference in May 1948 to debate how to advance the field.<sup>19</sup> And in 1949, addressing the AJHS, Baron deplored the Jewish public's limited interest in their own history or in preserving its records. “Many important documents originating from synagogues, schools, or philanthropic organizations,” he complained, “are being discarded daily, and no one cares.”<sup>20</sup> Baron therefore called for regional archive depositories managed by AJHS branches across the country, one in a series of desiderata including a “geographic dictionary” along the lines of *Germania Judaica*, a biographical dictionary, and an effort to collect statistics on Jewish communities and economic life.<sup>21</sup> In this same vein, Marcus put forward a similar list of tasks when in 1951 he lamented that “in this field there are no biographical or historical dictionaries, no atlases, no auxiliary works, few collected sources, no satisfactory union list of Jewish serials, no genealogical tables, not a single complete history of the American Jew that satisfies the canons of modern methodology and criticism.” As Marcus put it then, “The basic

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16. See Isidore S. Meyer, “Memorandum on the Preservation of the American Jewish War Records,” June 6, 1941, I-1 125/1, AJHS; Meyer to Harry Schneiderman, April 20, 1942, P905 28/13, AJHS; Meyer, “The American Jewish Historical Society,” 21. For an in-depth consideration of the Gesamtarchiv, see Jason Lustig, “‘A Time to Gather’: A History of Jewish Archives in the Twentieth Century” (PhD diss., UCLA, 2017).

17. Marcus to Lewis Straus, March 9, 1949, MS-210 1/4, AJA; Marcus to I. Edward Kiev, MS-210 6/10, AJA; Marcus to Edwin Wolf II, July 14, 1955, MS-687 76/24, AJA.

18. “The Program of the American Jewish Archives,” 2.

19. Handlin, “Our Unknown American Jewish Ancestors” and “New Paths in American Jewish History.”

20. Baron, “American Jewish History: Problems and Methods,” 217–219.

21. Baron, “American Jewish History: Problems and Methods,” 223.

tools with which every historian works are still missing.”<sup>22</sup> Along these lines, they hoped to develop the field of American Jewish history and provide it with an institutional and archival basis for its study.

These scholars had several overarching concerns. First, they all argued that professionals in addition to amateurs should study American Jewish history. Second, despite their criticism of the AJHS, they all hoped for its revitalization. Handlin called the AJHS the “logical agency” where American Jewish history could be cultivated, and Baron—a longtime AJHS board member and its president in 1953 and 1954—also looked to the AJHS to take up his list of proposals.<sup>23</sup> Marcus, too, would work assiduously to provide the Historical Society with the means and space to facilitate its mission, although his proposals ultimately proved a source of conflict. Finally, they all looked to create new tools, aiming to preserve archival records and produce bibliographic aids, and also argued for a new social history typified by Handlin’s studies of immigration and Marcus’s pursuit of personal letters written by everyday people.<sup>24</sup> These scholars’ outlooks were by no means identical. Handlin’s attempt to synthesize a unitary immigrant experience contrasted with Marcus’s effort to pluck the individual from the masses and give life to his or her story through personal documents, for example. But, nevertheless, they all rejected what they saw as the AJHS’s “apologetic” approach, with its focus on towering figures who had made signal contributions to American life.

At this same moment, it appeared that it might be possible to open a new chapter for the AJHS with funding from the National Jewish Welfare Board and with the ascension of Boston lawyer Lee M. Friedman to the Society’s presidency in 1948.<sup>25</sup> As Baron put it in February 1949, it was almost a total “reorganization.”<sup>26</sup> Friedman charted a new path, offering an “Invitation to American Jewish History,” the first in a series of addresses in which he proclaimed the importance of its study and his hope to popularize it.<sup>27</sup> Under Friedman, the Society more than

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22. Marcus, *Early American Jewry*, I:vii.

23. Handlin, “New Paths in American Jewish History,” 393.

24. Compare, for instance, Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951) and Jacob Rader Marcus, “The Love Letters of Bendet Schottlaender,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 7 (1930): 537–577, and “Letters as a Source of Biography,” 1954 (presented at the AJHS’s Conference of American Jewish Historians convened that year in Peekskill, NY), RG584 399b, YIVO.

25. See “Relationship of American Jewish Historical Society and the National Jewish Welfare Board,” November 15, 1947, 1986.42.52-.345/39, National Museum of American Jewish History (henceforth NMAJH), Philadelphia, PA.

26. Baron, “Problems and Methods.”

27. Lee M. Friedman, “An Invitation to American Jewish History,” *PAJHS* 38, no. 1 (1948): 12–21; Friedman, “The Significance of American Jewish History,” *PAJHS* 38, no.



doubled in size, and in 1954 it organized a landmark scholars' conference.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, there was widespread expectation that Friedman might be able to raise capital for a building to ensure the AJHS's independence and secure its future.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, the arrival of refugee scholars, and sometimes entire organizations, transformed Jewish studies in America. Particularly relevant to the growth of American Jewish historical research was the 1940 arrival of YIVO's research director Max Weinreich. The Yiddish Scientific Institute, founded in Vilna in 1925, had boasted a New York City branch as early as 1926.<sup>30</sup> The American branch took on new significance with the start of World War II, when Weinreich made his way to New York the following year and radically reformulated the group's mission to include increased attention to American Jewish history.<sup>31</sup> Initially, Weinreich hoped YIVO might be rebuilt in Europe. In September 1943, for instance, YIVO's newsletter proclaimed: "Send us everything! We need duplicates and triplicates for our book fund for postwar Europe."<sup>32</sup> However, Weinreich eventually came to realize Jewish life would have to be rebuilt elsewhere, and shifted towards making New York YIVO's true center. Besides reaffirming YIVO's aim to preserve East European Jewish history and culture, under his leadership the institute pursued new projects, including an immigrant autobiography contest, studies on the Jewish labor movement in the United States, which it hoped to publish in English, and a sourcebook on immigration.<sup>33</sup> By 1951, YIVO declared the examination of American Jewish life "a major objective of [our] research work," and its Commission on Research called for

4 (1949): 253-259; Friedman "Know Thyself: A Program for American Jewish History," *PAJHS* 39, no 4. (1950): 337-350.

28. Compare "Treasurer's Report," January 24, 1950, MS-210 1/5, (762 members), AJA with "Minutes, Executive Council Meeting," October 28, 1956, MS-210 1/7, (1670 members), AJA; by the 1960s, the group boasted over 2000 members. For papers presented at the 1954 conference, see YIVO RG584, folders 399a and 399b.

29. Marcus to Frank L. Weil, January 19, 1949, MS-210 9/1, AJA.

30. Cecile Kuznitz, *YIVO and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture: Scholarship for the Yiddish Nation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). On the New York branch: *Yedies fun Yivo*, October 23, 1925, November 20, 1925; also *Bulletin of the Central Jewish Library and Press Archives* (1939), which details the efforts of YIVO in New York to develop its research collection.

31. Kalman Weiser, "Coming to America: Max Weinreich and the Emergence of YIVO's American Center," in *Choosing Yiddish: New Frontiers of Language and Culture*, eds. Lara Rabinovitch, Shiri Goren, Hannah S. Pressman (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 233-252.

32. *Yedies fun Yivo*, September 1943, 5.

33. See YIVO Proposal to Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, March 1943, RG584, 387, YIVO.

a systematic history of American Jewry, as they brought their ethos of studying contemporary Jewish life to new shores.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science*, first published in 1946, endeavored to translate YIVO's prewar studies into English, displaying a new emphasis on the history and contemporary problems of American Jewry. These efforts all point to YIVO's interest in documenting and studying American Jewish life, especially the immigrant experience and the labor movement.

Between the efforts to develop the AJHS, where Handlin, Baron, and Marcus were all leading figures, and YIVO's interest in studying the American Jewish environment, the field displayed much promise and potential but also the need for practical work, especially in view of the need to preserve records. Any ostensibly shared goals, however, masked scholarly and cultural differences. There was a clear split between historians like Handlin, Baron, and Marcus, and social scientists like Weinreich. Each group also had a distinct organizational culture and deep wells of institutional pride and memory, whether of the AJHS as one of the oldest Jewish historical societies in the world, YIVO with its esteemed Eastern European pedigree, or Hebrew Union College as a bastion of Reform Judaism. Moreover, the leaders hailed from different parts of the country, leading to divergent regional perspectives and varying priorities for study. The contrast was particularly potent between east-coast scholars who emphasized centers of immigration, and Marcus's vision of what he termed Jewish history's "omniterritoriality"—the idea that Jews were to be found everywhere and an affirmation of dispersion as the key to Jewish survival.<sup>35</sup> Marcus's notion dovetailed closely with his work to document Jewish life all across America and his interest in the hinterland instead of major metropolitan centers, features that led Moses Rischin to declare Marcus's archive a "declaration of independence on the part of western and mid-western Jews."<sup>36</sup>

Such differences in outlook led to different topics of study and professional pathways among these scholars and their students. Hyman Grinstein, who completed his dissertation under Baron in 1944, examined the Jews of New York City and issues of immigration, as did Handlin's student Rischin fifteen years later.<sup>37</sup> Marcus, by contrast, as-

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34. See "YIVO Library is Back Home," *Yedies fun Yivo*, March 1951; Koppel Pinson, Abraham Duker, Jacob Schatzky to Max Weinreich, May 15, 1951, RG584 571a, YIVO.

35. On Marcus's notion of omniterritoriality see "A Moment Interview," and Jacob Rader Marcus, "Testament: A Personal Statement," *CCAR Year Book* 99 (1989): 111–114. See also Lustig, "A Time to Gather," for an in-depth discussion.

36. Rischin, *An Inventory of American Jewish History*, 7.

37. Hyman B. Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York, 1654–1860* (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1944; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1947);

signed his students rabbinical theses about the locales where they had bi-weekly pulpits.<sup>38</sup> The doctoral dissertations Marcus supervised focused on religion, as did Allan Tarshish's 1938 thesis tracing the history of religious reform and Bertram Korn's 1949 study of Jews in the Civil War emphasizing the role of rabbis.<sup>39</sup> Altogether, these topics befitted both Marcus's seat at the Reform rabbinical seminary as well as his interest in Jewish life in far-flung places. This new generation also laid out an institutional map, with Rischin pursuing a career in the academy, Grinstein as an administrator at Yeshiva University, and Korn, after working alongside Marcus at the AJA, entering the Reform rabbinate. Such divisions reflected a broader religious break between the leadership of the AJHS, mostly consisting of Conservative and Orthodox Jews—it was no accident that Isidore Meyer, who managed the AJHS's day-to-day affairs, was an ordinee of the Jewish Theological Seminary—in contrast to HUC, the Reform seminary.

These different priorities manifested themselves in each group's collections. The American Jewish Archive's early acquisitions reflected its seat at HUC, as it received material from Reform congregations and then, in 1952, from the Caribbean, after Marcus's "West Indies Expedition."<sup>40</sup> This collection diverged from that of the AJHS, which derived primarily from materials collected by such researchers as Cyrus Adler, A.S.W. Rosenbach (including files on colonial figures like Aron Lopez and Mordecai Sheftall), and Samuel Oppenheim (on Caribbean and South American Jewry).<sup>41</sup> Marcus and Meyer did exchange microfilms of material in the Cincinnati archive's Caribbean material and the AJHS's Sheftall papers.<sup>42</sup> However, the differences in the materials they gathered

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Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870–1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

38. Theses supervised by Marcus included, among others: William Sajowitz, "History of Reform Judaism in San Antonio, Texas, 1874–1945" (1945); Martin I. Hinchin, "A History of the Jews of Sioux City, Iowa (1857–1945)" (1946); Jerome Grollman, "The Emergence of Reform Judaism in the United States" (1948); Herbert Yarrish, "The Beginnings of the Mikve Israel Congregation of Philadelphia" (1949); Benno Wallach, "Dr. David Einhorn's Sinai, 1856–1862" (1951).

39. Allan Tarshish, "The Rise of American Judaism: A History of American Jewish Life from 1848 to 1881" (PhD diss., HUC, 1938); Bertram Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (PhD diss., Hebrew Union College, 1949; Philadelphia: JPS, 1951).

40. Jacob Rader Marcus "The West India and South America Expedition of the American Jewish Archives," *American Jewish Archives* 5, no. 1 (1951): 5–21; also Marcus's diary, MS-210 29/7, AJA; correspondence, MS-678 58/7, 22/22, AJA; and exchange with Isidore Meyer, January 1952, MS-210 1/6, AJA.

41. Meyer, "The American Jewish Historical Society," 17–19.

42. Marcus to Meyer, October 16, 1950, MS-687 5/1, AJA; Marcus and Meyer correspondence, February 1954, MS-687 5/2, AJA.

point to competing visions of what, exactly, constituted the mainstream of American Jewish history itself.

In 1952, Marcus wrote to Meyer: “Be assured that we will always cooperate with the AJHS in any matter. You may always count on that.”<sup>43</sup> The academically-trained historians we have considered all wanted to raise the level of scholarship in American Jewish history, and looked forward to collaborating on that project. But although they spoke of shepherding the field from “apologetics” to “scientific” history, the project of preserving sources and cultivating resources was by no means “objective.” In creating infrastructure for research—whether a central archive, or a dedicated building for the American Jewish Historical Society—they followed different institutional and geographic imperatives, and brought their own memories, identities, and historical narratives to the field they hoped to build. Consequently, the concerted efforts to develop the field of American Jewish history in the 1940s and 1950s left numerous unresolved differences and even proved to be sources of conflict.

The dream of creating a central archive arose within the context of these efforts to shore up the field of American Jewish history and of a sense, as expressed by Baron and others, that American Jews were not preserving their files. In practical terms, it began at Oscar Handlin’s 1948 conference, when Harry Lurie of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds and YIVO’s Max Weinreich began a conversation about the state of Jewish research and the utility of a central archive. In June 1949, they presented papers on the subject at the annual meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Social Welfare, which they later published with a number of comments.<sup>44</sup> Lurie and Weinreich echoed widespread complaints when they wrote that most American Jews had little interest in their past, and when Weinreich criticized “apologetic” efforts that emphasized Jewish “contributions” to America.<sup>45</sup> But whereas Lurie looked to universities for new professional scholarship, Weinreich spoke of the need for an independent centralized Jewish research institute such as YIVO itself. “The usefulness of a central clearinghouse for documentation and planning,” he declared, “is self-evident.”<sup>46</sup> Weinreich and Lurie hoped to bring Jewish research under YIVO’s leadership and to develop a program of study based in the social sciences. In response to their proposal, Cornell’s Milton Konvitz called for a “central Jewish

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43. Marcus to Meyer, January 7, 1952, MS-210 1/6, AJA.

44. See Henry L. Lurie and Max Weinreich, eds., “Jewish Social Research in America: Status and Prospects. A Symposium” (hereafter cited as “Symposium”), *Yivo Annual of Jewish Social Science* 4 (1949): 149–310.

45. Henry L. Lurie, in “Symposium,” 154–163.

46. Max Weinreich, in “Symposium,” 168.

research institution,” and suggested YIVO house it.<sup>47</sup> Mark Uveeler, YIVO’s executive secretary, spoke of the financial challenges facing scholarly institutions, and proposed a solution: the creation of “the proper milieu for the scholar—a centralized library and archives, a consultation exchange and clearing house, assistants, contact with scholars and communities on a world-wide scale, and the opportunity to earn a living in one’s chosen field of work.” A “centralized research organization,” he hoped, would pool resources and garner the support of all American Jewry.<sup>48</sup> Others were less enthusiastic. Nelson Glueck, HUC’s president, suggested that a single research center was impractical.<sup>49</sup> Oscar Handlin also opposed a central institution, arguing that independent groups could offer a diversity of approaches and techniques. YIVO, Handlin hoped, would have success. “But I hope,” he stated emphatically, “it will also have thriving rivals.”<sup>50</sup> In the end, Weinreich wrote of the desirability of a “directing center and a clearing house, with a library, archives, etc.,” proposing either YIVO or the Conference on Jewish Relations as centers for such work.<sup>51</sup>

The National Conference of Jewish Social Welfare—an association of communal professionals formed in 1899 as the Conference of Jewish Charities—may seem a curious group to take up such a proposal. But in fact, for a few years it had been exploring the utility of research for Jewish professional service and the need to preserve records and statistics. At its 1947 meeting, David Turteltaub called for collecting data on social programs, and Kurt Herz spoke of the need for research into program effectiveness, complaining that professionals often opposed gathering any statistics at all.<sup>52</sup> In 1949, Isidor Chein detailed a number of challenges, among them that “records are frequently neither up-to-date, nor complete, nor comparable” and that “we lose tremendous amounts of data.”<sup>53</sup> These concerns, and Weinreich and Lurie’s proposal for a central research institution at that same 1949 meeting, mirrored the challenges

47. Konvitz, in “Symposium,” 174.

48. Mark Uveeler, in “Symposium,” 297–298.

49. Nelson Glueck, in “Symposium,” 245.

50. Oscar Handlin, in “Symposium,” 219–220.

51. Henry L. Lurie and Max Weinreich, “Concluding Remarks of the Editors,” in “Symposium,” 308.

52. David Turteltaub, “Collecting National Statistics of Jewish Social Work,” *Jewish Social Service Quarterly (JSSQ)* 24, no. 1 (1947): 75–78; Kurt G. Herz, “Social Research Has a Place in Social Work,” *JSSQ* 24, no. 1 (1947): 79–81.

53. Isidor Chein, “On Some Difficulties of Doing Social Welfare Research,” *JSSQ* 26, no. 1 (1949): 120–129. Cf. Betram J. Black, “Evaluation of Current Research in the Jewish Social Service Field,” *JSSQ* 26, no. 1 (1949): 111–117, Esther Beckenstein, “Current Research in the Jewish Social Service Field,” *JSSQ* 26, no. 1 (1949): 118–119.

and opportunities that Baron, Marcus, and Handlin spoke about at this same time. The discussion reflected a hope that both Jewish leaders and laypeople would take more interest in preserving documentation and data, and that studies based in this material would inform policy and community decisions. All this set the stage for the National Conference's call to preserve agency records.

At the National Conference's June 1950 meeting at Atlantic City, the group passed a resolution encouraging institutions to preserve their files and to bring together existing Jewish archives.<sup>54</sup> This resolution echoed a similar memorandum circulated simultaneously by YIVO titled "On the Need of a Central Archive for the Preservation of Institutional Records."<sup>55</sup> Following up on both documents, Charles Zunser, the Conference's president and also a member of YIVO's executive committee, formed a committee to address the archives question.<sup>56</sup> When this "Committee for Central Jewish Archives" first met in December 1951 with representatives from YIVO, the AJHS, the AJA, and Yeshiva University, all agreed that Jewish organizations should preserve historical materials and hand them over to archives. They also recognized the value of some sort of centralization. Isidore Meyer proposed that they collect data to more easily locate material held in disparate archives, and they agreed to bring the question of centralization back to their own organizations.<sup>57</sup> Still, there was little common ground on how to actively chart a path forward. George Rabinoff, a National Conference official, insisted that it would be senseless to ask community institutions to preserve their records if the archives could not agree on an overarching program of their own, but he noted privately that the archives would not work together—the representatives, he scribbled in his diary, were unruly and difficult to control.<sup>58</sup>

A divide quickly emerged between the archives' representatives, who favored some form of centralization, though each institution suggested itself as the leading body, and community professionals who wanted collaboration but were wary of housing a central archive themselves.

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54. "Resolution on Archives, Adopted by the National Conference of Jewish Social Welfare," June 1950, RG338 11/59, YIVO.

55. "On the Need of a Central Archive for the Preservation of Institutional Records," June 1950, YIVO office collection, mimeographed document.

56. Charles Zunser to Sophie A. Udin, et al, January 15, 1951, RG338 11/59, YIVO. See Marcus to Zunser, January 21, 1951, Isidore S. Meyer to Zunser, January 22, 1951, Shlomo Noble to Zunser, February 9, 1951, RG338 11/59, YIVO.

57. "Minutes of Committee on Central Archives," December 14, 1951, RG338 11/59, YIVO.

58. See George Rabinoff's diary, March 6, 1952, March 27, 1952, P58 10/4, AJHS; "Minutes of Committee on Central Jewish Archives," March 6, 1952, RG338 11/59, YIVO.

At a March 1952 meeting, YIVO offered to be a collecting point, but Uriah Engelman of the American Association of Jewish Education wondered if centralization was possible while the archival institutions competed for the same material. I. Edward Kiev, the New York librarian of the recently merged Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion who represented the American Jewish Archives (Marcus never made it to New York City for the meetings), suggested putting off the establishment of a central archive. And so, the delegates decided first to educate Jewish organizations to preserve their records—as Rabinoff put it, to develop “the proper ‘climate’”—and later to “proceed with the blueprint for building future archives.”<sup>59</sup> The argument replayed a few weeks later, when Meyer, aware of the AJHS’s lack of space to store what it already had let alone to receive new collections, suggested that the National Conference should serve as a central address for correspondence. In opposition, Abraham Duker of *Jewish Social Studies* argued that the National Conference should not get into the archives business. Rabinoff and Louis Kraft, another National Conference figure, insisted that they just wanted to bring the archival agencies together, not create an archive of their own.<sup>60</sup> They thereby echoed Zunser, who had written in October 1951: “Our role is merely to call [the archival groups] together.”<sup>61</sup>

Clearly, the groups’ expectations and objectives differed. On one side, the Conference recognized the practical problem of encouraging Jewish institutions to preserve records, and hoped that the archival groups, if brought together, could do so. YIVO, on the other hand, harbored an ambition to serve as a central archive. Such cracks appeared at the outset, encapsulated in the two June 1950 statements by the National Conference and YIVO. Both shared the same opening—a claim that American Jewish history is “the history of its communal institutions and is becoming more and more so”—and also spoke of YIVO’s published symposium, indicating their visions’ common origin. However, the Conference’s resolution dwelled primarily on the need to stop the destruction of records, whereas YIVO reflected its archival activities in Europe prior to World War II, and spoke of an “in-gathering of all this material” to a central archive.<sup>62</sup> There were also divisions over

59. “Minutes of Committee on Central Jewish Archives,” March 6, 1952, RG338 11/59, YIVO.

60. “Minutes of Committee on Central Jewish Archives,” March 27, 1952, RG338 11/59, YIVO.

61. Charles Zunser to Herbert Aptekar, November 1, 1951, RG338 11/59, YIVO.

62. “Resolution on Archives, Adopted by the National Conference of Jewish Social Welfare,” June 1950, RG338 11/59, YIVO; “On the Need of a Central Archive for the Preservation of Institutional Records,” YIVO office collection.

where material could be housed and who should lead the effort. While Handlin, Meyer, and Baron all believed that the AJHS was the logical address for serious efforts in American Jewish historical studies, those associated with the National Conference were primarily affiliated with YIVO, to whom they would donate their own archives just a few years later.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, these leaders and institutions all worked towards different ends. The National Conference wanted to preserve statistical data for practical and policy purposes. Archivists and scholars, on the other hand, spoke of a research institution.

Consequently, the committee failed to reach any consensus on a centralized archive and instead focused on encouraging Jews to preserve their records. In this direction, Meyer presented a paper at the National Conference's 1952 meeting, "The Systematic Preservation of Jewish Social Welfare Records: A Desideratum," and Engelman and Kraft produced a manual for local archives.<sup>64</sup> The committee ultimately conceded, however, that creating a single archive was not "feasible," and neither could the archives agree on who should get what. They decided to leave that to local institutions.<sup>65</sup> In a July 1953 appeal, the committee explained that in the absence of creating "a single archive under one roof, which would have been the ideal," it wanted to share the archives' contact information so that local groups could decide where to send files for safekeeping.<sup>66</sup> In light of the situation, Zunsner wrote to Meyer, "We believe that this Committee still has an important function to perform," namely to foster communication and collaboration between the archival groups, particularly by exchanging card index information so scholars working at any institution would know what was available elsewhere.<sup>67</sup> In October 1953, each of the four institutions agreed to look into setting up local archives in a particular city.<sup>68</sup> YIVO selected Detroit, the AJHS chose Rochester, Yeshiva University went with Perth Amboy, New Jersey, and the American Jewish Archives looked to Memphis.<sup>69</sup> However, they made

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63. "Minutes, Executive Committee Meeting," March 29, 1955, RG338 5/51, YIVO.

64. Isidore S. Meyer, "The Systematic Preservation of Jewish Social Welfare Records: A Desideratum," *JSSQ* 28, no. 4 (1952): 434-438; Uriah Z. Engelman, Louis Kraft, "Memorandum on Establishment of Local Archives," March 27, 1952, I-1 122/28, AJHS.

65. "Minutes, Committee on Central Jewish Archives," October 22, 1952, RG338 3/49, YIVO.

66. Draft letter, April 2, 1953, RG338 3/49, YIVO.

67. Charles Zunsner to Isidore S. Meyer, July 7, 1953, RG338 1/47, YIVO.

68. "Minutes of Meeting of Committee on Central Jewish Archives," October 13, 1953, RG338 1/47, YIVO; "Executive Committee Minutes," November 1, 1953, RG338 1/47, YIVO.

69. "Minutes, Committee on Central Jewish Archives," December 15, 1953, RG338 1/47, YIVO; "Minutes, Committee on Jewish Community Archives," October 21, 1954, RG338 8/56, YIVO; cf. I-1 47/6, AJHS, which holds the final version.



little progress. Rabinoff reported in March 1954 that they had received few responses to their queries, and at the National Conference meeting that summer, the panel on "Preserving the Historical Record of the American Jewish Community" did not attract an audience.<sup>70</sup> That fall, the committee reported that no progress had been made on a card index or archiving manual.<sup>71</sup> Meanwhile, the committee fizzled out: By 1956, the committee had been dissolved, and Zunser's effort to resuscitate it the following year failed.<sup>72</sup>

The effort to create a central archive was unsuccessful for a few reasons. Practically speaking, the committee consisted mostly of non-archivists, like Rabinoff, Zunser, Kraft, and Engelman, and the only consistent attendees representing archives at these New York meetings were Meyer for the AJHS and Mark Uveeler and Shlomo Noble for YIVO. Yeshiva University's members appeared only sporadically, and I. Edward Kiev spoke for the American Jewish Archives; none of these figures were empowered to make major policy decisions on behalf of their employers. It also seems that the communities to whom the Conference appealed lacked interest in the project. And the National Conference's objectives were distinct from those of the archives, with the former primarily interested in working with local communities and the latter in institutional collaboration.

What is more, the archival groups' shared sense of the need to preserve materials was overshadowed by their tense relations. Throughout, there was a strong strain of territorialism and, sometimes, fierce infighting. Jacob Rader Marcus, for example, was a leader of the AJHS, and had initially envisioned the AJA as a counterpart to the Historical Society to serve scholars in the Midwest. He even argued on one occasion that the New York society, not his own Cincinnati archive, should receive materials from Philadelphia. He also promulgated a vision of a scholarly division of labor between them. As Marcus saw it, his archive would support "scientific" scholarship, whereas the Society could foster "amateur" work. Marcus thereby broke from the Society's other critics by accepting that nonprofessional historians had a role in popularizing Jewish history.<sup>73</sup> In his 1957 address before the AJHS, Marcus defended

70. "Executive Committee Minutes," March 21, 1954, RG338 1/47, 8/56, YIVO.

71. "Minutes, Committee on Jewish Community Archives," October 21, 1954, RG338 8/56, YIVO.

72. Compare *JSSQ* 32, no. 1 (1955): 111, with *JJCS* 33, no. 1 (1956): 132. Also see "Minutes, Committee on Jewish Communal Archives," February 25, 1957, I-527 108/10, AJHS.

73. Edwin Wolf II to Marcus, January 13, 1948, Marcus to Wolf, January 22, 1948, MS-687 1/9, AJA; Marcus, "Address of the President," February 16, 1957, MS-210 1/8,

the amateur as a crucial part of a broader intellectual ecosystem, and as one scholar has pointed out, Marcus expended great energies training his rabbinical students to be “semi-pros,” and he himself had a flair for public history.<sup>74</sup> But despite Marcus’s interest in collaboration, his tenure as AJHS president, and his stated interest in amateurism, he ultimately came to view his archive as encompassing the entirety of Jewish history in the Western Hemisphere, not just the Midwest. By 1960, he described his archive not as a supplement to the AJHS but as a response to the vacuum its chronic problems had left.<sup>75</sup> Marcus derided the AJHS as an “antiquarian” institution that demanded original documents. In contrast, he valued the information contained in historical materials, allowing him to focus on microfilms, as in his American Jewish Periodical Center, formed in 1956, to gather copies of historical newspapers.<sup>76</sup> Consequently, Marcus’s vision of collaboration was by no means one that could lead to the two groups’ fusion.

Many in the New York group thus looked warily upon Marcus and his archive. According to Marcus, Lee Friedman had been incensed that Marcus had created his own archive, thereby “killing” the Society, and he therefore had left his not insubstantial bequest to the AJHS and not to Marcus’s project.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, the AJHS rejected Marcus’s repeated offers to help mitigate the Society’s space problems. After the 1950 merger of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati with Stephen S. Wise’s Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City, Marcus proposed that HUC provide the Society space in JIR’s building.<sup>78</sup> But when Glueck made a formal offer, it was rejected; some feared that if HUC housed the AJHS, it would be absorbed into the recently-founded Cincinnati archive.<sup>79</sup> “There is a lot of hostility toward our organization in New

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AJA; Marcus to Isidore S. Meyer, October 20, 1950, MS-687 5/1, AJA, Marcus to Lee M. Friedman, June 16, 1951, Marcus to Meyer, July 2, 1951, MS-210 1/5, AJA, Meyer to Marcus, July 3, 1953, MS-687 5/2, AJA.

74. Jacob Rader Marcus, “Address of the President,” February 16, 1957, *PAJHS* 46, no. 4 (1957): 465–466; cf. Jeffrey Gurock, “Jacob Rader Marcus, Salo W. Baron, and the Public’s Need to Know American Jewish History,” *American Jewish Archives Journal* 50, nos. 1–2 (1998): 23–27.

75. Jacob Rader Marcus, “The American Jewish Archives,” *American Archivist* 23, no. 1 (1960): 57–61.

76. See Jacob Rader Marcus, “History V: Sources of Jewish History,” March 25, 1955, MS-210 22/10, AJA.

77. Transcript, Samuel Proctor Oral History Interview with Jacob Rader Marcus, September 14, 1985, 29, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program Collection, P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida.

78. Marcus to Glueck, October 4, 1949, MS-210 4/15, AJA.

79. “Minutes, Executive Council Meeting,” February 12, 1950, MS-210 1/5, AJA.

York City,” Marcus reflected, “I regret to say.”<sup>80</sup> As Marcus noted, the problem was that the AJHS leaders were reluctant to be closely affiliated with a Reform institution like HUC. “Back in their mind,” he wrote, was also “the fear that the [American Jewish] Archives would swallow the Historical Society.”<sup>81</sup> Of course, the AJHS had been based for half a century at the Conservative rabbinical seminary, hinting that the problem was not so much one of the group’s independence but of religious differences, highlighted when a 1960 proposal to rent space at a Westside interfaith building was rejected in part because Orthodox members might feel uncomfortable entering the building.<sup>82</sup> There were also concerns of money and prestige. In 1952, Marcus confided in Nelson Glueck that he was tempted to take on the presidency of the AJHS “if only to protect the interests of the Archives and the College, financially.” In the same candid note, Marcus lamented that the AJHS might become the “heir apparent” to the Tercentenary Committee and also complained that YIVO was going to receive “through a fluke” a contribution of \$650,000 for a building, and expressed his fear that this might lead to a “loose federation” of the various archives.<sup>83</sup>

Another major conflict was over microfilm. Marcus was a strong proponent of the technology, seeing microfilms as necessary back-up copies in case of a nuclear war. Using microfilm he established AJA branches in Los Angeles (1959), New York (1962), and Jerusalem (1977) to make available copies of much (though not all) of the Cincinnati material.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, Marcus preferred copies to originals, one way he stressed the distinction between the AJHS and his own operation. Marcus once criticized the AJHS because “they accept only gifts and make no copies,” and on another occasion he noted that “originals remain brittle, difficult and expensive to maintain.”<sup>85</sup> Marcus’s faith in photoduplicates, however, was not shared by all. YIVO had a strict policy against copying manuscript material. When Marcus learned of this, he expressed his “shock” and “surprise.”<sup>86</sup> Writing to Mark Uveeler at YIVO, he

80. Marcus to Milton Robertson, February 2, 1950, MS-210 8/4, AJA.

81. Marcus to Frank L. Weil, February 3, 1951, MS-210 9/1, AJA.

82. “Minutes, Special Meeting, Executive Council,” June 7, 1960, MS-210 2/4, AJA.

83. Marcus to Glueck, December 17, 1952, MS-687 5/13, AJA.

84. “Memorandum for the Congregational Historical Committee,” February 14, 1949, MS-210 1/2, AJA; Journal, Jul. 1962, AJA Nearprint File, Box 4. “Institute Starts Archives Project,” April 3, 1959, Nearprint File, Box 2, AJA; Marcus to Nelson Glueck, November 20, 1962, MS-160 1/9, AJA; “Ha-snif bi-yerushalayim,” Mach 11, 1977, Nearprint File, Box 4, AJA.

85. Marcus, “History V: Sources of Jewish History”: “The Archives Story,” *H.U.C.—J.I.R. Bulletin* 11, no. 2 (1959): 4–9.

86. Mark Uveeler to Marcus, June 1, 1951, Marcus to Uveeler, June 11, 1951, MS-210 9/3, AJA; Marcus to Lee M. Friedman, June 11, 1951, MS-210 1/5, AJA.

declared that “I cannot understand how scientific work can be done” and insisted that they needed to find a way to cooperate. “American Jewish historiography will be in a sorry state,” he reflected, “if individuals will have to travel to every different archive to consult the material.”<sup>87</sup> Duplicate copies would make possible archival centralization without fights over originals, and enable scholars to access all of the important materials in one location. Though the AJHS did cooperate with Marcus to exchange microfilms, some in the Society also expressed doubts about the usefulness of large-scale copying.<sup>88</sup>

In the end, the National Conference’s vision of a unified central archive proved fleeting. Still, it sheds light on the developing relationships between these groups and both the attraction of centralization and the challenges of cooperation. In it, we see the developing landscape of American Jewish historical studies, with disparate projects and figures each with different institutional and geographical epicenters and priorities. The dream of a central archive points to the pressing nature of the problem of documentation of Jewish life in the postwar period and also how contentious proposed solutions to the problem could become. This effort, then, set the stage for the continued challenges facing the AJHS, which still looked to secure a space of its own, and the kinds of internal fractures among the leading scholars in the field of American Jewish history who still could not come to an agreement as to how and where to build a home for the American Jewish past.

In 1957, at the same time Zunser tried to resuscitate his central archives project, another group looked towards archives, when the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds commissioned a study of Jewish cultural institutions. The result was a 1960 report that called, among other things, for coordination between Jewish archives and “some kind of central repository for... archives required by the Jewish community as a whole.” The proposal, which led to the formation of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, suggested that collaboration might now be possible due to “waning ideological differences.”<sup>89</sup> However, another episode from this same time indicates how similar struggles that had troubled the central archives effort had not abated: the struggle over how and where the AJHS would erect a building of its own, with the possibilities of remaining in New York City or relocating to Philadelphia or Boston. In fact, this acrimonious debate ended up in court, and led Abram Kanof, the AJHS’s president in the early 1960s, to remark that

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87. Marcus to Mark Uveeler, June 11, 1951, MS-210 9/3, AJA.

88. “Report of the Library Committee to the Executive Council,” January 25, 1953, MS-210 1/6, AJA.

89. David Zeff, “National Jewish Cultural Study,” *American Jewish Year Book* 61 (1960): 149–160.

“probably no president of the Jewish Historical Society has unmade more friends.”<sup>90</sup> Indeed, the question of where the Society would be located was not just about institutional and cultural leadership, but also stood in for conflicting visions of the geography of American Jewish life.

Throughout the 1950s, the AJHS considered and rejected a number of proposals to solve its chronic space problem by leaving the Jewish Theological Seminary. Even with the Jewish Welfare Board’s support, the group still had a small budget, in part because its agreement with the JWB limited its ability to fundraise. This situation changed dramatically after Lee M. Friedman’s passing in 1957. Friedman, who was childless, designated the AJHS as a prime beneficiary of his estate, with a large portion designated specifically for a building.<sup>91</sup> By 1962, the bequest totaled just over \$1,500,000.<sup>92</sup> Overnight, the future of the Society had been secured, and it finally had the resources to find a home of its own. The only question was where it should be.

In 1958, Jacob Solis Cohen Jr. and Solomon Grayzel, both leaders of the Jewish Publication Society in Philadelphia, proposed that the Society relocate to that city, with an opportunity to acquire a building at Independence Mall.<sup>93</sup> In October of that year, Edwin Wolf II argued that the Society should establish itself near Independence Hall, as plans called for the development of the area as a historical and cultural center and such a move would establish the Society as a national institution.<sup>94</sup> The new proposal recalled Friedman’s 1949 declaration that a building could both resolve the Society’s practical needs and place American Jewish history in public view.<sup>95</sup> The proposed Philadelphia location would place the AJHS at the center of what that city’s boosters termed a “national shrine” and thereby serve as a monument to the role of Jews in America’s history. Moreover, it would place the Society in the view of millions of tourists and visitors.<sup>96</sup> (This same symbolism underlay the choice in 1976 to es-

90. Abram Kanof, “Review and Preview: ‘Address of the President,’” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (1964): 313–321, 323–340; Kanof repeated the claim in “Days of Stress—Days of Progress,” *American Jewish History* 71, no. 4 (1982): 486–492.

91. See Lee M. Friedman’s will, April 15, 1957, 1986.42.52-.345/90, NMAJH.

92. “Articles in the Last Will and Testament of Lee M. Friedman,” I-1 95/2, AJHS; “Minutes, Executive Council Meeting,” January 18, 1962, MS-210 2/4, AJA; “Minutes, Executive Council Meeting,” November 12, 1962, I-1 109/22, AJHS.

93. “Minutes, Executive Council Meeting,” February 16, 1958, April 16, 1958, MS-210 2/1, AJA.

94. Edwin Wolf II to Jacob Rader Marcus, October 24, 1958, MS-210 2/2, AJA.

95. Friedman, “The Significance of American Jewish History.”

96. See “Memorandum on Philadelphia,” June 24, 1963, I-1 94/2, AJHS, which identifies the site: “It fronts on the State Mall which will be a park area to the north it abuts the historic Christ Church Burial Ground; and on the South it is bounded by Commerce

establish what is now the National Museum of American Jewish History on nearly the same spot.<sup>97</sup>) Ultimately, the AJHS's Executive Council decided to remain in New York, as it believed that such a move was too momentous to undertake without consulting the membership.<sup>98</sup> However, New York real estate proved too expensive, so the Society continued the search for a number of years, in 1960 renting space at Fifth Avenue and West 20th Street.<sup>99</sup> And so, the April 1962 Executive Council meeting in Philadelphia again considered the possibility of moving to that city, with land provided by Mikve Israel in the historic district.<sup>100</sup> Again, the group favoring New York insisted the Society remain there due to the size of that city's Jewish community and its position, as they argued, as the center of Jewish life in America. Again, the Executive Council voted narrowly in favor of New York.<sup>101</sup> By November 1962, though, the Society had determined that purchasing a building in New York was cost prohibitive. Also, Brandeis University had now offered land on its Waltham campus, so the AJHS's Executive Council seriously considered all three options—to continue to search for a suitable location in New York, or to move to Philadelphia or Brandeis.<sup>102</sup>

At stake was not just the practical matters of the Society's relationship with nearby institutions, archives, and libraries, or the availability of materials to researchers. Where the Society placed its flag would hold great symbolism, and it became a question of the nature and even the "integrity" of the Society. New York City had the most Jews of any city in the world, and was where the group had been founded. A move away from New York might seem to flow against the tide at a time when institutions like the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and commercial concerns such as the Manischewicz kosher food company were moving to New York. Even HUC, following the merger with JIR, found itself pulled into this geographical orbit as its center of gravity shifted

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[today Market] Street." On the development of the historical park and its vicinity, see Stanislaus von Moos, "Urban Form and National Identity: On Philadelphia 1950–2000," in *Arquitectura, ciudad e ideología antiurbana*, ed. José Manuel Pozo (Pamplona: Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura Universidad de Navarra, 2002), 45–55.

97. The National Museum of American Jewish History is today located just south of the proposed AJHS site, at the southeast corner of the Mall and Market Street, as opposed to the northeast corner.

98. "Minutes, Executive Council Meeting," February 16, 1958, MS-210 2/1 AJA, November 23, 1958, MS-210 2/2, AJA.

99. Meyer to Marcus, May 14, 1958, MS-210 2/1, AJA.

100. "Minutes, Executive Council Meeting," April 1, 1962, MS-210 2/4, AJA.

101. "New York City as the Ideal Location for the American Jewish Historical Society," April 17, 1962, "Minutes, Executive Council Meeting," May 5, 1962, MS-210 2/4, AJA.

102. "Minutes of Executive Council Meeting," November 12, 1962, I-1 109/22, AJHS.

eastward.<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, the proposed Philadelphia location would have situated the AJHS alongside symbols of the nation's founding, in public view of millions of visitors. And Brandeis University was the only nonsectarian Jewish-sponsored university in the country and a burgeoning research center. Situating the Society there, its boosters argued, was financially prudent, would present a practical utility to scholars and the Society's staff, and would have been approved by Friedman, a Boston native. At the November 1962 Executive Council meeting, after what the notes termed "a lengthy and serious discussion," the results were close, with 11-9 favoring Brandeis over the other options.<sup>104</sup>

Clearly, each option presented a very different role for the AJHS and a different public with which it would interact: New York had the Jewish masses; at Brandeis, it would be used by faculty and students and could take advantage of campus amenities and the prestige of a research university; and Philadelphia offered a large public and a place for the Jews in a national pantheon. Such advantages and disadvantages resonated in different ways with the AJHS leadership and its membership, something that became clear when the group's leaders, themselves divided, turned to the general membership for direction and advisement. In June 1963, Abram Kanof circulated a memorandum summarizing the group's struggles to secure a home, detailing the three possibilities, and outlining the arguments for and against each option.<sup>105</sup> Nearly 1,200 of the AJHS's approximately 2,000 members responded.<sup>106</sup> Some wanted to be close to the sites of the founding of the United States in Philadelphia, though Sefton Temkin maintained the Society's mission was not to "establish a kind of historical shrine for the Jews of America."<sup>107</sup> Others thought that Brandeis's offer would elevate the Society through affiliation with a university. Many, however, deeply opposed Waltham on two accounts: First, that it was far removed from other centers of scholarship and, especially, from the major Jewish population centers. One member insisted that the AJHS remain in New York, "the center of Jewish life in America," and Jeannette Baron feared that "we now stand a very good chance of alienating a large segment of our scholarly membership and, let us not forget, the Welfare Funds as well"—a veiled

103. Michael A. Meyer, "From Cincinnati to New York: A Symbolic Move," in *The Jewish Condition: Essays on Contemporary Judaism Honoring Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler*, ed. Aron Hirt-Mannheimer (New York: UAHC Press, 1995), 302-313.

104. *Ibid.*

105. Abram Kanof, Circular, June 24, 1963, I-1 94/2, AJHS.

106. See Sidney Musher and Nathaniel E. Stein to Kanof, February 21, 1964, I-1 95/2, AJHS.

107. Sefton Temkin to Kanof, July 1, 1963, I-1 94/1, AJHS.

reference to the demographic and institutional centrality of New York City.<sup>108</sup> Secondly, some feared that situating the Society at Brandeis would so closely associate the group with the university that it would lose its independent character. Harmon Goldstone, a New York-based architect, pointed to the Institute of Advanced Studies at Princeton to argue that although that organization remained financially independent, no one could dissociate it from its host.<sup>109</sup> Altogether, the hundreds of letters and postcards indicate the active interest of the Society's members in the question of where they would build their home, and their division on these issues. Beyond the boardroom, too, one sees here the emergence of distinct geographical wings of the organization, especially among the proponents of the Philadelphia option, which was sponsored by figures like Edwin Wolf, himself the longtime assistant of the Philadelphia-based former AJHS president A.S.W. Rosenbach, alongside JPS's Solis-Cohen and Grayzel. Just as Brandeis's boosters appealed to memory of the Bostonian Lee Friedman, these figures all looked to a time when distinct cities and their cliques played prominent roles in the organization.

Of the respondents, a plurality of 507 expressed their support for Brandeis, versus 351 for Philadelphia and 319 for New York.<sup>110</sup> But some felt Kanof was predisposed to Brandeis and was utilizing antidemocratic means to push through the result he desired.<sup>111</sup> Maxwell Whiteman, librarian at Dropsie College, insinuated that Kanof was "deliberately misleading" by even proposing the Philadelphia option, which by then was no longer on offer.<sup>112</sup> When Kanof called a meeting at Brandeis to decide on the matter in February 1964, some called foul, claiming it was intentionally out of the way, similar to the Society's upcoming annual meeting, held in Charleston beginning on a Sunday, which Orthodox members complained made it impossible for them to attend.<sup>113</sup> And indeed, at the Brandeis meeting, those present decided unanimously to move to Waltham.<sup>114</sup>

The response was swift and violent. Those opposed to the move—led by Salo Baron, Abraham Neuman, and Edgar J. Nathan, Jr., a New York

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108. Harold Schwartz to Kanof, July 23, 1963, Jeannette Baron to Kanof, July 18, 1963, I-1 94/1, AJHS.

109. Harmon H. Goldstone to Kanof, July 1, 1963, I-1 94/1, AJHS.

110. Musher, Stein to Kanof, February 21, 1964, I-1 95/2, AJHS.

111. Dorothy Steinberg to Isidore Meyer, October 10, 1963, I-1 94/1, AJHS.

112. Maxwell Whiteman to Kanof, July 8, 1963, I-1 94/1, AJHS.

113. See Abraham A. Neuman and Arthur Hertzberg vs. AJHS and Dr. Abram Kanof, U.S. District Court, Southern District of New York, June 8, 1964, 1986.42.52-.345/86, NMAJH, pp. 26–27.

114. "Minutes, Executive Council Meeting, at the Brandeis University Faculty House," February 2, 1964, I-1 95/2, AJHS.



judge—quickly coalesced into the “Committee for the Preservation of the Integrity of the American Jewish Historical Society.” They claimed that the move to Brandeis was against the wishes of the majority of members (they counted more votes against Brandeis than for it), and called on the Society’s members to install a new board that would keep the group in New York.<sup>115</sup> They insisted that Waltham’s location was “not very propitious to research” and that Boston lacked “a single major Jewish library or museum,” whereas New York and Philadelphia were major centers of Jewish life. Further, they claimed that the move was part of a process of disenfranchising members.<sup>116</sup> And they insisted that because Friedman’s will stated the AJHS could only use the funds if it remained “independent,” a move to Brandeis would put the Society at risk.

Baron’s committee even sought a court injunction to stop the move. The judge suggested that the problem had arisen because the Society had gotten too rich too quickly.<sup>117</sup> However, it was not just about money. As the Committee’s name implied, its members feared that a move to Brandeis would radically change the character of the AJHS by making it subordinate to the university. When the court demanded that the stakes of the lawsuit be spelled out clearly, Robert Warshaw, the committee’s attorney, explained that it was about how major institutions looked to “accumulate” other bodies around them; continuing, he argued that Friedman was concerned about rabbis taking over the AJHS, a bizarre fear, given that Brandeis was a secular institution.<sup>118</sup> Despite this confusion, Washaw struck at the heart of the matter: The debate over where the AJHS would go was about control over the past and the kinds of narratives engendered by the archives’ context. In light of the centrality these figures attributed to New York in American Jewish history and contemporary Jewish life, they clearly felt that to remove the AJHS from its historic location was an attack on the Society’s integrity and its ability to pursue the study of American Jewish history. Eventually, though, the suit was dropped and the AJHS moved to Brandeis, where it would remain from 1968 until 2000, when it joined the Center for Jewish History, just blocks from its former Fifth Avenue location.<sup>119</sup> On the whole, the episode demonstrates the lengths to which people would go in the fight over building a home for the past, as well as the

115. Committee for the Preservation of the Integrity of the American Jewish Historical Society, Circular, February 27, 1964, I-1 95/2, AJHS.

116. “The Future of the American Jewish Historical Society: A Policy Statement,” February 27, 1964, I-1 95/2, AJHS.

117. Neuman and Arthur Hertzberg vs. AJHS and Kanof, US District Court, June 18, 1964, 1986.42.52-.345/87, NMAJH, 53–57.

118. Neuman and Arthur Hertzberg vs. AJHS and Kanof, US District Court, June 18, 1964, 1986.42.52-.345/87, NMAJH, 61–65.

119. See agreement, November 5, 1965, I-1 109/22, AJHS.

deep entrenchment of the kinds of barriers to cooperation that the 1960 report hoped were easing. In all, the dispute over where to headquarter the AJHS demonstrates the continuing dreams of establishing and housing archives as a means of representing the geography and landscape of American Jewish life where institutional aspirations and intellectual visions reappear and often rise against a persisting, but sometimes concealed, map of Jewish culture.

Altogether, the effort of the National Conference of Jewish Social Work to create a central archive from major institutions like the American Jewish Archives, American Jewish Historical Society, YIVO, and Yeshiva University, and the debate over the AJHS's permanent headquarters, demonstrate the attractiveness of collaboration on one side, and the problem of archival geography and ownership on the other. The lengths to which individuals were willing to go to push for their desired location for the AJHS, go to show how important to them was the question of where one should build a home for the past. The coordination and location of archives were imbued with deep symbolism, as different cities each marked distinctive narrative frames for the American Jewish past: Cincinnati reflected Marcus's notion of omniterritoriality and the importance of the hinterland and its smaller communities; Philadelphia held out the attachment to symbols of the nation's founding; Boston presented the opportunity to attach the AJHS to a burgeoning research center; and New York City represented a connection to the consummate center of Jewish life in demographic and institutional terms. In the debate over the AJHS's move to Boston, the acrimony of these issues came to the forefront. At issue was not just where would be the most easily accessible, or offer the best building. Rather, the fundamental question concerned where the center of American Jewish history lay. Consequently, the eventual return to the vision of a central archive in New York City, with the founding of the Center for Jewish History in the 1990s, reflected the enduring vision of bringing archives together to make materials available for research and also as a means to bring these histories under a common framework. Nevertheless, even if institutions like the AJHS, YIVO, and LBI have begun the process of digitizing their tremendous archives and thus making them available to researchers no matter where they are themselves located, the early struggles over centralization and location indicate the importance of the physical location of the past.<sup>120</sup> Where the past goes, and who holds it, has powerful symbolic importance as a means of framing the histories and the people contained in the archival record.

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120. See Frank Mecklenburg, "Jüdische Familienforschung und Internet," in *Jüdisches Archivwesen*, eds. Frank M. Bischoff and Peter Honigmann (Marburg: Archivschule Marburg, 2007), 353–364.