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J E W I S H  H I S T O R I C A L  S O C I E T Y
of the Upper Midwest

A N N U A L  R E P O R T  2 0 0 8 - 2 0 0 9
The Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest is completing our 25th year promoting the vitality and continuity of Jewish culture in the Upper Midwest through preservation, interpretation and education. We continued our tradition of collaborating with other organizations to bring materials, programs and exhibits to a wide audience while making significant improvements to our archive facilities.

**Preservation**

We greatly improved our Lyle Berman Archives facility at our Kaplan Family History Center. A National Endowment for the Humanities grant awarded JHSUM substantial funds to replace our entire collections shelving. We received a Minnesota Historical Society Preservation Assistance grant to purchase storage cabinetry housing our valuable Steinfeldt Photo Collection as they are digitized and retired from active handling. The Minnesota Art Conservation Center invited JHSUM to participate in a collections conservation audit, the results of which will align us with national standards for best archiving practices, further safeguarding the stories of Upper Midwest Jewish experiences for generations to come.

We enlarged our document collections with the acquisition of the personal archives of Rabbi Moishe Sachs including important materials on Midwest support for Soviet Refusniks during the 1970s and 80s. It has been a very busy processing year as we completed archiving Rabbi Stacy Offner’s papers, as well as materials from Hillel, the George Kaplan Foundation and Hadassah. A total of 68 donations of materials—ranging from single pieces of paper to multiple boxes—were received in 2008-2009 and our tireless volunteers, Judy Sherman and Marge Fink handled each one of those items with great care. We continue to make our remarkable photo collection accessible to a wider audience through our partnership with web-based posting and sharing sites Flickr.com and Minnesota Digital Library, bringing our on-line collection to almost 600 items. Digitized documents were added for the first time this year moving us closer to our goal of accessible collections for our audiences from anywhere in the world.

We moved forward on two important oral history projects. The Jewish Lawyers and Judges Project interviews were conducted by skilled volunteer Helen Rubenstein. We will be offering programming based on the interview findings in late spring 2010. We completed translation and transcription work on two separate collections of interviews with Jewish residents of the former Soviet Union, one concerning World War II veterans, the other documenting Soviet refugees who settled in the Twin Cities after the war.

We encouraged Upper Midwest Jewish organizations to establish guidelines for records retention and photo preservation and to submit them to JHSUM for safekeeping. We heard from far too many that they did not have the records to celebrate important anniversaries.

**Interpretation**

We experienced steady use of our collections, locally and nationally. In Minneapolis and St Paul, Sabes JCC, Jewish Family and Children’s Services and United Jewish Fund and Council requested materials featured in anniversary celebrations. The Minnesota Jewish Theater Company used the North and South Dakota collections for research and set design for Chutzpah a Go Go. JHSUM provided a post-production discussion on history and life in 19th century Midwestern Jewish agricultural settlements and introduced new audiences to our mission through engaging outreach programming. Photograph requests came from university and commercial presses exploring topics as diverse as Jewish food ways, Eric Mendelsohn’s synagogues design, and Jewish women in the post-war era.

We saw firsthand the results of our research efforts on behalf of A Serious Man, the latest Coen Brothers film, when costume designer Mary Zophres gave staff a special on-set behind the scenes tour of costume production trailers sporting copies of JHSUM photos. She paid JHSUM high praise in stating that our photographs from the mid-1960s illustrating clothing and hair fashion as well as building interiors and exteriors gave the production an historically accurate look.

We continued our strong collaborative programming with three showings of Refusnik, a documentary on the events of the 1970s and 1980s leading to a relaxation of Soviet immigration laws targeting Russian Jews in partnership with the Minnesota Jewish Film Festival. In St. Paul we worked with the West 7th Community Center to present The Richie Boys, a film about a group of German Jewish immigrants who formed a U.S. intelligence unit to fight the Nazis. We were at the St Paul JCC for the Twin Cities Jewish Book Fair sponsoring the author presentation for The German Bride and at the Sabes JCC co-hosting a lecture by Jeffrey Gurock on the relationship between the JCC movement and the rising and conflicted importance of sports in the mid-century American Jewish community.

We brought more than 40 guests to the North Side neighborhood of Minneapolis, joining with the Minneapolis Historic Preservation Alliance, to offer a new tour on synagogue architecture. Color commentary was provided by former North Siders in the audience. JHSUM was generously given permanent exhibit space at the new Shirley Chapman Sholom Home East, which we quickly filled with a display of some of our interesting archival resources. St Paul Talmud Torah invited JHSUM to collaborate on curriculum using our George Kaplan materials to illustrate Jewish values.

**Education**

We mounted a panel discussion for 30 Introduction to Judaism students at St Olaf College. Panel members included David Harris of Rimon, Vic Rosenthal of Jewish Community Action and Dr. Linda Mack Schloff, historian. Our interns, Andrea Bergman and Siri Matra, have provided invaluable support for transcription, database entry and archival processing activities. Their work is deeply appreciated. This year we had 138 reference requests, ranging from accounts of Jewish cattle ranchers to information on a “freedom from religion” suit filed in 1922 by a Virginia, Minnesota Jewish butcher to a search for minutes from the 1955 Rochester Minnesota B’nai Brith Chapter. Our scanning services have been widely used: we have sent 123 scans to users across the country interested in our materials.

The economic difficulties brought on earlier this year have forced many of us to face hardship and summon resilience. At the occasion of JHSUM’s 25-year anniversary, we can look to our collections for stories and images of Jewish people, families and institutions navigating hardships by building and strengthening community. We are grateful for our founders’ foresight and energy for bringing these materials together as the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest. Their work along with that of all of our members, supporters, collaborating partners and staff continues to keep the past at the heart of the present.

Katherine Tane Executive Director
Jamie Heilicher President
Susan Hoffman Archivist
Julie Tarshish Member Resources Coordinator
JHSUM’s President and Board of Directors are glad to put this demanding year behind them. In late fall, recognizing challenging financial circumstances, leadership took preemptive measures to safeguard JHSUM’s next 25 years. Difficult but prudent decisions were made to reduce expenses and curtail programming while preserving JHSUM’s ability to collect, protect and tell the stories of Jewish life ensuring that our community’s history from the 1840’s to the present is not forgotten. With a lot of support from members and friends JHSUM continues as one of America’s best local Jewish historical societies.

For 25 years, JHSUM has been gathering and presenting the stories of the Jewish people of the Upper Midwest. Everyone is an important part of the story. The Society encourages individuals to donate personal stories, documents, photographs and artifacts to its collections. JHSUM collections are housed in two prominent locations: The Eloise and Elliot Kaplan Family Jewish History Center in Minneapolis and the Nathan and Theresa Berman Upper Midwest Jewish Archives in the Andersen Library at the University of Minnesota.
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Interest earned on the principal provides a steady source of income to support JHSUM’s programs and operations.

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