

Collecting and Cataloging Gifts

By Yelena Luckert

Yelena Luckert has been the Judaica Bibliographer at the University of Maryland Libraries since 1995. Prior to that she worked as a Liaison Librarian at George Mason University. She received her MLS from Albany University and MA in History from Binghamton University. She has published in the areas of Soviet Jewish History and librarianship.

The University of Maryland Libraries' Judaica collections have been built in part with donations and purchases of second hand collections from private individuals and larger

institutions. In a little over ten years it has grown from a relatively small Judaica collection to one of the largest in the Mid-Atlantic Region. These donated and purchased materials pose numerous challenges in the realm of preservation, cataloging and collection management. At the University of Maryland they are referred to as "Gifts-In-Kind," which are defined as "tangible materials that could be added to the Libraries' collections. (Gifts-In-Kind are distinguished from the monetary gifts, grants or contracts sought by the Libraries' development officers)."¹ This paper will examine the variety of issues associated with acquiring Gifts-In-Kind and the ways in which the University of Maryland Libraries work to solve them.

Before going into detailed examinations of the issues at hand it is important to understand the context in which we are trying to create excellence in Judaica collections. The University of Maryland, College Park, is a public, state-funded, research university,

¹ "I. Introduction and Background." University of Maryland Libraries Report of the Project Advisory Team on Gifts to the Collections. January 22, 2004. <http://www.lib.umd.edu/PUB/GiftsInKind.html>.

the flagship campus of the University System of Maryland, and the original 1862 land-grant institution. It has a total enrollment of more than 35,000 undergraduate and graduate students.² The direct mission of the University of Maryland Libraries is “to provide access to and assistance in the use of the scholarly information resources required to meet the education, research and service missions of the University.”³

The Jewish Studies Program at the University of Maryland encourages research and provides instruction about the rich history and culture of the Jewish people from earliest times to the present day. The program offers a wide array of courses in Hebrew Language and Literature, Jewish History, Bible, Rabbinics, Jewish Philosophy, and Yiddish Language and Literature. Every semester between 500 and 600 students enroll in Jewish Studies courses. In addition, the Jewish Studies program supports faculty research projects and organizes frequent academic conferences and lectures⁴.

The Jewish Studies Program under the auspices of the Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Studies has been able to fulfill its scholarly mission because of the gracious bequests of prominent local philanthropists, many of whom have provided funds for faculty research and travel to scholarly conferences, scholarships for students to study in Israel, and funds to build a substantial Judaica collection in the library to meet teaching and research needs.

The building of the University Judaica collections began in earnest in the late 1980s / early 1990s, particularly with the arrival on campus of Dr. Bernard Cooperman,

² UM Newsdesk. Facts & Figures. Quick Facts. <http://www.newsdesk.umd.edu/facts/quickfacts.cfm>

³ UM Libraries. Office of the Dean. Libraries Mission. <http://www.lib.umd.edu/deans/index.html>

⁴ Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Studies. Home page. <http://www.jewishstudies.umd.edu/main.html>

the Louis L. Kaplan Chair in Jewish History. Although the Libraries were contributing to the Judaica collection development through its state budget, it became apparent that this was not enough to build the kind of Judaica library the Center aspired to. The collection was patchy at best, just barely sufficient for the teaching of undergraduate courses, and lacking in historical material.

Dr. Cooperman's strategy, which began before I came on board in 1995, has been to purchase large private collections or duplicates from institutions with larger Judaica collections and donate them to the University of Maryland Libraries in order to fill in the existing holes and increase our holdings. Among the first major collections to be acquired by the Libraries was the 7,000-volume collection of the late rabbi and scholar, Max Gruenwald, an expert in German Jewish history. Later we received the personal library of Samuel Shneiderman, a noted Yiddish journalist and author.⁵ Most recently we acquired what must be described as a "Jerusalem genizah," a collection of over 22,000 volumes put together by the well-known Jerusalem bibliophile, author and journalist, Rabbi Bezalel Landau. We have had special exchange and purchase arrangements with other universities, such as Stanford, the University of Pennsylvania, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Harvard, as well as collecting agencies, like the National Yiddish Book Center, and community libraries such as Isaac Franck Library of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater Washington.

In addition, the Libraries have actively pursued donations of Judaica materials from private individuals as well as various types of organizations. Many individuals or

⁵ S. L. and Eileen Shneiderman Collection of Yiddish Books.
<http://www.lib.umd.edu/SLSSES/index.html><http://www.lib.umd.edu/SLSSES/index.html>

institutions come directly to us with their offers, because awareness of our pursuits has become known, spreading mainly by word of mouth. On occasion we also solicit materials of special interest to us, either through word of mouth or advertising, including through ha-safran. Most unexpectedly we have been getting partial or even complete collections from a number of area temple, synagogue, and small Jewish libraries, whose missions are to support the Jewish population of the area by disseminating Jewish knowledge. They traditionally supported local rabbis, day school teachers, or temple goers. Unfortunately today many of such institutions are forced to downsize or close their collections due to budget considerations and shift of organizational priorities.

This type of collection development truly fills in holes in our collections particularly by building up our 18th, 19th and 20th century publications of Judaica. It has been also a way for us to build up our non-English language collections, particularly in Hebrew and Yiddish, but also in German, Russian, Ladino and other languages important to Jewish Studies. Today we have amassed one of the best Judaica collections in the Mid-Atlantic region in part due to this type of collecting. Ironically, in addition to our academic mission, we have also become an important center and a repository of Jewish knowledge for the local Jewish community, as the local smaller Jewish libraries are forced to downsize.

Yet, there are many challenges associated with collecting gifts in kind, particularly in bulk quantities. Both the University of Maryland Jewish Studies faculty and the Libraries are constantly working on how to overcome difficult challenges and move forward with our goal of creating a first class Judaica collection.

The sheer volume of physical materials, books, journal volumes, pamphlets, non-print media, etc., that are coming into the Libraries has been overwhelming for a multitude of units within the Libraries. When I arrived in 1995 nobody even knew the size of the Judaica backlog we had at that time, but the books occupied a good portion of a very large storage area in the basement of McKeldin Library. I would estimate it close to 10,000 volumes. Although the size of our backlog varied from time to time, and at one point it actually disappeared, it is about 20,000 volumes today, a daunting task for everyone who comes in touch with it, including the administration of the Libraries, librarians, library staff and faculty, as our acquisitions continue to grow.

One of our biggest problems has been the issue of cataloging. Very early on, the Jewish Studies faculty realized that if they wanted to see some of these materials on library shelves they needed to take a proactive approach and help the Libraries get the necessary funding to hire appropriate people to process the materials. As a state-supported institution, which went through some major budget problems in the early 1990s and then in early 2000s, the Libraries could not create new positions, including a position of a Judaica cataloger. Moreover there was no staff in our Technical Services Division in place who could read/understand Hebrew scripts. In the early 1990s, the Jewish Studies Program began providing the Libraries with the money to hire and pay for students and part-time staff with knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish Studies to start cataloging and processing not only the Judaica backlog but also the new acquisitions of Judaica materials, which too began to expand considerably.

In general the acquired gift materials presented much greater cataloging challenges than the purchased brand new items. A good portion of gifts were Rabbinnics

and other types of materials published in the 19th and early 20th century with extremely difficult bibliographics. Many of the volumes were unique or rare, not described in OCLC or RLIN. Others were “unknown” editions or reprints of already existing multi edition works. There were also many that were complex reprints of earlier works, including some that combined several totally different books into one binding.

It became clear that non-professional catalogers, even if they know the necessary languages and have been trained in some areas of Jewish Studies, would not be able to process such complex materials. These items went back to the backlog area, which brought us back to square one. The Jewish Studies program once again stepped up to the task. They were able to work out an agreement with the Libraries’ administration to jointly pay for a professional Judaica / Hebraica Cataloger, and this finally enabled the Libraries to open such a position for a professional search. Thus in the late 1990s we were able to hire our first professional Judaica Cataloger. Today we have a full time Judaica Cataloger, a part time assistant, and several student workers.

Collecting so many second hand materials from a variety of places and sources has made preservation a central issue as well. A large portion of these items suffers from problems ranging from age, extensive use and missing pages, to poor (particular highly acidic) paper and poor storage conditions that have left various degree of mold, infestation, brittleness, and other perils. The items from private collections are especially vulnerable, as people often store them “out of the way,” usually in inappropriate places such as garages, attics, non-live-in basements, where climate conditions are questionable. The books are often in cardboard boxes or even worse in plastic wrappings. Ironically the latter comes when people really want to protect their cherished items.

The University of Maryland Libraries has our own in-house Preservation Department. Although chronically understaffed, the highly knowledgeable preservation librarians offer advice and solutions. They clean, repair, de-acidify, reformat, box and digitize materials as appropriate for preservation purposes, and with the size of our Judaica collections, their job is huge. We dispose of materials only in extreme cases, such as mold, life-infestations and severe damage to the books. We try to dispose such materials in a proper manner, and more than once have organized a proper burial for sacred books that could not be saved. Now, with so much experience behind us, we have introduced much more rigorous standards for accepting material. We will not accept anything that is moldy, infested or badly damaged. This often involves on-site visits, and if that can't be arranged, we include special language in our Memorandum of Understanding for each collection.

Bringing bulk collections has presented us with some of the collection building challenges as well, namely what to do about duplicates and “unwanted” materials. Both of these issues, at times, place various university bodies at odds with each other, for example the libraries and the faculty, or even various divisions within the libraries. These are very difficult issues, which require constant dialog. There are different and sometimes conflicting philosophies here: what should the library be collecting? How many copies should we have? Who do we serve (the university or a community at large)? What should the space be used for (books or computer labs)? Overall the issue is how to balance all these conflicting demands on the Libraries in an electronic age and in a modern environment. Unfortunately these issues are often so complex that they never go away completely and re-surface, sometimes with a new twist, but usually just the same.

When we first started to get large second hand collections, most of these items were unique to us, so most of these items were added to the collections. However as we go forward, duplication of our collections is becoming more and more of an issue. Our professors are absolutely adamant that the Libraries need to have multiple copies of books so that students will have easy access to materials. They, of course, have an excellent point, particular when we looked at our circulation statistics. It turns out that our DSs circulate at 43%, BMs and BSs at 28%, and PJs at 17%, study conducted in October 2005.

However the Libraries are rapidly running out of stacks' space not only in the libraries facilities on campus, but also in our remote storage facility. This is not only due to the pretty large annual growth of the collections, but also because the Libraries have an obligation to provide study and computer lab space. Our administration is working hard on solving some of the space issues, but with little success at the present. At the same time such a huge backlog of gift materials overwhelms our Technical Services Division, which performs the bulk of work on these collections, not only cataloging, but also acquisitions, gift processing, preservation, labeling, etc. This division is chronically understaffed, and the staff naturally wonders what is more important to process, new books or duplicates, particularly when the duplicates are dirty, brittle and in general not pleasant to touch.

Thus some compromises had to be found to negate these conflicting demands. The Libraries generally allow up to three duplicate copies in the stacks at the discretion of the subject librarian working with that collection. With Judaica materials, because again of the size, it became clear that if we want to bring new things, we have to limit the

number of duplicates, and we can't duplicate everything as we did in the past. Initially we had to limit the number of Yiddish and other non-English and non-Hebrew copies to only two, and then to one, unless there were special circumstances. The Hebrew volumes followed shortly. And now the Libraries will allow multiple copies only on a case by case basis, even for the English language publications. In general this is how all of the libraries collections are currently treated, no matter what subject area.

The issue of "unwanted" materials is very similar to the issues of duplication in the sense that it also presents different philosophical positions on the part of the Libraries and the faculty. The Libraries in general have a policy of not accepting such items as textbooks, travel literature, fiction, children literature, cook books, etc., as such items can easily over run the entire library operations and space. In bulk second hand collections, particularly from private individuals, this type of material is abundant, and usually in the worst possible shape. However often faculty will argue that these items represent historical, cultural and social values and might be of great use to scholars at the present or in the future. As a compromise we have to judge these items on a case by case basis, which is incredibly time consuming.

Unfortunately the space issue is not limited to only stacks. There is a serious deficit of working space where we can hold unprocessed material and our rejects, and where we can create staging areas for processing new collections. As in most libraries we prefer to add only complete monographic sets or full runs of periodicals. As different volumes from the same set could be dispersed over many different boxes in the same collection, our catalogers often require a space where they can sort the material and store it while they are looking for "missing" volumes. In the Libraries the storage space has

been disappearing at an alarming rate due to rebuilding and reallocation of space to projects that reflect current Libraries organizational priorities. In a few instances our faculty has been able to find storage space for un-cataloged or rejected materials at other locations on campus as a condition for our acceptance of a particular collection. However these are usually very short-term solutions, which have to be worked on fast, as space is at a high premium everywhere on campus.

Because of the “space” issues the question of what to do with unwanted or duplicated materials that we can’t keep becomes so much more crucial. As if to add to this problem, several years ago the Libraries decided not to hold our annual library book sale citing huge expense of staff time and labor. This semester we also stopped the practice of selling items through the internet, which also was found to be not cost effective. Instead we go to one or two distributors who take a good portion of our unwanted materials in bulk.

However Judaica materials did not always fit into the distribution through the above means, as they are often not in English. Thus even early on we have had to think of what to do with unwanted items before accepting any gift, particularly bulk ones. It has become a part of the selection process. Wherever possible we travel to the location and pre-select materials that we think are unique and important to us. In rare cases donors provide the lists of their collections, which is a huge help. In such cases we can tell them precisely what we want. And we also had to become creative in the ways we dispose of these materials. We have been able to sell our duplicates to Judaica vendors and to institutions which were in the beginning stages of their Judaica collection development (just as we were buying not so long ago), we have donated them to other

libraries in the US and abroad, and we also have used some of the materials for our ongoing book exchange programs.

At the University of Maryland Libraries the role of overseeing gift donations has been assigned to the Gifts-In-Kind Office. This small but very important department supports the subject librarians in handling gifts by properly referring unsolicited gifts to a correct subject librarian, keeps counts and value information of what has been accepted, sends out thank you notices, assists in negotiating with donors for special considerations, prepares gifts for review, organizes pick ups, and handles most of the surplus. Several years ago the Gifts-In-Kind Office and the entire Gifts-In-Kind program underwent a major program review, resulting in the University of Maryland Libraries Report of the Project Advisory Team on Gifts to the Collections January 22, 2004.

The Report acknowledges that gifts represent significant value to the collections, they however also represent a significant cost. The Report urges our subject specialists to accept gifts only when they would enhance our collections and the support we provide to our users.⁶ As a follow up to the Report, the new policy on gifts⁷ came into being which reflects more accurately the Libraries' current realities, such as lack of space, chronic staff shortage, and conflicting priorities. The Libraries Gifts-In-Kind Policy and other supporting documents can be found at <http://www.lib.umd.edu/CLMD/Gifts/donate.html>.

⁶ University of Maryland Libraries Report of the Project Advisory Team on Gifts to the Collections January 22, 2004. <http://www.lib.umd.edu/PUB/Giftsinkind.html>

⁷ Gifts-in-Kind Policy. UM Libraries. <http://www.lib.umd.edu/CLMD/Gifts/donate.html#gift>

Here are some of our general rules in regards to gifts and bulk collections. We no longer accept any collection or items blindly without having a good idea or estimate of the kind of materials we will find there. We do not go for large collections unless they are in very specific areas that are of interest to us. When taking a collection we try to think ahead of what we will be able to do with duplication and how we will be able to dispose of the unwanted items. We carefully look and ask a lot of questions in regards to the condition of the material offered to us. And we also try to address the issue of storage before we make any deals. We will not take any collection with conditions attached. We at times ask potential donors of large collections to help us pay for the processing of their material and even find storage space. In return, we can offer to the potential donors pick up of their collections, tax incentives, and in some special cases, book plates and a special note field in the MARC record. But most importantly to most donors, we provide a good home and a future for their beloved objects. It never ceases to amaze me how intimately people regard their books, or the books that ones belong to their loved ones who are no longer living.

It has to be noted here that Judaica is not singled out among various subject areas. All of the above issues are very relevant to all of our collections. As in many other libraries we are experiencing a major shift in what we consider to be our collections, how we look and treat them. The gifts are only a small part of this conversation. Just like in general collections, those of us who work in Judaica, are forced to make hard decisions and many compromises regarding the acceptance of donations, big or small. Can or should we take in a particular gift? For Maryland's Judaica collection the pressure is so much greater than in any other part of the Libraries due to the uncharacteristically strong

involvement of the faculty, the sheer volume of the materials we receive, and the difficulties in acquiring and processing this material in a multitude of languages from many countries of origin, often with difficult bibliographics and varying levels of preservation needs. Since our Jewish Studies faculty and the Center itself are so deeply involved in building our Judaica collection, we have to have constant dialog with them in regards to a multitude of issues related to both collections and services, including every gift offer we are considering.

In conclusion, gifts-in-kind collecting is a labor intensive, and a very hard task, which involves the participation and work of the entire library and its staff. It requires open channels of communication between faculty and the libraries, libraries and donors, and various departments within the libraries. It is a constant educational process for everyone involved. More often it is the role of the subject specialist to work with faculty, donors, and various departments within the library to ensure the better process and get to the final results, making these materials available to users. A tough job, but one that is absolutely worth it.