

## **The Florida Jewish Newspaper Project**

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Virtual Faiths: Cooperative Digitization Projects  
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I would like to introduce a proposed project to create a large and collaborative online database of historic Florida Jewish newspapers and newsletters to be known as ‘The Florida Jewish Newspaper Project’ (**slide 1**). The project is still in its infancy, having been through only a small pilot stage. A proposal for the next stages of the project, the digitization of *The Jewish Floridian* newspaper and the creation of a collaborative teaching tool, has been submitted for major grant funding. Nevertheless, in spite of its present indeterminate state, I believe this project is worth presenting as an example of the potential in and the value of collaborative digitization projects, particularly within the realm of dispersed faith communities.

I will begin by discussing (1) the background to the Florida Jewish Newspaper Project: where it is based and what it is. I will then describe (2) why the project is a *desiderata*, and I will summarize (3) who the project is expected to serve, as well as (4) the various stages of its implementation. Finally, I will conclude by outlining (5) the ideas for the project’s future expansion (**slide 2**).

### **Background**

The Florida Jewish Newspaper Project will ultimately constitute an online database of Jewish newspapers and newsletters produced in Florida. Its contents will be sourced from the Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica at the University of Florida (UF) and supplemented with materials from other UF collections and from institutions and organizations around the state (**slide 3**). The database will be hosted on the University of Florida Digital Collections (UFDC) website and managed by the Digital Library Center (DLC).

Located in Gainesville, Florida, the University of Florida (UF) has the largest public and academic library in the state, with collections located at nine libraries across campus. The Libraries house more than four million books and possess special collections such as the internationally recognized Baldwin Library of Historical Children’s Literature and the P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, as well as excellent area studies collections like the Latin American collection and the

Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica.

With over 92,000 fully cataloged volumes that support scholarship in virtually every aspect of the Jewish experience, the Price Library of Judaica is widely regarded as the foremost Judaica research collection in the southeastern United States. In terms of its scarce late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century materials, particularly its range of hard-to-find periodicals, it ranks among the top 20 academic research libraries in the world.

In addition to physical holdings, the George A. Smathers Libraries have extensive digital collections. The UFDC database (<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/>) is composed of more than 300 unique and outstanding digital collections and provides free and open access to over seven million pages of information. The Florida Digital Newspaper Library (FDNL) with over 1.3 million pages of historic through current newspapers is one of the UFDC's most popular collections (<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/fdn1>). Since its inception in 2006, the FDNL has received over 19 million hits (**slide 4**). The libraries own in-house, specialist Digital Library Center (DLC) which manages these collections and monitors their usage statistics is therefore an important asset in collaborative projects (see: <http://digital.uflib.ufl.edu/>).

The UFDC database also hosts the digital collections of the Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica (<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/iufjudaica>). These include nine sub-collections and 354 items dealing with over 100 separate subject areas covering a broad range of research fields within the humanities. The Judaica digital collections have received over 100,000 external views since the site was created in June 2010. The most popular items in the collection are anniversary editions of Jewish newspapers from around the world that are held in the Price Library of Judaica (**slide 5**). This unique digital collection of newspapers has received more than 29,000 hits in just over a year (see: <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/ianniversary>).

In addition to that collection, the Price Library of Judaica and the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History are among only a few library collections to boast copies of five historic Florida Jewish newspaper titles on microfilm (**slide 6**). However, this distinction also means that these titles are somewhat off limits, being available only to patrons who are actually aware of the collections and physically able to travel to the holding institutions. Furthermore, in order to mine the wealth of information contained in the hundreds of thousands of pages of newspaper print researchers would

have to engage in the painstaking and time consuming process of trawling through microfilm issue by issue, page by page: a familiar and much lamented aspect of microfilm.

### **Why is the Florida Jewish Newspaper Project a *desiderata*?**

A project to convert the microfilm to digital format and mount the digital copies online is greatly needed. Such a project will bring to light and make freely accessible virtually hidden collections and provide a key resource for research into the history of Florida Jewry (**slide 7**).

Although, relatively small in number compared to the overall population of Florida, Jewish people have made a significant impact on the state and its growth. Furthermore, the Jewish population of Florida is the third largest Jewish population in the United States— a significant number in terms of American Jewish history. Yet, to date, no comprehensive history of the Jewish community of Florida has been written. As we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the impetus to learn about Florida Jewry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century - a key period for migration and settlement- will become greater.

This project will also shed light on the history of Florida Jewish newspapers - another area of Florida Jewish history about which little is known.

Since its inception in the 1820s, the American Jewish Press has served as an important tool in promoting social cohesion and integration. Jewish newspapers have provided a portal through which Jewish customs can be disseminated, and a central point where the gamut of religious, organizational and ideological Jewish groups can be represented. The Jewish newspapers of America have both recorded history and mapped and directed social change. In this regard, they are an unparalleled primary resource.

The Florida Land Boom of the 1920s witnessed the growth in Jewish commercial enterprises and gave rise to newspapers directed towards a Jewish subscribership. Around 1924, *The Florida Jewish News* (later the *Southern Jewish Weekly*) began publishing in Jacksonville. *The Jewish Floridian*, beginning in 1928, and based in Miami, ultimately included a chain of six newspapers in Florida and one in Louisiana (**slide 8**).

The founding of these two newspapers paralleled the growth of the Jewish community in Florida. The Jewish community of Jacksonville was the largest in the state until the 1930s when it was

overtaken in size by Miami. Several other newspapers for Jewish communities were also established in the 1920s and 1930s, but the *Southern Jewish Weekly* and *The Jewish Floridian* had the longest run, both of them continuing for more than fifty years.

*The Jewish Floridian* was founded by J. Louis Shochet and later edited by his son Fred K. Shochet until the paper was disbanded in 1990. The newspaper's headquarters were in Miami, but by the late 1970s, *The Jewish Floridian* was being published weekly around the state under additional titles such as *The Jewish Floridian: The Voice of the Jewish Community in Palm Beach County* for example (**slide 9**).

Yet, in spite of its wide readership and long-standing production, nothing beyond the above-listed basic historical information has been written about *The Jewish Floridian*, and even less is known about the history of the *Southern Jewish Weekly*.

### **Implementation: what are the stages of the Florida Jewish Newspaper Project?**

The Florida Jewish Newspaper Project thus began small-scale with an idea to convert *The Jewish Floridian* from microfilm to digital format (**slide 10**). The original microfilm was produced as the result of a collaborative project in 1998 between the Jewish Museum of Florida and the UF libraries. The Jewish Museum of Florida received a grant from the U.S. Newspaper Program and the Florida Newspaper Project to microfilm its hard copies, and the microfilming took place at UF.

The idea to digitize *The Jewish Floridian* led to a new partnership in 2011 between the Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica, the University's DLC and Preservation department, and the Jewish Museum of Florida. Working with the libraries' dedicated grants manager, Bess de Farber, a proposal for a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant was created in which the Price Library and the DLC would be responsible for the digitization process and the Jewish Museum would use its wide network to help publicize the digital collection and broaden access to it.

The museum is a valuable partner in this regard, hosting approximately 45,000 visitors annually and receiving around two million hits on its website each year. The museum was keen to collaborate on this project as it does not have the funds or facilities to create digital copies and yet it wishes to complete its mission to produce an index to the newspaper. This undertaking, however, is proving a Herculean task with just one volunteer trawling through the microfilm.

In addition to these two partners, three South Florida public library systems were identified as ideal collaborators in the promotion and distribution process, including the Broward County Libraries Division, the Miami Dade County Public Library System, and the Palm Beach County Library System. The Palm Beach County Library System serves a diverse community, including a Jewish population of more than 250,000 residents (the fourth largest Jewish population in the U.S.). The Broward County Libraries Division, the ninth largest library system in the United States, boasts 37 branch locations, and hosts over 10 million visitors. And, finally, the Miami-Dade Public Library System serves more than eight million visitors each year (**slide 11**). The LSTA proposal was submitted in March 2011 (the proposal can be read here: <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00000517/00001>), but it was unsuccessful.

In order to keep the project moving forward and build awareness of this resource, a pilot project to digitize the first reel containing 200 issues (1928-1932) was completed in February 2012 (**slide 12**). The project was funded using the Price Library Endowment Fund.

Working together with the libraries' Digital Humanities Librarian, Laurie Taylor, and the exhibits coordinator and website landing page designer, Lourdes Santamaría-Wheeler, a database called the [Florida Jewish Newspaper Project](#) was created. The 200 issues of *The Jewish Floridian* were added to the database. Four months later, and with minimal promotion of its presence (the Jewish Museum of Florida has been informed of its existence), *The Jewish Floridian* online collection has already received over 5,000 hits (**slide 13**).

Confirming that there is indeed a demand for these materials, the grants manager and I discussed ways to better leverage our partners' assets (i.e., their networks and outreach potential) to produce a project with greater scope and broader appeal to fit the criteria for funding.

The phenomenal growth in the use of the Florida Digital Newspaper Library (FDNL) has recently led to a call for more instruction on how to access the FDNL resources. A first response to this demand, as channeled through the *AskALibrarian* network, is the Tampa Bay Library Consortium Workshop scheduled for July 2012 entitled Hot Topics: Florida Digital Newspaper Library ([http://tblc.org/training/ws\\_info.php?ws=1784](http://tblc.org/training/ws_info.php?ws=1784)). The webinar will provide training on how to conduct full text searches and browse page images, along with answers to common patron questions.

Similarly, a rising interest in researching Florida's ethnic newspapers suggests a need to include more such materials, particularly hard to find primary sources. A digital collection of an ethnic newspaper like *The Jewish Floridian* will not only meet this need, it will also serve as a focal point for further detailed training and instruction, and it will function as a gateway by which to access the larger database (**slide 14**).

Thus the project's scope was broadened from an idea focused solely on *The Jewish Floridian* newspaper to a project that would use *The Jewish Floridian* as a tool for introducing the wider public to the ethnic newspapers held in the FDNL.

The project will unfold as follows: after the successful digitization of all 128 reels of *The Jewish Floridian*, a video tutorial will be created in partnership with the libraries' history subject specialist, Shelley Arlen. The tutorial will be distributed in-house and to the partner libraries and contain the following information:

1. An overview of the FDNL website
2. How to access the Florida Jewish Newspaper Project database from the FDNL website
3. A brief history of *The Jewish Floridian* newspaper
4. The number of issues and years available within the Florida Jewish Newspaper Project
5. How to use and search *The Jewish Floridian*

The brief history of *The Jewish Floridian* will include an overview of some of the regular columns, a summary of the important issues confronted, and some glimpses into the life and times of the various Jewish communities in Florida.

The partner libraries will all host the link to *The Jewish Floridian* digital collection as well as provide publicity to promote its use. The video tutorial together with hands-on training will be provided to the staff of the public library systems so that they might in turn train the public how to access and use these resources, including instruction on how to conduct searches (**slide 15**) and how to use the zoom and enlarge functions (**slide 16**).

This tutorial will be available online with links from the George A. Smathers Libraries' tutorials and newspaper sites and the UFDC homepage. The creation of new publicity for the collection, brochures and online exhibits for example, will encourage other Jewish institutions and organizations as well as Florida public, college, university, and school libraries to link to the

tutorial.

A motivated outreach program will include the websites of all of the Florida public library systems, the 317 Jewish synagogues around the state, Jewish and other genealogical societies, the 23 chapters of the Association of Jewish Libraries, and Jewish Studies programs and educational organizations across the U.S.

The digital collection and tutorial could also be advertised to the member libraries of the Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) and other relevant organizations like the Association of Jewish Studies (AJS) and the American Theological Library Association (ATLA).

The next stage of the project will be to collect the usage statistics and conduct surveys to prove that the project to digitize *The Jewish Floridian* has resulted in increased interest in the wider FDNL database, particularly with regard to the ethnic and religious newspapers.

This new proposal for a broader-scale, collaborative project was submitted for a second LSTA grant in March 2012 (the proposal can be read here: <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00010438/00001>). We are still waiting to hear the outcome.<sup>1</sup>

### **Who will the project serve?**

A freely available and easily accessible Florida Jewish newspaper database is aimed at a broad range of users. Its primary targets are the researchers, historians, scholars and writers wishing to learn more about the cultural, social, historical and political life of Florida's Jewish population throughout the 20th century (**slide 17**).

As a teaching aid, an online collection of newspapers can be used for course materials, classroom projects, or web quests, and to demonstrate the importance and mechanics of using focused primary source material in history classes (**slide 18**).

Additionally included in the project's main targets are public library patrons, particularly genealogists and families who wish to research local and family history. The greatest users of historic newspapers in public libraries are individuals and societies searching for community information (**slide 19**). There are 26 Florida genealogical societies and six active Jewish genealogical societies in Florida who will benefit from this digital archive, as well as the large

numbers of Jewish individuals living in areas of Florida that are not within easy reach of either the George A. Smathers Libraries in Gainesville or the Jewish Museum of Florida in Miami Beach. This particular set of patrons may also turn out to be future partners in the expansion of the project and the sharing of materials and metadata.

### **The future expansion of the project**

The digital archive of *The Jewish Floridian* newspapers will serve as the first important stage in a long-term plan to make the Florida Jewish Newspaper Project database as comprehensive as possible (**slide 20**).

The project will continue moving forward in small steps by adding Florida Jewish newspapers already online in the UFDC to the Florida Jewish Newspaper Project website. There are five such titles already accessible in the Judaica digital collections; only one title is a complete run (**slide 21**). Further in-house collaboration with the exhibits coordinator, digital humanities librarian and the libraries' publicity officer will focus on raising the profile of the nascent collection in readiness for a major campaign to promote the larger database.

Other titles, like the aforementioned *Southern Jewish Weekly*, are available as microfilm and future funding proposals and initiatives will have to be devised for them (**slide 22**). It is hoped that given the importance of these materials in preserving the community's collective memory, that there might be some way of creating buy-in from the Florida Jewish community. Proposals to secure funding from other sources such as Florida foundations and private donors will be put together in partnership with the libraries' development officer and grants manager.

In addition to newspapers, it is envisioned that an outgrowth of the database will include other news related materials like Florida Jewish newsletters (**slide 23**). The Price Library of Judaica has retained copies of Jewish newsletters produced by Jewish communities and synagogues from around the state. The newsletters are not always complete runs and they are currently housed un-cataloged in storage, but the Price Library is the only library to have systematically set out to collect this type of item. These ephemeral items are often discarded by most institutions, yet their value for research into the history of ethnic and religious communities is immense. Newsletters record, among other things, notices and descriptions of community events, lists of community members, items relating to religious groups and activities, calendars, and articles/notices dealing



with community concerns and faith issues.

It is hoped that these collections could be expanded by supplementing copies from the archives of the institutions and organizations that originally produced and distributed them, or from other libraries and archives that might hold copies (**slide 24**). We will even look to enlist help from members of the Jewish community who may have stored such materials in community or personal archives. This sort of public interaction and resource swapping has already proved successful with one of the Price Library's other digital projects - the Jewish Jacksonville digital collection (<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/jewishjacksonville>). We recently mounted this collection to coincide with an exhibit entitled Jewish Jacksonville (<http://exhibits.uflib.ufl.edu/jewishjacksonville/>). Following a curatorial guided tour of the exhibit, which emphasized the importance of retaining and preserving such materials, we have received over 100 relevant items in donations.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is only through collaborative efforts that we can get important hidden resources identified, exposed and used (**slide 27**). It is easy for collection managers to provide a list of what they lack or need, but if instead they could provide lists of what they have and can share, then we can come together to create effective partnerships. Such collaboration is particularly useful in the case of Jewish materials which due to the dispersed nature of this faith community are either seemingly impossible to locate or spread out across numerous institutions. Too often institutions have failed to adopt long range vision with regard to short-lived periodicals and related items of ephemera, failing to realize their enormous benefit to research into faith communities and have either failed to collect them or failed to preserve them. Many of these items are in great danger of disappearing completely from view.

On a more positive note, a great step forward in the direction of collection exposure in order to facilitate collaboration within the field of Judaica librarianship is being made by Michelle Chesner of Columbia University and Daniel Scheide of Florida Atlantic University. Together, they are putting together an online spreadsheet entitled 'AJL Hidden Collections' for Judaica librarians to input information about their collections, particularly those aspects of their collections that are at present out of sight or little known. The information from the spreadsheet will form a shared databank of hidden Judaica collections across the country. The Florida Jewish Newspaper Project,

bringing Florida's Jewish newspapers to light, we think, is an important step in this unearthing process.

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<sup>1</sup> The project has now been awarded LSTA funding and will begin in October, 2012.