

## **A Brief History of the Association of Jewish Libraries**

By Lee Wixman

This article was compiled for the benefit of newer AJL members. In January, 1966 the Jewish Librarians Association and the Jewish Library Association decided to combine. These groups each had chapters in New York City, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and other cities in the United States and Canada. Plans for the merger were initiated by Mae Weine and Miriam Leikind. The first president of the Association of Jewish Libraries was Herb Zaffren, librarian at the Klau Library, HUC-JIR, in Cincinnati. During his term, it was decided to hold annual conventions at different locations.

The Association of Jewish Libraries currently publishes two periodicals, *Judaica Librarianship* and the *AJL Newsletter*. The first editors and staff of *Judaica Librarianship* included Dr. Bella Haas Weinberg, Pearl Berger, Hazel Karp, and Linda Lerman. The *AJL Newsletter* was established in 1974 as a 2-sheet mimeographed publication, sent to 50 members. The founding editor was Irene Levin, ז"ל. Florida-based Irene collected the copy and gave it to a graphic layout person, who sent it to Atlanta to Hazel Karp and her husband Dr. Herb, who arranged for offset publication and mailing. In the mid-1990s Nancy Sack and Jean Alexander took over and gave the newsletter the look it has today.

AJL membership remains open to individuals and libraries, library workers, and library supporters. AJL appeals to wide interests. There are two divisions, the SSC and RAS. AJL serves libraries in temples, synagogues, centers, Hebrew schools, yeshivot, colleges, and universities. All branches of Judaism are covered. Prestigious institutions, such as Harvard, Yale, Oxford, Cambridge, and the Library of Congress, are affiliated. St. Vincent's in Florida is noted for its collection of Spanish language Judaica. The Marshall Meyer Seminary, in Buenos Aires, the largest Judaic library in South America, is headed by Rita Saccal, a former president of RAS. In Israel, Hebrew University and Bar-Ilan are members. AJL is a truly international group; members reside and work in Holland, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, and Mexico.

Speaking geographically, our northernmost member is Naomi Nachami of Temple Beth Shalom in Anchorage. Heading far south, we have members in Melbourne, Australia, and Veronica Belling at University of Capetown, South Africa. Honors for the member located at the greatest distance from AJL headquarters appear to go to Brenda Yi, librarian at the Jewish Center in Hong Kong, China. Historic synagogues housing libraries affiliated with AJL or served by members include Temple Emanu-El, in New York City; Beth Israel, in Boise, Idaho, the oldest synagogue west of the Mississippi River; Kahal Kodesh, in Charleston, SC; Mikve Israel, in Savannah, Georgia; and Mikve Israel, in Curacao. Thus far, AJL has no members in only one of the US states—North Dakota!

AJL strives to improve the quality of Jewish libraries, librarianship, and literature. Its programming, publications, and communications are directed to those ends. AJL sponsors awards for authors and illustrators and awards for contributions to the profession. AJL also makes available scholarships for education and convention attendance. Hasafran, AJL's electronic discussion list, is a valuable networking tool.