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### **Penn Libraries Receive \$8.5 Million Gift of the Kaplan Collection of Early American Judaica**

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PHILADELPHIA, PA - The Penn Libraries have received the Arnold and Deanne Kaplan Collection of Early American Judaica. This gift is valued at \$8.5 million and contains over 11,000 items. It is the most important private collection of its kind that documents the social and economic development of early Jewish life in the Western Hemisphere. The core of the Kaplan Collection covers the period before mass Jewish migration to the Americas in the late 1880s.

"Arny & Dee Kaplan began collecting before most people paid much attention to Judaica Americana, and they specialized in what many people neglected, such as items related to the economic life of nineteenth-century American Jews," remarked Dr. Jonathan Sarna, Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History at Brandeis University and Chief Historian of the National Museum of American Jewish History. "With this remarkable addition to its already highly significant holdings, Penn moves to the front ranks among libraries of American Judaica."

Some items are significant in their own right; others, while ephemeral, provide a rich mosaic of primary sources for scholars to mine. The majority of the Collection consists of manuscript and printed material. There also is a diverse array of important early American oil paintings, presentation silver, and other museum-quality, three-dimensional items.

"With the acquisition of the Kaplan Collection, the Penn Libraries have gained a treasure-trove of information about American Jewish life from the colonial period through the era of mass migration," said Professor Beth S. Wenger, Chair of the Department of History and Director of the Jewish Studies Program at the University of Pennsylvania. "Its unique and wide-ranging materials bring to life the details and vitality of an evolving Jewish community. The depth and breadth of this Collection are truly extraordinary and will be an unparalleled source for researchers for years to come."

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The earliest item in the Collection is a late 16th-century codex of the proceedings of the Mexican Inquisition against a New Christian accused of Judaizing. Engraved maps dating from the 17th and 18th centuries are among the first to document Jewish permanent settlement in the New World. A major component of the Collection focuses on the development of Jewish mercantile, social and religious activity in the Americas of the 19th century.

“The Kaplan Collection provides scholars with a unique opportunity to rethink many assumptions that we have about American Jewish history, assumptions we’ve been unable to test because sources like these have been in private hands and yet to be examined,” explained Arthur Kiron, Schottenstein-Jesselson Curator of Judaica Collections at Penn Libraries and Adjunct Assistant Professor of History.

Penn Libraries will make part of the Kaplan Collection available on long-term loan to the National Museum of American Jewish History (NMAJH). Through this endeavor, first envisioned by Arnold Kaplan, the NMAJH and the Penn Libraries have embarked upon a unique partnership to enhance public access to the Kaplan Collection.

“Generations of scholars will be grateful to the Kaplans for their diligence in amassing this Collection, and for their generosity in presenting it to Penn,” said Carton Rogers, Penn Vice Provost and Director of Libraries. “It is an added benefit of the Kaplan’s gift that it creates an important new alliance between research and cultural organizations in this region, Penn and the NMAJH.”

Every item in the Collection will be digitally reproduced and made available online to scholars and students. Penn Libraries will hold an exhibition in January 2014 in its new Special Collections Center with highlights from the Kaplan Collection on view, accompanied by an exhibition catalog with essays by leading scholars in the field.

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