

## 9 *The Professionalization of Wisdom: The Legacy of Dropsie College and Its Library*

Arthur Kiron

The Center for Judaic Studies (CJS) Library is a recent addition to the humanities collections of the University of Pennsylvania Library system. It includes approximately 180,000 volumes, including twenty Hebrew incunabula and over 8,000 rare printed works in Hebrew, English, German, Yiddish, Arabic, Latin and Ladino. The rare Hebrew editions offer specimens from a variety of Hebrew printing houses around the world; particularly strong are holdings of early modern rare books printed on the Italian peninsula. The CJS special collections of non-print materials include 451 codices written in eleven different alphabets as well as in twenty-four different languages and dialects as varied as Armenian, Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic, Syriac, Yiddish and Telugu. The Library has a relatively small but significant collection of 565 fragments of medieval writings from the Cairo Genizah (a kind of archive of sacred and secular Jewish documents), dating from the tenth century c.e. to the rise of printing. There are also 102 fragments in Coptic and Demotic written on papyrus, dating from the earliest centuries of the common era. A variety of ritual objects and artifacts, ranging from an “*omer*” board, ca. 1800, used by Jews in Lancaster, Pennsylvania to count the harvest days between Passover and the Pentecost, to a sizeable block of the stone retaining wall that surrounded the ancient Jewish Temple in Jerusalem can be found stored away in special climate-controlled areas. Lining the shelves of the Center’s rare book room are cuneiform tablets and archeological finds that date from the most remote periods of recorded history in the Ancient Near East. Among the Library’s archives and manuscript collections are the institutional records of Dropsie College and the personal papers of over fifty nineteenth and twentieth-century American Jewish lay leaders, ministers and scholars. Most noteworthy are the papers of Isaac Leeser, Sabato Morais, Charles and Mary M. Cohen, Mayer Sulzberger, Cyrus Adler, Abraham Neuman, Ben Zion Goldberg, and Moses Aaron Dropsie.

*Opposite page:* Moses Aaron Dropsie (1821—1905). Founder of Dropsie College. Center for Judaic Studies Library.



When added to the Penn Library's pre-existing Judaica holdings of approximately 170,000 volumes, the result is a substantial collection of some 350,000 volumes. The Library today possesses one of the largest and richest corpus of research materials documenting the history and culture of Jews from Biblical times to contemporary America. The primary significance of the CJS Library, however, does not derive from raw statistics, nor from specific individual treasures. Ultimately, its significance is based as much on its singular history as on its numbers and quality.

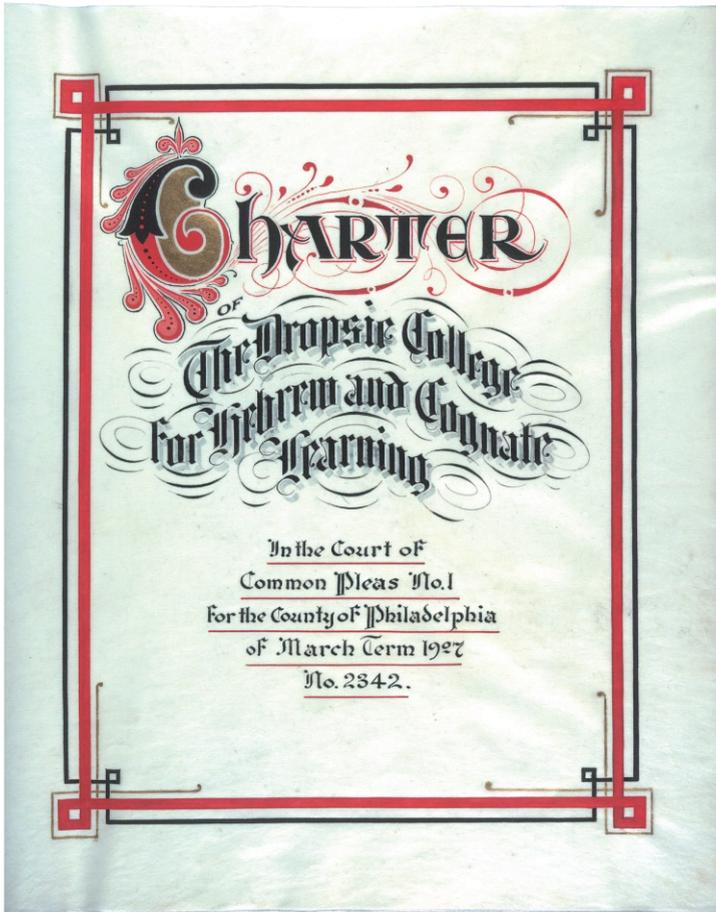
The CJS Library is the permanent home of the extant library collection of the Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning. Dropsie College was founded in Philadelphia in 1907 under Jewish auspices. It was established on democratic principles of open admission without regard to "creed, color or sex," or even financial ability since originally no tuition was charged.<sup>1</sup> Though its founders were closely aligned with the emerging Conservative movement of Judaism, the College was not affiliated with any religious denomination nor for that matter with any American university. It was not intended to, nor did it in practice, provide a theological program of study. As an independent institution, Dropsie was licensed by the state of Pennsylvania to perform a uniquely academic function: to grant Ph.D.s. In fact, Dropsie College offered the world's first accredited doctoral program in Jewish Studies.<sup>2</sup>

The College was named after its principle benefactor, Moses Aaron Dropsie. Born in Philadelphia on March 9, 1821 to a Jewish father and a Christian mother, Dropsie converted to Judaism at the age of fourteen along with his sister and brother in a formal ceremony featuring a ritual immersion in the Delaware River. Dropsie worked as an apprentice to a watchmaker before pursuing a career in law at the age of twenty-eight. He made his fortune through his law practice and through investments in Philadelphia's streetcars, becoming president of both the Lombard and South Street Railroads as well the Green and Coates Streets Railroad company. Upon his death in 1905, Dropsie, a life-long bachelor, bequeathed his entire estate to the establishment of a College "for the promotion of and instruction in the Hebrew and Cognate languages and their respective literatures." He further directed that "there shall be no discrimination on account of creed, color or sex," in the criteria of admission to the College.<sup>3</sup> So was born this pioneering experiment in Jewish higher education planted in the soil of American democratic principles.

<sup>1</sup> *The Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning Preliminary Register, 1909-1910* (Philadelphia: Cahhan Printing Co., 1909), p. 5. All primary sources subsequently cited are held in the archives of the Center for Judaic Studies Library.

<sup>2</sup> On the early history of Dropsie College, see Arthur Kiron, "The Creation of Dropsie College" (Unpublished Columbia University M.A. thesis, 1994) and additional sources cited there.

<sup>3</sup> On Dropsie, see Cyrus Adler, "Dropsie, Moses Aaron," *Dictionary of American Biography* 22 vols. (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1928-58), 5:459-60, and additional bibliography provided there. For the quote, see the *Last Will and Testament of Moses A. Dropsie, as registered with the City and County of Philadelphia in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, July 12, 1905*, articles six and seven (pp. 6-8).



Charter, Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, March Term 1907. Dropsie College Archives. Center for Judaic Studies Library.

The fact that Dropsie began its career unaffiliated with any university should not obscure the fact that it was conceived in the context of the emergence of the American and German university systems and specifically the critical methods of philological and archeological research prevailing at these institutions. Just as American scholarship was undergoing professionalization with the implementation of new standards of training, evaluation, and accreditation, so too was Jewish learning searching for a professional niche in the academy of higher education. The early twentieth century was an age that witnessed the ongoing excavations of the tombs of Egypt, the decipherment of their hieroglyphs, as well as the unearthing and analysis of ancient libraries of clay tablets from Mesopotamia. The fertile crescent region in which the miracle of writing and the revelations of monotheism occurred came to be the object of scientific scrutiny.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> On professionalization and higher education, see for example, Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Classes and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: Norton, 1976).

Throughout its existence, the College emphasized a strong grounding in ancient languages such as Akkadian, Aramaic, Ethiopic, Hittite, Sumerian and Ugaritic. Like the University of Pennsylvania's program of Semitic Studies, Dropsie College focused on teaching and researching the Hebrew Bible in its Ancient Near Eastern context. Unlike most universities of the time, however, Dropsie College also provided a unique environment in which non-Jews (and the majority of the students, especially in later years, were not Jewish) could go to study post-Biblical Jewish texts of classical rabbinics. This legal and exegetical corpus of rabbinic literature includes the Mishnah, the Palestinian and Babylonian editions of the Talmud, midrashic compilations, halakhic codes and responsa literature. Shortly after its founding, the College established a Department of Jewish History. Later a school of education was introduced, breaking completely with the College's original orientation towards philological study.

The mission of the College was to provide a new kind of Jewish learning that was non-theological and scientifically objective. It would fill an academic and cultural vacuum left by the almost total absence of Jewish Studies (save theologically oriented programs) in universities in Europe and the United States. The founding of the College also occurred under specific historical conditions of mass migration, intolerance, and exclusion. From the 1880s to the 1920s, the Jewish people underwent the greatest population transfer in their entire history. Millions came to America, primarily from Eastern European lands, to seek a better life, to escape widespread pauperization as well as a rising tide of antisemitism. In the United States, calls for sharp quotas and restrictions on immigration intensified during this period. Ultimately, the anti-immigration movement led to the closing of the "Golden Door" to America in 1924.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most remarkable features of the College's proposed program of study was the seemingly discomfiting quest to fuse Jewish particularism with a universalizing scientific objectivity. The early history of Dropsie College shows how the interest in recovering the ancient origins of modern western culture simultaneously served and transcended a Jewish apologetic impulse. The Jewish founders of Dropsie College shared a civic faith in the American republic and believed that its foundations could be objectively sought in Biblical models of government. This apparently curious fusion of secular and sacred was not new. Englishmen like John Milton and Oliver Cromwell in the seventeenth century had insisted upon it as Christians.<sup>6</sup> What was new was

<sup>5</sup> On immigration and intolerance in the United States during this period, see John Higham, *Send These to Me: Immigrants in Urban America* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), esp. pp. 29-80, 95-152.

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 92-184.

the effort to ground that historical consciousness in a new set of scientific methods of philological research. Mayer Sulzberger, for example, president of Dropsie College at the time of its establishment, tried to show in a series of lectures delivered at the College beginning in 1910 (and later printed), that the ancient Israelites had a parliamentary democracy.<sup>7</sup>

The apologetic point, though implicit, was clear: studying the history of the Jews would reveal that the most basic values of America were in fact originally Jewish. Demonstrating that the rule of law and the notion of a government of, by, and for the people was entirely compatible with and, in fact, ultimately grounded in Jewish values and Jewish history would solve the old conundrum of what it meant to be both Jewish and American. For Sulzberger, the apology was beside the point, because the scientific method he utilized was believed to have secured the objective result. It is interesting to note in this regard that the founders and later leaders of Dropsie consciously identified their efforts with the first generation of modern, critical-historical Jewish studies: the “Science of Judaism,” established in Germany in the early nineteenth century. Dropsie College’s leaders shared not only the ideology and methodology of their predecessors; they also shared an apologetic agenda to achieve full, dignified participation for Jews in modern civil society.<sup>8</sup> The history of the College, from its founding to its reorganization in 1986 as the Annenberg Research Institute (ARI), is significant precisely in terms of how it narrates ongoing efforts by Jews to realize these ends by means of an academic institution.

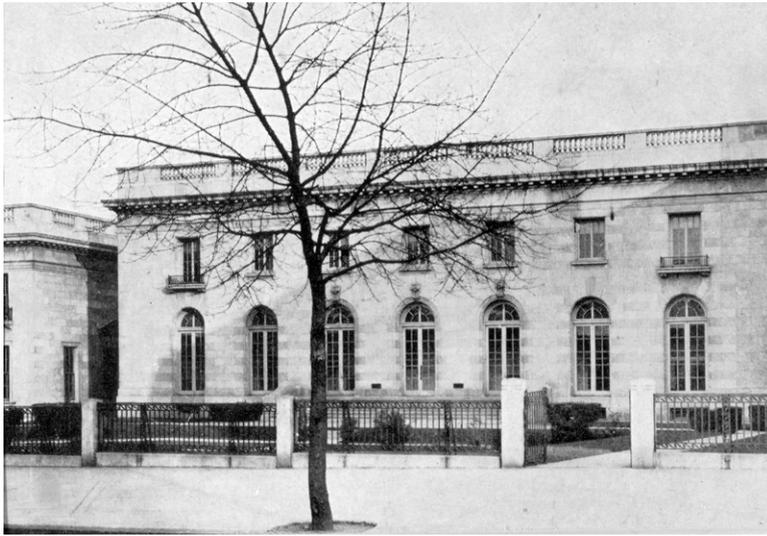
Long before Dropsie College was transformed into a post-graduate research institution, it shared a variety of close ties with Penn. Attending the College’s dedication was University of Pennsylvania Provost Edgar Fahs Smith and Morris Jastrow, son of the distinguished rabbi and scholar Marcus Jastrow. Morris Jastrow had been elected chairman of Semitic Languages at Penn in 1892 and also served as Librarian of the University after 1898.<sup>9</sup> As early as 1914, the Board of Dropsie College passed a resolution tendering Dropsie’s law library of 1,700 volumes to the University of Pennsylvania Law School. The books were “gratefully accepted” by the Dean of Penn’s Law School William Draper Lewis.<sup>10</sup> Ephraim Speiser, who received his Ph.D. from Dropsie in 1925, went on to become a key figure in the development of Penn’s Semitics Studies program. His library also came to form the core collection of the Jewish and Ancient Near East Seminar Room at Penn’s Van Pelt Library. Sharing

<sup>7</sup> Mayer Sulzberger, *Am ha-aretz: The Ancient Hebrew Parliament, A Chapter in the Constitution History of Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Julius H. Greenstone, 1910); idem., *The Polity of the Ancient Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Julius H. Greenstone, 1912) and note also, Solomon Solis-Cohen, “Democracy in the Ancient Hebrew Commonwealth,” *Judaism and Science with other addresses and papers from the writings of Solomon Solis-Cohen* (Philadelphia: Privately Printed, 1940), pp. 213–17. Sulzberger, technically, was the founding president of the College; Cyrus Adler was its first operating president.

<sup>8</sup> On the apologetic impulse among the early practitioners of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, see, for example, Gershom Scholem, “*Mittokh ha-hirhurim ‘al hokhmat yisra’el*,” [“Reflections on the Science of Judaism”] in *Devarim be-go* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1976), pp. 385–403 and see more generally, Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Hannover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> See *Dropsie College Register* (Summer Term, 1913), p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> Dropsie College Board of Governor Minutes [henceforth, BG], 1914.



Picture of Dropsie College, Broad and York Streets, Philadelphia, PA. Center for Judaic Studies Library.

common interests, faculty expertise and bibliographic resources, Dropsie and Penn collaborated in other areas as well: joint archeological excavations (especially the Tepe Gawra dig in northern Iraq in the 1920s and 1930s) and in later years, a reciprocal enrollment are two notable examples.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the most striking symbol of that ongoing relationship is the current location of the Center. Thirty blocks east of the main campus, in the heart of the “most historic mile in the United States” near Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell, the Center faces the quintessential institution of the eighteenth century American Enlightenment: the American Philosophical Society, founded by Benjamin Franklin and others. The juxtaposition reinforces geographically a relationship that dates back to the colonial period. Dropsie College’s first building was erected in 1912 at Broad and York Streets in North Philadelphia adjacent to the historic Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Mikveh Israel. Mikveh Israel was Philadelphia’s first Jewish congregation, and the house of worship of Dropsie’s first three presidents, Mayer Sulzberger, Cyrus Adler and Abraham Neuman. Mikveh Israel dates its founding to 1740, the same year as the founding of the University of Pennsylvania. In 1761, a decade after the Penn Library recorded its first library acquisitions, Mikveh Israel received its first Torah scroll.<sup>12</sup> Franklin later contributed money to assist the fledgling colonial Jewish congregation. When Franklin died in 1790, leading his funeral procession and walking side by side with other members of Philadelphia’s Christian clergy, was Mikveh Israel’s Jewish minister, Jacob Cohen.<sup>13</sup> Subsequent generations of

<sup>11</sup> E. A. Speiser, *Some Prehistoric Antiquities from Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: The Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1929) [reprinted from the *Jewish Quarterly Review* (new series) vol. 19, no. 4 (1929), pp. 345–54]; *Joint Expedition of the Baghdad School, the University Museum and Dropsie College (1931–1938). Excavation at Tepe Gawra* (Philadelphia: Published for the American Schools of Oriental Research by University of Pennsylvania Press, 1935–1950).

<sup>12</sup> Edwin Wolf 2nd and Maxwell Whiteman, *History of the Jews of Philadelphia: From Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1957), p. 41 [henceforth, Wolf and Whiteman].

the historic Jewish congregation self-consciously and collectively pioneered, already prior to mass migration, the infrastructure of American Jewish communal life and a model for Jewish acculturation into American society.

During the nineteenth century, figures like Isaac Leeser, Sabato Morais, the successive ministers at Mikveh Israel, from 1829 to 1897, and their disciples, such as Dropsie, Sulzberger, Adler, as well as prominent Jewish women like Rebecca Gratz, Simha Peixotto, Ellen Phillips, and Mary M. Cohen, shared overlapping roles and responsibilities in the creation, and continued service on the boards, of a multitude of local and national Jewish institutions. Many of these leaders of the so-called “Philadelphia Group,” shared family ties, worshipped at the same synagogue, and socialized together. This intimate culture of elite Victorian Jewish society dating from the mid-nineteenth century bound together a generation of Jewish leaders in terms of their philanthropic activities, their enlightened traditional religious orientation, and their middle to upper class position.<sup>14</sup>

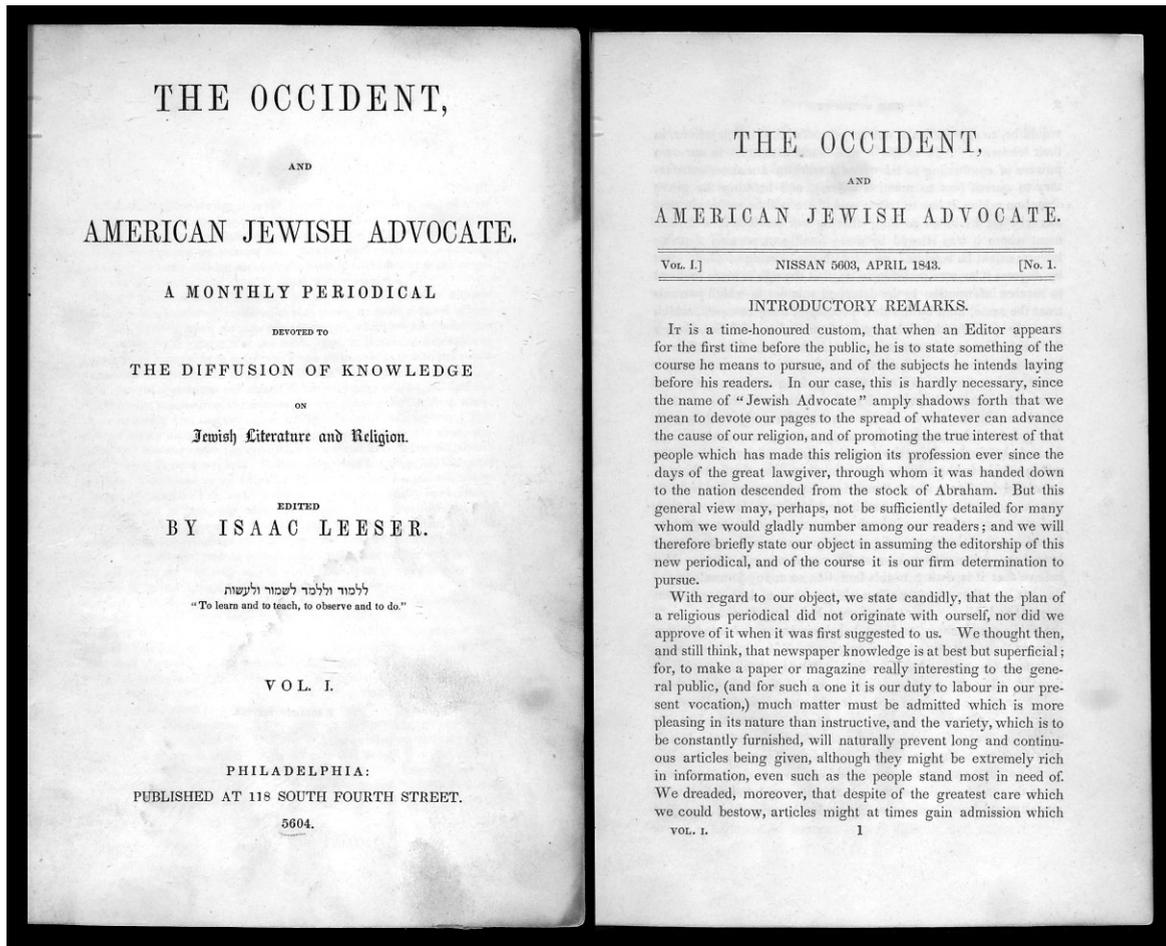
Dropsie College was the most ambitious intellectual achievement of the Philadelphia Jewish leaders at Mikveh Israel. It represented a fusion of two different yet related nineteenth-century Jewish intellectual trends: the religious humanist interest in character formation and the *wissenschaftlich*, or scientific study of Jewish history and its traditions. Such a fusion would lead to the cultivation of a new kind of Jewish leader: the Jewish academic. In founding a college of Jewish studies, Dropsie hoped to carve out and determine a place for Jewish studies, broadly conceived, as part of a professionalized humanistic curriculum: a *trivium* of Hebrew and its cognate languages alongside classical Greek and Latin studies.<sup>15</sup> The Dropsie library amounts to a veritable time-capsule that encompasses these different and at times conflicting trends.

The centerpiece of the original Dropsie collection is the library of Isaac Leeser, minister at Mikveh Israel from 1829 to 1850, an opponent of the growing Reform movement of Judaism, and Dropsie’s mentor. The Westphalia-born Leeser pioneered American Jewish publishing and book production and is credited with creating nearly every “first” in American Jewish history, including the first “Hebrew Education Society,” the first American Jewish Bible translations, and the first American Jewish Publication Society. He also founded and edited a monthly journal, the *Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, the first of its kind in the United States. As an editor and communal leader, Leeser regularly received letters, pamphlets, books and periodicals from

<sup>13</sup> Thomas J. Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884* 3 vols (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts and Co., 1884), 1:457-58.

<sup>14</sup> Wolf and Whiteman, op. cit., p. 143; Solomon Solis-Cohen, “The Philadelphia Group,” *Judaism and Science*, op. cit., pp. 246-52; Maxwell Whiteman, “The Philadelphia Group,” *Jewish Life in Philadelphia, 1830-1940*, ed. Murray Friedman (Philadelphia: Ishi Publications, 1983), pp. 163-78 and more generally, see the collection of essays in Murray Friedman, ed., *When Philadelphia Was the Capital of Jewish America* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Moses Aaron Dropsie, *On Deform in Judaism and on the Study of Hebrew* (Philadelphia: Billstein and Son, 1895), pp. 6-7.



all over North America, Latin America, Europe and the Ottoman empire. From these acquisitions, his library grew. In the pages of the *Occident*, Leeser repeatedly called for the establishment of a "Hebrew College" in the city of Philadelphia. A year before his death, in 1867, his dream was realized with the founding of Maimonides College, "the first American Jewish theological seminary."<sup>16</sup> After his death, his personal library and papers were given to the seminary, in fulfillment of the terms of his will. Maimonides College closed in 1873, and forty years later the library was transferred to Dropsie College in a formal ceremony held on Founder's Day, March 10, 1913.<sup>17</sup>

Heading the group of friends that came together to fulfill Dropsie's wishes was his friend and a former apprentice in his law office, Mayer Sulzberger. Like Dropsie, Sulzberger, was a disciple of Leeser and a life-long bachelor who devoted himself to the

Title page of the first issue of *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate*. Edited by Isaac Leeser. Vol. 1, No. 1 (Philadelphia: [Published by the Editor], 1843).

<sup>16</sup> On Leeser's plan for a "Hebrew College," see, eg., *Occident*, vol. 18 (1861), p. 1, col. 1. On Maimonides College, see Bertram W. Korn, "The First American Jewish Theological Seminary: Maimonides College, 1867-1873," in *Eventful Years and Experiences* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1954), pp. 151-213.

promotion of American Jewish learning. Sulzberger was the first American Jew to hold judicial office in Pennsylvania and arguably the greatest book collector and maecenas in American Jewish history. The first meeting of the group was held on November 7, 1905, at Sulzberger's home at 1303 Girard Avenue, which was at that time also the location of possibly the finest private collection of Judaica in the western hemisphere.<sup>18</sup> Sulzberger brought into the planning stages of the incipient College his younger cousin, Cyrus Adler, a Penn alumnus, and the first American and the first Jew to receive a Ph.D. in Semitics (from Johns Hopkins University, in 1887). Adler, a disciple of the Italian-born minister of Mikveh Israel, Sabato Morais, was also a book collector and a communal leader active in dozens of different Jewish organizations. He became the first operating president of Dropsie College in 1909 and was, from 1915 until his death in 1940, simultaneously president of Dropsie and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.<sup>19</sup> The scholarly interests and the book collections of the "Philadelphia Group" helped shape the character of the institutions they served.

The formal beginnings of the Dropsie College library postdate its founding. Apparently, a budget for library acquisitions was not originally allocated when the College began operations. Several special appropriations were made between December 1908 and June 1910 to acquire the "Trumbull collection." According to a 1911 letter found in the Library records, an initial amount of one thousand dollars was proposed for annual acquisitions at a meeting held in June of 1909. In 1912, the library purchased part of the collection of Ephraim Deinard, another Jewish bibliophile and book dealer. In 1914, the library acquired the English translation of Bernard Picart's *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Various Nations of the Known World* (London, 1737). The first volume of this handsome, folio-sized six volume set contains some of the most beautiful engravings of Jewish life in the early modern period as seen through the eyes of a Christian. In addition to works acquired by purchase, the College received "current literature" in exchange for its in-house journal, the *Jewish Quarterly Review* and established an exchange of duplicates with the New York Public Library.<sup>20</sup> The College's library was enriched also by substantial gifts in the early years, including various rarities donated by Mayer Sulzberger. These included, *inter alia*, the first volume of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible (of 1514-17), thirty-seven Samaritan Hebrew manuscripts, and a Hebrew incunabulum—a Hebrew Bible—issued by the famous Soncino printing house in Brescia (Italy) in 1494.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> On Leeser, see Lance Sussman, *Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995). On the transfer of the Leeser Library to Dropsie College, see Edward Wolf, "Transfer of Custody of the Leeser Library," delivered as part of the Exercises on Founder's Day, March 10, 1913, and printed in the *Dropsie College Register*, (Summer Term, 1913), pp. 26-39.

<sup>18</sup> On Sulzberger, see the "Mayer Sulzberger Collection Finding Aid," prepared by Arthur Kiron (Philadelphia: Annenberg Research Institute, 1993), and additional bibliography provided there.

<sup>19</sup> On Adler and, particularly his role at Dropsie College, see his autobiography, *I Have Considered the Days* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of American, 1941), passim [henceforth, IHCD]; more generally about Adler, see the section entitled "The Role of Cyrus Adler in American Jewish History" in *American Jewish History* vol. 78, no. 3 (March, 1989), pp. 351-98.

<sup>20</sup> Dropsie College Board of Governors Minutes-Library Report, 1913 [henceforth, BG-Lib]; BG-Lib, April-June 1916.

<sup>21</sup> BG-Lib, March 5, 1911; BG-Lib, 1912; BG-Lib, 1913.



In May of 1912, the library began cataloguing its books and serials onto cards, according to a classification system that closely followed that of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. According to a 1913 library report, “the books are so arranged that the students can at a glance see what the Library possesses on a certain subject.”<sup>22</sup> The Hebraica cataloguing followed the example of Joseph Zedner’s catalogue of the Hebrew books in the British Museum, whose “rules for cross-reference have been strictly complied with.”<sup>23</sup> Joseph Reider, the College’s second Ph.D., and the future head librarian at Dropsie, assisted by Mr. Barnett Cohen, performed the cataloguing labors and wrote the annual library reports.

Engraving of the interior of the Sephardic Synagogue of Amsterdam. Bernard Picart, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Various Nations of the World*. 6 vols. (London, 1737). Center for Judaic Studies Library.

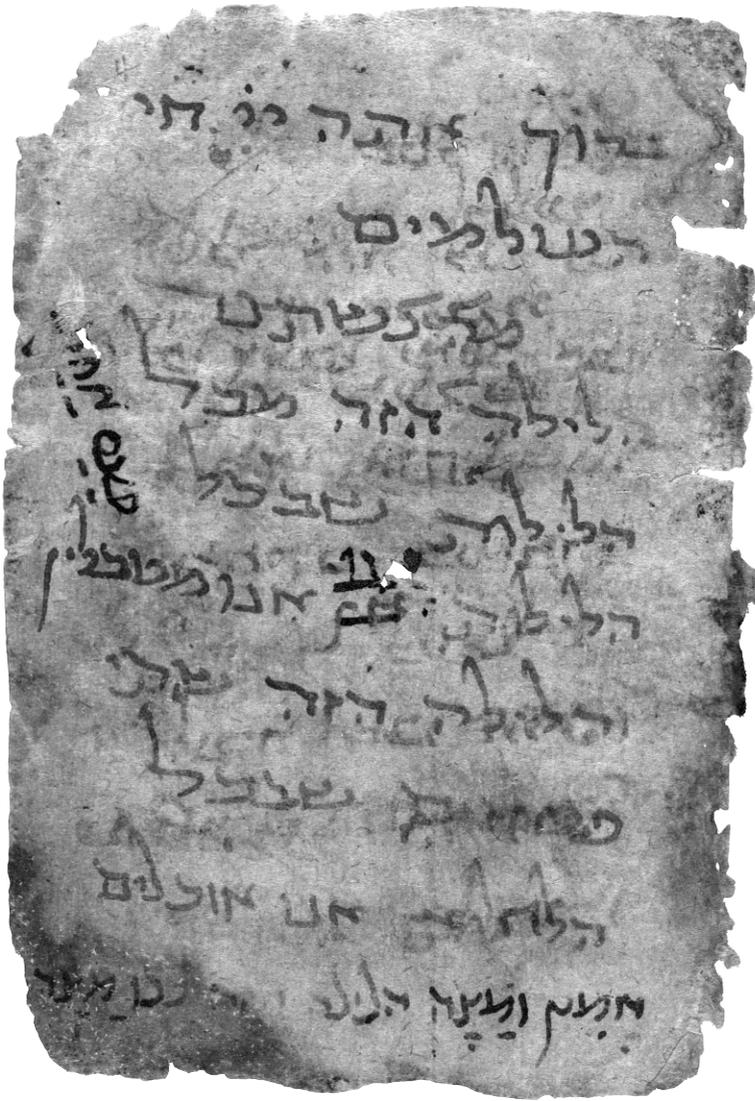
<sup>22</sup> BG-Lib, 1913.

In Reider's 1912-1913 library report appears the first official statistical record of the newly-established library with the announcement that "with 4,000 volumes as a start," the total library holdings now stood at 8,400. Reider attributed this increase in large part to the transfer of the Leeser Library of 2,400 volumes from the Hebrew Education Society. Three years later Dropsie College received another donation: the Joshua I. Cohen collection, which had belonged to a Jewish physician from Baltimore, and at the time reputed to be one of the most outstanding collections of Judaica and Hebraica in the United States. These two collections, both from the libraries of nineteenth century American Jews, solidified a core collection of almost 15,000 volumes. Detailed information exists about the original contents of these collections because Cyrus Adler catalogued both as a teenager, also modeling his work after that of Zedner. According to Adler, in his autobiography, this activity "laid the basis of [Adler's] interest in libraries, in cataloguing and in bibliographies."<sup>24</sup>

Among Adler's most noteworthy achievements in building the Dropsie library was his role in acquiring Genizah fragments. The word Genizah, which comes from a verb meaning to store away, and a rabbinic Hebrew phrase for a "treasury," refers to a kind of archive of writings which have been damaged and are no longer in use yet cannot be thrown away due to a special status imputed to them. Such fragments were placed in a Genizah and ultimately intended for burial in its cemetery. In the 1890s, scholars such as Cambridge University's Solomon Schechter, went to the famous synagogue in Fustat, located in the Old City of Cairo, to examine the literally hundreds of thousands of fragments of ancient writings found there which had become increasingly well-known from travelers' reports earlier in the century. Schechter, who later became president of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, was a friend of Sulzberger. Schechter not only wrote to his friend about his research but eventually sent a group of fragments to Philadelphia. Cyrus Adler, who traveled to Cairo in the Spring of 1891 several years before Schechter, had brought back another batch. Perhaps the most important fragment in the Dropsie collection is one of the oldest extant fragments of the *haqadah*, the book read by Jews on Passover to commemorate the ancient Israelites' Exodus from Egypt. This eleventh-century c.e. version, which documents the variations of medieval Jewish liturgical practices, came to Dropsie from yet another source: the private collection of David Werner Amram, another Philadelphia Jewish leader and professor of jurisprudence at Penn's Law School

<sup>23</sup> BG-LIB, 1913 and see the *Catalogue of the Hebrew books in the library of the British Museum* [compiled by Joseph Zedner] (London: Printed by Order of the Trustees, 1867).

<sup>24</sup> Cyrus Adler [compiler], *Catalogue of the Leeser Library* (Philadelphia: [s.n.], 1883); idem., *Catalogue of a Hebrew Library; being the collection, with a few additions of the late Joshua I. Cohen, M.D. of Baltimore now in the possession of Mrs. Harriet Cohen* (Baltimore: Privately Printed by the press of Isaac Friedenwald, 1887). See also, Adler, IHCD, p. 21 for the quote.



Fragment of the world's oldest Passover haggadah, ca. 1000. This fragment, discovered in the nineteenth century in the Cairo Genizah, is especially noteworthy for its variant textual readings. It contains only three of the traditional "four questions" at the core of the Passover service.

from 1912 to 1925. All of the fragments that found their way to Library in the early years, as well as others held at Penn, were catalogued by a Dropsie College professor of Judeo-Arabic, Benzion Halper, and published in 1924.<sup>25</sup>

These Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic writings include fragments of Biblical, rabbinic, liturgical, poetic, philosophical and mystical works. They also contain letters and correspondence dealing with business transactions, medicine, magic and folklore. Schechter brought back hundreds of thousands of these fragments to Cambridge. These and thousands of other fragments scattered in various libraries around the world formed the literary basis for

<sup>25</sup> Benzion Halper, *Descriptive Catalogue of Genizah Fragments in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1924).

a University of Pennsylvania professor, Shlomo Dov Goitein, to reconstruct Jewish social, religious and economic life around the Mediterranean from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>26</sup>

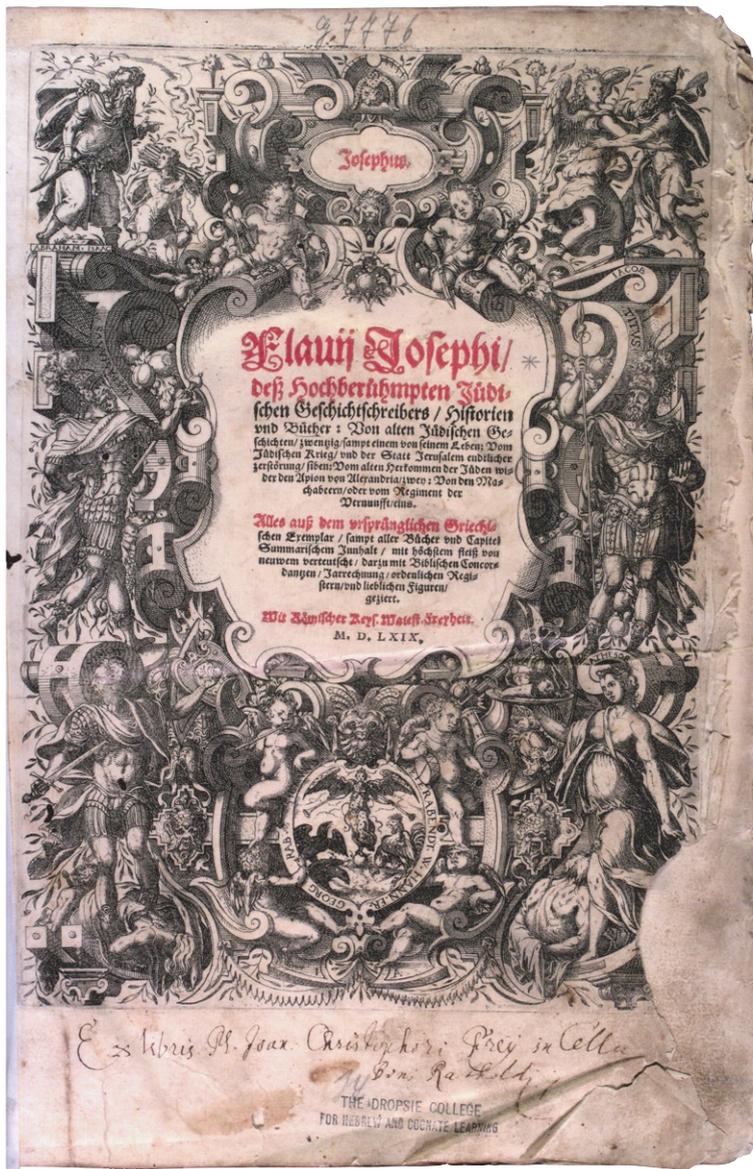
Over the years, the library acquired many other notable collections. The most important came from Dropsie's own faculty and officers. Among them are: the Max Margolis collection, containing specialized work in Biblical studies; the Solomon Skoss collection of photostats of rare Judeo-Arabic manuscripts (especially valuable for Skoss' notes which identify the manuscripts as well as their date and place of composition); the Leo Honor collection of works dealing with Jewish education, history and literature; the Abraham Neuman collection of works of Jewish history; the Abraham Katsh collection of microfilmed Hebrew manuscripts found in libraries in the (former) Soviet Union; the Herman Blum collection of rare Bibles; the Adolf Schrijver collection of Sumerology; the Eduard Glaser collection of Arabica; the Henry Malter library of Jewish philosophy; the Sulzberger and Adler donations of rare printed and manuscript Hebraica; the libraries of Solomon Zeitlin, a scholar of the Second Temple and rabbinic periods and Morton Enslin, who taught Early Christian Thought and Literature at Dropsie.<sup>27</sup>

The CJS Library, thus, grew through purchases, donations, bequests, endowed book funds and deposits. One other less common means by which the Dropsie library grew is poignantly illustrated by one particular volume in the CJS collection: a sixteenth-century German translation of the *Jewish Wars*, originally written in Greek by the first century c.e. Jewish historian Josephus Flavius. In this work, Josephus recounts the Jewish revolt against the Roman occupiers of Palestine and specifically the destruction of Judea's capital, Jerusalem, by the Roman army under Titus' command. The book contains a beautifully engraved, ornamented title page and is printed in elegant gothic type. What is particularly significant about this volume, however, are several seemingly unremarkable book plates and ownership marks which appear on the inside cover opposite the title page. One of the library stamps comes from a Nazi Institute for Historical Research. Founded in 1936, under the direction of Wilhelm Grau, the *Reich Institut für Geschichte des neue Bibliothek*, was created in part to document the culture of those who would be murdered and to house the vast amount of materials confiscated from their libraries and communal archives.<sup>28</sup> Obviously, the book survived the pillaging. From the Dropsie College bookplate, we know it found its way to Philadelphia.

<sup>26</sup> On the history of the Cairo Genizah and Genizah studies in America, see most recently, Menahem Schmelzer, *One Hundred Years of Genizah Discovery and Research. The American Share* (New York: National Foundation for Jewish Culture, 1998) and S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: the Jewish communities of the Arab world as portrayed in the documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 6 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967-1993).

<sup>27</sup> *Dropsie College Bulletin*, 1983-84, 84-85, pp. 5-6.

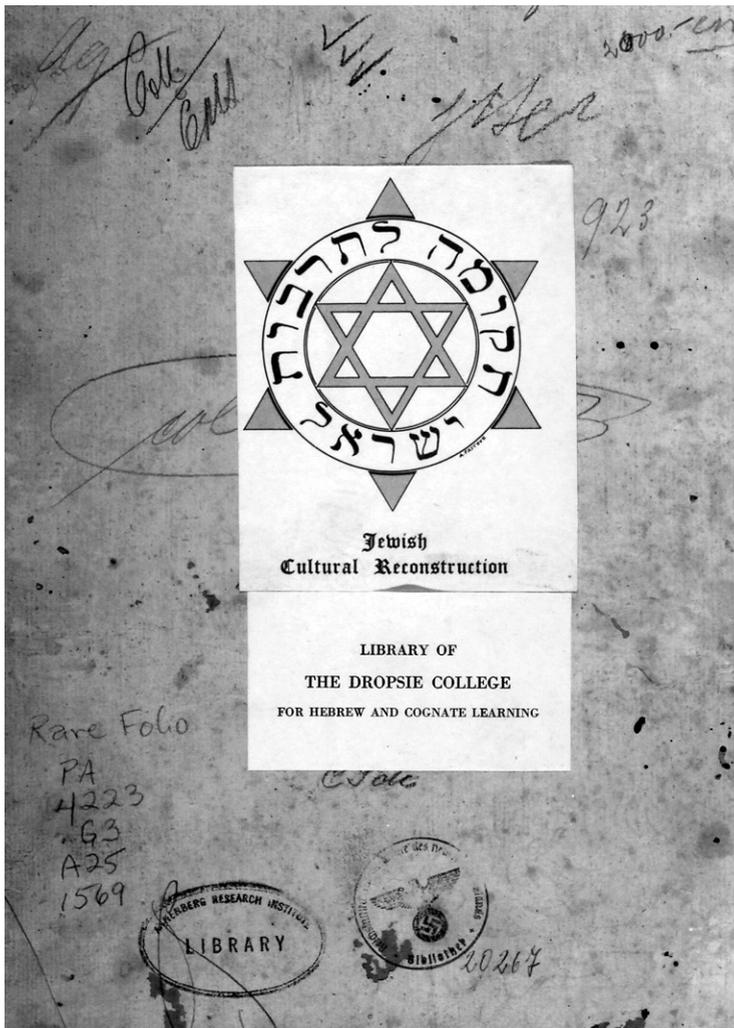
<sup>28</sup> On Wilhelm Grau and the Reichsinstitut, see the *Encyclopedia Judaica* vol. 8 (1972), pp. 565-66.



Title page of the German translation of Josephus' *Jewish Wars*. Flauij Josephi, dess hochberühmpten jüdischen Geschichtschreibers... (Frankfurt am Main: Printed by Geroge Raben, Sigmund Feyraend and Weygand Hanen Erben, 1569). Center for Judaic Studies Library.

How did it get there? The existence of the next bookplate, "Jewish Cultural Reconstruction," explains it. After the Second World War, a foundation, headed by Salo Baron, an historian and founder of the Jewish Studies program at Columbia University, restored nearly half a million books, pamphlets, periodicals and cultural treasures stolen from the Jewish people to Jewish institutions throughout the world.<sup>29</sup> The Dropsie College Library was among the recipients. As the final stamp shows, the book later became part of the Annenberg Research Institute library.

<sup>29</sup> On the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction program and the bookplate, see Philip Goodman, *Illustrated Essays on Jewish Bookplates* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1971), pp. 117-18.

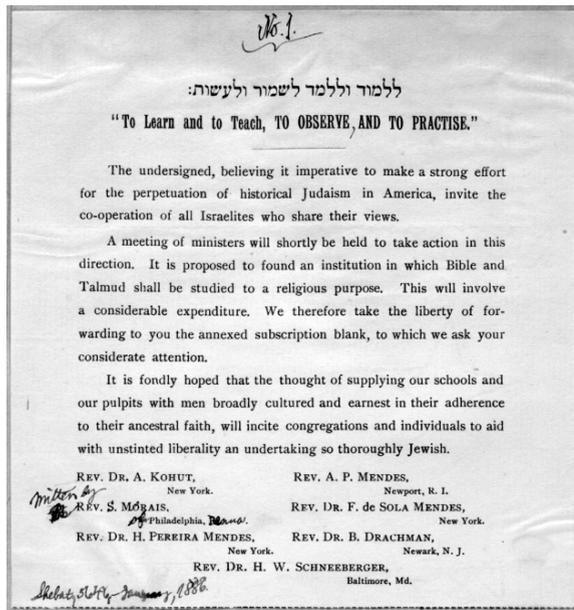


Inside front cover of the 1569 Josephus showing the stamp of the Institute for Historical Research (bottom center) and the bookplate of the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction Foundation.

Today it belongs to the University of Pennsylvania's Judaica Collections housed at the CJS Library.

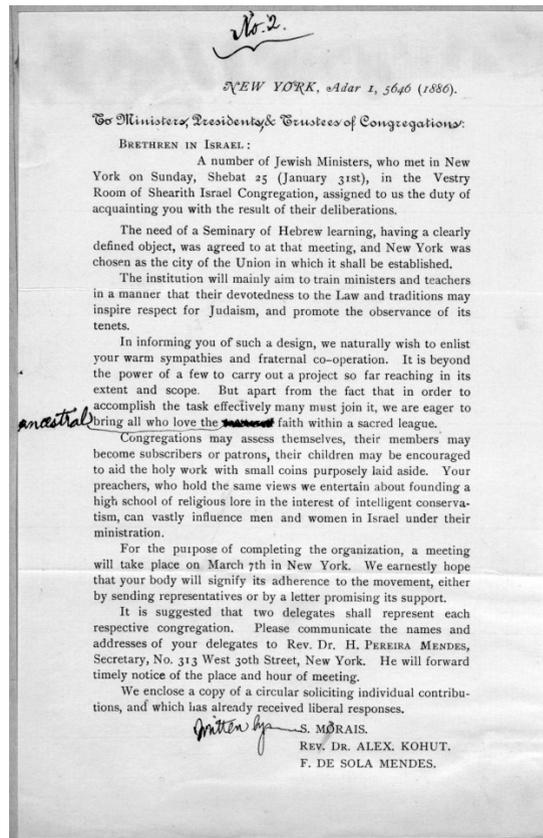
The post-war period was a time of rebirth for the Jewish people in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Sadly, it was a period of sharp decline for Dropsie College and its Library. As early as 1947, Moshe Davis, a scholar of American Jewish history, reported the personal scrapbook of Sabato Morais missing from the College's archives.<sup>30</sup> Morais, Leiser's successor at Mikveh Israel from 1851 to 1897, was the principal founder of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City in 1886. It had been Adler's unrealized dream before his death in 1940 to write a biography of his mentor based in part on the scrapbook, which contained Morais' handwritten annotations and personal signature

<sup>30</sup> Moshe Davis, "Sabato Morais: A Selected and Annotated Bibliography of his Writings," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* vol. 37 (1947), p. 60.



over hundreds of anonymously published newspaper articles. Notably, the scrapbook documents Morais' authorship of two circulars from 1886 announcing the founding principles of the Jewish Theological Seminary. Fortunately, the scrapbook was discovered and purchased at a West Philadelphia book shop in the 1950s by a future CJS board member, Marvin Weiner. In 1993, Weiner donated the five hundred page scrapbook, today called the "Morais Ledger," to the Center. In so doing, he permanently reunited, after a half-century hiatus, the ledger with the rest of Morais' personal papers.

Some disappearances did not end so well. In 1954, Reider reported missing Geniza fragments that have never been recovered.<sup>31</sup> Reider retired in 1959 and three years later, in January of 1962, Lawrence V. Berman, a professor of medieval philosophy, felt impelled to call to the attention of the College's President Abraham Neuman the poor condition of the library. Berman declared: "I feel that it is my duty to bring to your attention ... the state of the library. It is my feeling that in terms of organization, administration, service, and holdings the library is sub-standard."<sup>32</sup> His outcry was not heeded. Over the next two decades, the library continued to decline. Part of the problem was continuous turn-over in management. In the twenty-seven



Two circulars announcing the establishment of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and its founding principles, with handwritten annotations identifying Rev. Sabato Morais as the author of the documents. Center for Judaic Studies Library.

<sup>31</sup> Memorandum, Joseph Reider to Abraham Neuman, November 2, 1954 [Dropsie College Library files, 1954 [henceforth Library files].

<sup>32</sup> Lawrence Berman to Abraham Neuman, January 16, 1962 [Library files, 1962].

year period from Reider's resignation in 1959, until the re-organization of the College in 1986, Dropsie had nine different head librarians or a change of leadership of about once every three years.

The 1980s ushered in a new era in the history of Dropsie College and its library. Credit for this revival belongs in particular to David M. Goldenberg, who became president in October of 1981, and Albert J. Wood, who joined the Board of Governors earlier that year. It is no exaggeration to say that the period from 1981 to 1986 saw a nearly defunct institution rise from the ashes. At the beginning of the decade, Dropsie was on the brink of collapse, its financial base diminished, its physical surroundings decrepit, its local support nearly exhausted, and its priceless library in a state of disrepair. The last straw came in the early morning hours of the forty-third anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, on November 9, 1981. Only a month after Goldenberg assumed the presidency of the college, he was awakened by an emergency call notifying him of an arson attack. Firemen who rushed to the scene to douse the flames also inadvertently caused irreparable harm to the library's collections. The streams of water that had extinguished the fire also turned ancient cuneiform tablets to mud and rare books into wet carcasses. Goldenberg quickly arranged to have the water-damaged books removed to be freeze-dried and then began a long campaign to save the library.

Goldenberg, a scholar of rabbinic literature and a graduate of Dropsie, directed the recovery of his alma mater. He had written his dissertation on the halakhah, or the Jewish legal elements, contained in the Greek writings of Josephus Flavius. Goldenberg launched a grant-writing effort which ultimately brought the institution over a million dollars to help modernize the library.<sup>33</sup> His efforts were complicated by the years of mismanagement endured by the library and from typical problems of never-returned and missing books, as well as the simple fact that a majority of the library collection was almost impossible to locate. For years, Dropsie students had preferred going to Penn to use its library collections rather than suffer the frustration of futilely searching the library stacks for books reported in the card catalog.

The Library holdings, at that time totaling approximately 120,000 volumes according to contemporary reports, required automation and modernization. Goldenberg hired a skilled professional librarian, Sara Levy, and formulated the collections development program. He launched a relentless campaign to identify missing books and to search for them on the open market, at

<sup>33</sup> On Goldenberg's activities during this period, see his President's reports to the Board of Governor Minutes, 1980-85, and especially his remarks on the occasion of his appointment as President on October 10, 1981, as recorded in the Board of Governor Minutes.

auctions, and in private hands. He engaged the help of world-renowned collectors of Judaica, such as Jack Lunzer of the Valmadonna Trust in London, to help develop the rare collections and to help purchase substantial private collections, such as the Sanders collection of Anglo-Judaica and the Shraga collection of rare Middle Eastern imprints, to fill in additional gaps in the library holdings. A Philadelphia collector of antiquities, Sigmund Harrison, joined the effort and donated a number of rarities. Goldenberg's efforts also led to the conservation of the precious Genizah Fragment collection by the Center for the Conservation of Art and Historical Artifacts.

Albert Wood, a local businessman, pioneer in the credit card industry and marketing research, and founder of the Middle East Forum, joined the Board of Governors in February of 1981. Wood conceived and oversaw the transformation of the College into a post-graduate research center. In the aftermath of the fire, Wood urged the relocation of Dropsie to temporary quarters in Lower Merion, a suburb of Philadelphia.<sup>34</sup> He issued a program for broadening the financial base and restructuring the College's operations. Perhaps his most significant contribution to the College was a leadership dinner he organized, in conjunction with the Federation Allied Jewish Appeal Campaign, on the second anniversary of the fire, on November 10, 1983. The event was held at the Bellevue Stratford Hotel in Philadelphia. Walter H. Annenberg, the former American Ambassador to Great Britain and renowned philanthropist, not only attended the dinner on Wood's invitation but wrote a moving letter to each of the dinner's participants describing how his commitment to philanthropy was based in part on his visit after World War II to the Dachau concentration camp near Munich, on his way to attend the Nuremberg Trials.<sup>35</sup> The dinner raised nearly a half a million dollars and ultimately led to Annenberg's large-scale involvement with the College. Wood later became the founding Chairman of the Board of the Moses Aaron Dropsie Research Institute, as it was originally called. On September 13, 1985, Wood stepped down and Ambassador Annenberg was installed as the new chairman. Subsequently, at Wood's urging, the institution was renamed after its principle benefactor.

In 1986, Dropsie College was transformed into the Annenberg Research Institute. Annenberg supported the idea of creating a "trialogue" among scholarly representatives of the three monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Through this triologue, it was hoped, lasting understanding and peace among

<sup>34</sup> Memorandum, Albert J. Wood to the Board of Trustees, March 12, 1982.

<sup>35</sup> A copy of the Annenberg letter, dated October 10, 1983, is in the Albert J. Wood Papers at the CJS Library.

these religions' adherents might be achieved. Bernard Lewis, of Princeton University, and a specialist in Islamic history and religion and Jewish-Islamic relations, was appointed the first Director. Eric M. Meyers, an archeologist and Biblical scholar from Duke University, and former director of the American Society for Oriental Research, succeeded Lewis as Director in 1991. Following Meyer's resignation a year later to return to full-time teaching at Duke, Goldenberg returned as Acting-Director and participated in the negotiations, directed by Wood and others, which led to the merger with Penn in 1993.

In 1988, the ARI moved from Lower Merion to its new quarters: an award-winning, \$7 million building funded by Annenberg. The beautiful new edifice was erected just three blocks south of the new location of congregation Mikveh Israel and the National Museum of American Jewish History. Soon afterwards, the Institute hired a new library director, Aviva Astrinsky. In just over a decade, she and her staff succeeded in fully automating almost the entire Dropsie collection of 180,000 volumes and organized the library's extensive manuscript and archival holdings.

Today the Center, under the leadership of David B. Ruderman, provides a forum for scholars from around the world to gather and discuss their particular fields of study. Ruderman has broadened the scope of topics and participants, organized numerous programs of education and outreach, built a local and national lecture series, and cultivated an atmosphere of interdisciplinary collegiality. Ruderman contributed to the development of the library by promoting the creation of a new position, a curatorship of Penn's Judaica collections, to manage the entirety of Judaica and Hebraica holdings throughout the Penn library system.

Jewish Studies at Penn now boasts a unique, and in some ways unrivalled concentration of strengths in terms of library resources, faculty members and the annual arrival of new fellows to the Center, many of whom also contribute to the life of the Penn community through teaching and lecturing. The Center for Judaic Studies preserves a tradition of scholarly activity practiced in Philadelphia since the eighteenth century. The CJS Library simultaneously supports and documents this history of enlightened bibliophilia in the service of humanistic learning. The legacy of Dropsie College and its library, in short, is a precis of one particular version of the cultural and intellectual formation of American Jewry. It also reveals the intimate and shared search for enlightenment that a variety of Philadelphians of different faiths and backgrounds have pursued over the last two hundred fifty years.