HERITAGE
Magazine of the American Jewish Historical Society

Gretel Bergmann.
USHMM #21683/Photograph courtesy of Margaret (Gretel Bergmann) Lambert.

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“A woman of valor, who can find? Her worth is far above jewels.” (Proverbs 31:10). Truer words have never been spoken. Starting with Sarah and continuing to Miriam, Deborah, Ruth and Esther, women played a pivotal role in preserving the Jewish people during biblical times.

It is no less the case in our own day. Passing down traditions and recipes, our “Bubbie” is possibly the strongest link connecting one generation to the next. On a more global scale, women’s organizations like Hadassah have been instrumental in maintaining support for the State of Israel and building medical and healthcare institutions in Israel and beyond. Individual women have also made an extraordinary impact. Challenging the international political machine, Avital Sharansky (the recipient of AJHS’s 2013 Emma Lazarus Award) made it possible for hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews to peacefully emigrate from the former Soviet Union. In the face of incredible odds and opposition, Avital became a world-renowned champion of human rights.

As this issue of HERITAGE makes clear, AJHS is deeply committed to highlighting the efforts and accomplishments of Jewish women. Our archives preserve thousands of cases of valiant women who have made a positive difference in the lives of Jews and non-Jews alike. I invite you to visit and explore their stories and help us uncover more remarkable accounts of bravery and selflessness throughout the decades and centuries. I also encourage you to support the Society’s ongoing efforts to document the lives of the women of valor who will shape our world in the years to come. It is only with your help that we can fulfill our mission and continue our remarkable journey. I hope you will join us.

Paul Warhit
I am honored to be the first woman to serve as Executive Director of AJHS. It is particularly meaningful to write this sentence in an issue of HERITAGE devoted to the topic of women in American Jewish history.

Storytelling, including the writing of history, is a key aspect of Jewish culture, one that has helped sustain our people for millennia. This notion was recently confirmed by the “Do You Know?” scale developed by Dr. Marshall Duke and Dr. Robyn Fivush of Emory University. In asking children questions about their family history, the study showed that knowledge of family history “yields greater health and happiness.” We at AJHS agree and believe that the American Jewish community’s awareness of its history is essential to its future vitality.

AJHS has remarkable stories to uncover and explore. We will share these stories in the most creative formats available today, while remaining a model of partnership, multidimensional programming, development, and online presence in American Jewish life. I look forward to working with our talented staff and bringing my lifelong passion for Jewish history and love for our community to AJHS.

Rachel Lithgow
On April 12, 1861, Confederate artillery fired on Charleston’s Fort Sumter. The Civil War had begun. As men donned blue or gray and marched off to battle, wives, mothers, and daughters bid them a tearful farewell. All would now lead very different lives.

In many ways, women North and South, Christian and Jew, had parallel experiences of the war. Separated from husbands, fathers and sons, they “trembled in suspense and fear,” as New Orleans teen Clara Solomon confided to her diary, to learn the fate of their loved ones. “Giving our all to our poor soldiers,” ardent secessionist Eugenia Levy Phillips wrote, meant spending hours packing boxes for soldiers and the wounded. Their breadwinners gone, women, whether on the Confederate home front, which became a world of white women and slaves, or in the North, found themselves managing the family economy and taking on roles formerly left to men.

Jewish women on both sides were ardent champions of their cause. Charleston’s Phoebe Yates Levy Pember proudly recalled how women of the South “had been openly and violently rebellious from the moment they thought their states’ rights touched.... They were the first to rebel—the last to succumb.” Eleanor Cohen and her family took refuge in Columbia, South Carolina, when their hometown of Charleston came under siege, running for their lives as General Sherman’s troops occupied the capital. “Oh, God, can I ever forget that day?” It made Eleanor’s “southern blood boil to see them [Yanks] in the streets!”

Occupation brought new trials. In May 1862, Union General Benjamin F. Butler declared “war upon the women” of New Orleans. Furious at their blatant scorn for his men, he ordered that any woman daring to “insult or show contempt” for any Union soldier “shall be regarded and... treated as a woman of the town plying her avocation.” If southern women would not behave like ladies, he would treat them just as they behaved.

The general’s most famous target was Confederate patriot Eugenia Levy Phillips. After “Beast” Butler (as he was called by New Orleans residents) arrested her for laughing at an officer’s funeral procession, she retorted she was simply “in good spirits” that day. Outraged, Butler sentenced her to three months imprisonment where, so Mrs. Phillips recalled, she was “treated worse than the vilest felon.” Eugenia Levy Phillips was not her family’s only patriot. Her sister Phoebe Pember, a 39-year-old widow, served the cause as matron of Hospital Division No. 2 in Richmond, Virginia’s sprawling Chimborazo complex. Pember was unusual, since southern women of her social class generally eschewed hospital nursing and its physical rigors. Pember recalled how, after the Battle at Fredericksburg, she “stood by and saw men’s fingers and arms cut off and held the brandy to their lips.” She nursed thousands until at the war’s conclusion all the sick “were either convalescent or dead” and her vocation at an end.

The war afforded women the opportunity not just to take on “men’s work,” but to participate in new organizations. For many Jewish women, this offered fresh possibilities for associating with non-Jews. Octavia Harby Moses, for instance, supported the war effort in Sumter, South Carolina. With five sons in the Confederate army, she organized a society to sew uniforms for the soldiers, sent off boxes filled with clothes and provisions, and met every train with food and blankets.

In the North, Jewish women worked just as mightily for soldiers’ aid. In Quincy, Illinois, 19-year-old Annie Jonas (later Annie Wells) joined women from the town’s leading families in the newly formed Needle Pickets. In synagogues in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Chicago, “the Ladies” of the congregation packed boxes of bandages, medicines, and preserves to send to soldiers in the field and to the wounded in hospital “irrespective of religious creed.”

Union women’s soldiers’ aid work was coordinated by the United States Sanitary Commission, established in 1861. To raise funds, the organization promoted sanitary fairs. Charging admission, selling homemade goods, offering refreshments and entertainment, these spectacles gave women a crucial venue for displaying their patriotism. After Washington, D.C.’s
Eleanor Cohen.
Courtesy of Special Collections, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston.
1864 sanitary fair, where the Hebrew table raised nearly a tenth of the day’s receipts, the Jewish press crowed: “All honor to our fair Jewesses!” Of course, for many women North and South, the paramount experience of war was not a sanitary fair, but rather the absence of their men. Caroline Frances Hamlin Spiegel, the wife of German Jewish immigrant Marcus Spiegel, was surely typical. She sent her husband his favorite foods and had a family portrait taken so Marcus could gaze upon his loved ones. For his part, Marcus managed to secure a furlough in time to be with Caroline during the birth of their fourth child; a subsequent leave left her again pregnant.

The war also presented new economic and political challenges. Caroline Spiegel asked Marcus how to manage the family finances and wanted to know about money he was owed and how much of his pay he was sending home. Annie Jonas found herself pleading with Union officers after her brother Charles H., a Confederate soldier, was taken prisoner. Charleston-born Septima Maria Levy Collis, who became a “Northener” when she married a Union officer, found herself in a similar situation. “I never fully realized the fratricidal character of the conflict,” she wrote, “until I lost my idolized brother Dave of the Southern army one day, and was nursing my Northern husband back to life the next.” To oblige her husband, Union General Rosecrans “made every effort” to locate the remains of her brother, Confederate Lieutenant David Cardoza Levy, killed at the battle of Murfreesborough, in Tennessee—but to no avail. “He lies to-day,” Collis reported, “God only knows where. Without a grave, unknelled, uncoffined, and unknown.”

For the Spiegels, the wartime separation challenged the marriage. Caroline confessed that she had “the blues.” Marcus recognized “the Heroism” his wife required “to lead the life” she was “compelled to live” since he went into the army. When the heroine pleaded for the soldier to resign his commission and come home, the colonel lectured her on duty to country and wished his wife were “a little more incoraging [sic] as to [his] military career.”

War’s end signified different things for Jewish women depending on where they stood in the War Between the States. Southerners, like Eleanor Cohen, wondered if they would ever forget “the deep sorrow, the humiliation, the agony of knowing we were to be under the Yankees.” Cohen especially despared over the loss of her slaves: “I, who believe in the institution of slavery, regret deeply its being abolished.” Women like Annie Jonas and Septima Collis, who had family members fighting on both sides of the divide, must have heaved a collective sigh of relief. But for so many others, Caroline Spiegel among them, surrender brought no respite from sorrow. War’s end left her a soldier’s widow with five children, one of hundreds of thousands of women, North and South, Christian and Jew, whose families had made the greatest sacrifice of all.

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A number of women in the Jewish-American Hall of Fame exhibited spunk (defined by *The Oxford Dictionary* as “courage and determination”). One little-known example is Ernestine Rose.

In 1826, 16-year old Ernestine Louise Potowski, the daughter of a rabbi in Piotrkov, Poland, showed her mettle when she dared to reject an arranged marriage. The teenager left her home within a year, traveling first to Germany, then Holland, finally settling in England. There she began her career as a public speaker in behalf of social reform that would lead to her nickname, “Queen of the Platform.” Ernestine married William Rose in 1836, and the couple subsequently emigrated to New York.

In 1847 Ernestine Rose had the courage to speak against slavery in South Carolina, the heart of the South, and was threatened with being tarred and feathered. By petitioning the New York State Assembly for 12 years, Rose led a successful campaign for passage in 1848 of the Married Woman's Property Bill, which allowed a woman to control her own assets after she was married.

At the first National Woman's Rights Convention, held in October 1850 in Worcester, Massachusetts, Ernestine spoke with “graceful style of eloquence,” having the moxie to ask: “We have heard a great deal of our Pilgrim Fathers but who has heard of the Pilgrim Mothers? Did they not endure as many perils, encounter as many hardships?”

When one newspaper omitted Ernestine from a list that included Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone and other “gifted women,” an editorial in the *Boston Investigator* proclaimed that “to omit her name is like playing Hamlet with the character of Hamlet left out.”

To read about other women (and men) in the Jewish-American Hall of Fame who showed spunk, visit www.amuseum.org/jahf.

The Jewish-American Hall of Fame was founded in 1969 and has been affiliated with the American Jewish Historical Society since 2001.
Sheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In* is a rallying cry for young women to seize control of their lives and careers. It’s a vital message for our times but one that, as historian Deborah Dash Moore shows, *fits in* with a long tradition of American self-help memoirs, including notable ones by other Jewish women.
Acclaimed as one of the world’s wealthiest businesswomen, Sheryl Sandberg has somewhat inadvertently stimulated renewed attention to Jewish women’s exceptional achievements. Her recent book, *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead* (2013) conveys a feminist-inflected message. Ambitious and talented women ought not sell themselves short as they seek to balance career and family life. But *Lean In* is not only impressive autobiography with a heavy dose of self-help advice; it evokes (without always acknowledging) a number of longstanding American and American Jewish themes.

*Lean In* has been frequently compared with a path-breaking book by another Jewish woman, Betty Friedan. In fact, Sandberg’s memoir shares polemical aspects with Friedan’s 1963 *The Feminine Mystique*, a work credited with helping launch a second wave of feminism in the United States that took the women’s movement well beyond the struggle for mere legal equality. However, unlike Friedan (who expressed surprise at the impact of *The Feminine Mystique*), Sandberg actually anticipates the possibility of creating a movement around her book. Toward this end she has established Lean In, a non-profit organization promoting change for women and girls.

Sandberg’s book has older pedigrees than Friedan. It resonates with another famous Jewish woman’s story, Mary Antin’s autobiography *The Promised Land*. This 1912 memoir of an immigrant from Polotzk to 19th-century Boston recalls the arc of slave narratives as well as Christian “born again” themes and Enlightenment ideals of the re-creation of self.

“I was born, I have lived, and I have been made over… Is it not time to write my life story?” Antin asks in her famous opening. Her question could aptly characterize Sandberg since she, too, traces an account of self-transformation. In Sandberg’s case, she describes herself as a high academic achiever, a rather bossy sister, and someone who was convinced she needed to marry after college (which she did). Only after that marriage quickly ended did Sandberg seek out the challenges that would lead to her phenomenal success. Veering from the established and preferred path for women turned out to be crucial to her accomplishments.

As the historian Werner Sollors observes in his introduction to the centennial reissue of Antin’s book, Antin asks her readers, “Should I be sitting here, chattering of my infantile adventures, if I did not know that I was speaking for thousands?” Sandberg, too, imagines that she is speaking for thousands. She repeatedly references data on women in the workplace to complement her own personal story. *Lean In*’s strong showing on The New York Times bestseller list appears to justify her assumption.

In addition to these links to the earlier writings of American Jewish women like Antin and Friedan, Sandberg’s success story inevitably brings to mind Benjamin Franklin’s classic autobiography. Franklin begins by addressing his son: “Having emerged from the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a stage of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world,” not to mention enjoying considerable “felicity,” he deems it worthwhile to compose an autobiography “fit to be imitated.” Sandberg, too, has acquired both enormous wealth and reputation, although she did not grow up in either poverty or obscurity but rather in an upper-middle-class Jewish home. Nevertheless, her ascent is dizzying. She occupies an enviable position as a woman at the top of one of the newest Internet industries. She sits on Facebook’s board of directors, the only woman to do so. And she, too, writes her life story because she implicitly sees it “fit to be imitated.”

Sandberg begins her book: “I got pregnant with my first child in the summer of 2004. At the time I was running the online sales and operations groups at Google.” Lest readers think she walked into a famous, established company, she explains. “I had joined the company three and a half years earlier when it was an obscure start-up with a few hundred employees in a rundown office building.” This is an opening worthy of both Franklin and Antin. Sandberg begins at a moment of transformation: she is months away from becoming a mother, and Google is similarly poised to become “a company of thousands” located in a “multibuilding campus.” Of course, joining a company with hundreds of employees hardly matches arriving unemployed in Philadelphia with a loaf of bread under your arm as Franklin did. Nevertheless, Sandberg’s

Dr. Joel Sandberg and Adele Sandberg were co-founders of the South Florida Conference on Soviet Jewry (SFCSJ). During the late 1970s and through the 1980s, SFCSJ published a series of books that documented up-to-date histories of Soviet Jewish refuseniks, which served as an essential resource for activists worldwide. In the photo below, the Sandbergs present volumes of the case histories to Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin circa 1980. AJHS holds the Joel and Adele Sandberg Papers.
rise from a typical Jewish household where her father, Joel, a prominent Miami physician, earned a sufficient livelihood to support the entire family to a position of wealth and power still takes one’s breath away.

Sandberg speaks occasionally of her Jewish identity, but it does not play a major role in her account, despite the fact that a careful reader can trace significant Jewish connections, from Larry Summers to Sergei Brin to Mark Zuckerberg. These men recognized her talents, nurtured and guided her ambition, and benefited from her achievements. Sandberg pays credit to her grandmother’s energetic efforts to support her family during the difficult Depression years; and she acknowledges the decision by her mother, Adele, to forego an advanced degree for a life as a wife and mother. Although Sandberg mentions her parents’ political engagement on behalf of Soviet Jewry in the 1970s, she does not portray that extraordinary activism as a valued form of “leaning in”. Yet her mother not only risked arrest in the Soviet Union in 1975 (Adele and Joel were detained and interrogated in Kishinev and then expelled from the USSR), but she also co-edited a series of books documenting case histories of refuseniks. Understandably, given Sandberg’s age at the time (she was born in 1969), she would not necessarily have been aware of this. However, considering her larger argument about the importance of ambition for women, she might have reflected more on these significant forms of female philanthropic and political activism.

Lean In also calls to mind pragmatic Jewish businesswomen who preceded her and helped lay the groundwork for her career. Sandberg’s rise follows, for instance, that of American Jewish women such as Helena Rubenstein and Estee Lauder, self-made millionaires who helped make cosmetics into one of the growth industries of the 20th century. But Sandberg does not choose to depict herself in light of this particular trajectory, perhaps because their careers were crucially abetted by family and ethnic ties, factors she seems hesitant to emphasize.

There is a potentially Jewish vision for women’s economic vitality buried in Lean In. It would be interesting indeed if Sandberg were to situate her work, career and aspirations in a broader context, both Jewish and American, that might expose some of the deeper roots of her own extraordinary ascent.

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“ONLY AFTER THAT MARRIAGE QUICKLY ENDED DID SANDBERG SEEK OUT THE CHALLENGES THAT WOULD LEAD TO HER PHENOMENAL SUCCESS. VEERING FROM THE ESTABLISHED AND PREFERRED PATH FOR WOMEN TURNED OUT TO BE CRUCIAL TO HER ACCOMPLISHMENTS”
The discrimination that surrounded Jewish athletes in the 1936 Olympic games and the atrocities against Israeli athletes in Munich 1972 are forever seared in Jewish hearts and memories. Less well-known but perhaps more relevant today is the constant refusal of athletes from Arab nations to go to the mat, fair and square, in competition against Israelis. Several Olympiads ago, an Iranian wrestler was honored by his government with a $25,000 award for refusing to take on a “Zionist.”

However, in the checkered history of the Olympics, some bright moments of Jewish pride have shone through—even in dark and troubling times. One of the bleakest episodes took place in 1936, when the American Olympic Committee (AOC) refused to boycott the games in protest against German anti-Semitism. On the contrary, the AOC swallowed whole the Nazi’s pledge that all competitors would be treated with respect and manifestations of Jew-hatred would not mar the games.

The Jewish community knew better and responded forcefully. The Jewish Labor Committee organized its own counter-Olympics on New York’s Randall’s Island. Less noticed but no less meaningful was the heroic statement of Charlotte “Eppie” Epstein. Her personal protest to a world not attuned to the anguish of Jews is worth recalling today.

“IN THE CHECKERED HISTORY OF THE OLYMPICS, SOME BRIGHT MOMENTS OF JEWISH PRIDE HAVE SHONE THROUGH—EVEN IN DARK AND TROUBLING TIMES.”

Epstein was slated to lead the entire 1936 American swim team to the natatorium in Berlin. She earned this rare honor with her nationally recognized athletic leadership. Epstein, known as the “Mother of Women’s Swimming in America,” had been instrumental in forming the Women’s Swimming Association and was team manager of the American women’s swim team at the 1920 Olympics—the first to admit females to the competitions. Epstein demonstrated her Jewish leadership when, prior to the 1936 tryouts, she made clear to all concerned that she “would not go to Germany under Hitler” and resigned her position.

She was prescient in recognizing the Nazis would not play according to the rules. Another prominent female Jewish athlete, the German high jumper Gretel Bergmann, was stripped by the Nazi regime of her German records and dismissed from the track-and-field squad two weeks before the opening ceremonies. Unlike Bergmann (who would
Gretel Bergmann.
USHMM #21683/Photograph courtesy of Margaret (Gretel Bergmann) Lambert.
emigrate to the United States in 1937), as an American, Epstein was in a position to fight back, though doing so could risk her reputation and standing. She bravely recruited other elite Jewish women athletes to join her boycott. Among the dissenters was track-and-field star Lillian Copeland, who had earned a gold medal four years earlier at the Los Angeles games and had been eager to return to the international limelight. Demure in her defiance, Epstein instructed another teammate wishing to make the squad simply in order to “thumb her nose at Hitler” that such a demonstration would ill serve the cause. The best protest, Epstein suggested, was to stay home.

Three generations later, American Jewish gymnast Aly (Alexandra) Raisman made another ultimately profound statement of Jewish pride when she, too, took on an unfeeling Olympic establishment. Her gold-medal performance during the floor exercises at the 2012 Olympics linked her in spirit to Charlotte Epstein, whose protests had by then become but a footnote to a tragic history. In the run-up to the London games, the Israeli delegation, with the support of Jewish groups worldwide, requested that official note be taken of the 40th anniversary of the slaughter of 11 of its Olympic athletes by Palestinian terrorists. The International Olympic Committee refused, asserting it had “officially paid tribute to the memory of the athletes on several occasions.”

Critics—Jews and non-Jews—saw the committee as again hiding behind its time-weary insistence that politics have no place at an Olympic display of international comity (which in fact was, as always, rife with politics). Those who marked the Munich atrocity were resigned to offer their tribute out of sight of the established venues; although one American television commentator, NBC’s Bob Costas, did observe his own moment of silence while reporting the marching in of the Israeli delegation to London Olympic Stadium.

Ostensibly, when Raisman began her floor-exercise performance to the beat of *Hava Nagila*—that well-known tune—as she spun, flipped and jumped, the athlete was simply demonstrating her extraordinary capabilities and influencing the judges in her favor. But in so doing, the gymnast also brought the Jewish realities of 1972 into the 2012 Olympics, sending a message to her international audience that could not be ignored. After descending from the victory podium with her gold medal, Raisman made clear the song choice, though not intended as a political statement, had been important as “something from my Jewish heritage… The fact that it was on the 40th anniversary [of the murders] made it special.”

Fittingly, Aly Raisman was recently honored with the torch lighting at the opening of the 2013 Maccabiah Games; a tribute that she shares spiritually with Charlotte Epstein and her gifted fellow athletic sisters, who stood up for Jewish pride.

Jeffrey S. Gurock is Libby M. Klaperman Professor of Jewish history at Yeshiva University and a former chair of the Academic Council of the AJHS.
COMING SOON
THE BRAND-NEW EDITION OF JEWISH MAJOR LEAGUERS!

Back by popular demand, produced for AJHS by Jewish Major Leaguers, Inc. and the Topps Company, the 6th edition of this legendary baseball card series. It includes updates on all players since the 2010 season, along with the usual collection of historical oddball notes, career leaders, all-time roster, Team Israel in the World Baseball Classic, “in memoriam” cards, and other treats. A perfect gift item! The new series will be available at AJHS.org starting March 2014.
On May 28, 2013 the American Jewish Historical Society gave its highest honor, the Emma Lazarus Statue of Liberty Award, to Avital Sharansky. The award acknowledges Avital’s heroic efforts to free her husband, Natan Sharansky, held captive in a Soviet forced-labor camp for nine years, and gives overdue recognition to Avital’s leadership in the global campaign to liberate all Soviet Jews.

Dignitaries including former Secretary of State George Shultz, Secretary of the Treasury Jacob Lew, prominent veterans of the Soviet Jewry movement, and her husband Natan, paid tribute to Avital’s remarkable accomplishments. The award was presented by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and author, Professor Elie Wiesel.

*Photo from the Emma Lazarus tribute and transcripts of the events speeches have been compiled in a beautiful journal available for purchase at AJHS.org.*
Sisters and Strangers:
Hannah Arendt & Lucy Dawidowicz

By Nancy Sinkoff

Two Jewish women, Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) and Lucy S. Dawidowicz (1915-1990), played pivotal roles in the crystallization of Holocaust consciousness in postwar America. Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963) and Dawidowicz’s *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945* (1975) helped shape public and academic discussions on the relationship of Jews to political power, anti-Semitism and the “Final Solution,” and the response of Jewish leaders to the Nazi campaign to annihilate the Jews of Europe.

Arendt’s and Dawidowicz’s conflicting perspectives on the destruction of European Jewry recalled longstanding debates in the Jewish community—questions about whether Jews should maintain principal loyalties to fellow Jews or embrace the universalist perspective of the Enlightenment, and whether they should assimilate and pursue individual freedom or maintain a distinctive collective and national identity. These timeworn questions continued to preoccupy Jewish intellectuals throughout the 20th century. The fact that women, Arendt and Dawidowicz, were advancing different sides of these debates appears significant to us now, yet in their own time neither emphasized her sex as a significant element of her thought process or public role.

Although a decade and a continent divided their births, Arendt and Dawidowicz shared several biographical experiences. Both worked in postwar Europe with Jewish refugees; aided in the restitution of Jewish property looted by the Nazis and others; and traversed the circles of the Jewish intelligentsia in New York (including such luminaries as Salo Baron, Norman Podhoretz, Alfred Kazin, Irving Howe, and Marie Syrkin). Arendt and Dawidowicz likewise wrote in English for the American and Jewish audiences, as well as in their respective mother tongues, German and Yiddish.

Indeed, we might well understand Arendt’s and Dawidowicz’s worldviews as two sides of the fabric of Ashkenazic civilization torn by the advent of modernity. Many West European Jews encountered the modern world as individuals for whom the bonds of traditional ethnic and religious life had already largely dissolved. In contrast, for a sizable proportion of Jews in Eastern Europe, these bonds were still essentially intact, even though traditional religion was rapidly becoming displaced by Jewish nationalist ideologies of one kind or another. Paradoxically, these “Western” and “Eastern” identities were constructed in close relationship to one another. Beginning in the late 18th century, the ideas of the European Enlightenment and the political process of emancipation propelled German-speaking Jewry to define itself in sharp contrast to “backward” East European Jewry; while many Jews in the East, especially by the late 19th century, wished to avoid the fate of excessive “assimilation” associated with their Western brethren.

Curiously, the writings and the personae of these two remarkable thinkers represented a perpetuation of this old conflict, now transposed to the world of New York Jewish intellectuals.

Born in Hanover, Germany, Arendt studied philosophy at the Universities of Marburg, Freiburg, and Heidelberg, but fled her native land after Hitler came to power. She went to Paris, where she worked for the Zionist organization Youth Aliyah, serving as general secretary of its French branch until 1938. In 1941 she escaped to the United States, where two years later, she began writing for English-language journals, including *Partisan Review*, the all-important organ of New York intellectuals. From 1944 to 1948 she...
was research director of the Conference on Jewish Relations and chief editor of Schocken Books. From 1949 to 1952, Arendt was executive director of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc. (JCR), a U.S. government organization founded in 1947 and empowered to restitution Jewish cultural property stolen by the Nazis. Literate, literary, and engaged with high culture, particularly politics, in 1967 Arendt began teaching at the New School for Social Research, a progressive institution that was home to several prominent German-Jewish refugee intellectuals. This position solidified her reputation as a cosmopolitan for whom Jewishness had ceased to be the primary loyalty.

Arendt's Origins of Totalitarianism (1951), which considered Nazism and Soviet Communism analogous forms of state terror, was hailed as a brilliant study of the horrors of modern bureaucratic society. But Eichmann in Jerusalem ignited a storm of protest among her peers, who criticized the book's two central claims: first, that Nazism had been the product of the totalizing bureaucratization of modern life and not of ideological hatred of the Jew; and second, that the Jews of Europe, particularly their leaders, had been complicit in the Final Solution. Even some of Arendt's closest friends were shocked by what they regarded as the book's dismissive tone and callous assumptions about the options available to the victims facing Nazi brutality.

Dawidowicz's identification with the Jews of Poland anchored her perspective on the destruction of European Jewry. Born in New York to a Polish Jewish immigrant family, Dawidowicz attended a public school and college, and also received a supplemental Yiddish education through the politically non-partisan Scholem Aleichem Folk Institute dedicated to the principles of Diaspora Nationalism. In 1938, she sailed to Poland to be a graduate fellow at the Vilna YIVO, the independent Yiddishist institution devoted to the study of East European Jewish life. Fleeing Poland in late August 1939, Dawidowicz returned to Europe in 1946 to work with displaced persons in the American zone of occupied Germany. After helping to salvage YIVO's plundered library, she sailed back to New York City and went to work for the American Jewish Committee in its research division, out of the public eye. In 1967, she published The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe, an anthology of East European Jewish autobiographical writing, followed by The War Against the Jews, works that emphasized the vitality, diversity, and spirit of Polish Jewish culture. In 1968, she began teaching at Yeshiva University's Stern College for Women, inaugurating the formal study of the Holocaust on the American college campus.

In contrast to Arendt, who famously had expressed discomfort with national belonging in a letter to her friend Gershom Scholem, for Dawidowicz cosmopolitanism that made no room for Jewish distinctiveness was anathema. Indeed, it is likely that Dawidowicz wrote The War Against the Jews as a counterpoint to Arendt's claims in Eichmann. “Part One, The Final Solution,” posited that Hitler's ideological anti-Semitism, already evident in Mein Kampf (1925-1926), defined the blueprint for the extermination of the Jews. “Part Two, The Holocaust,” argued that European Jewry, in particular the vast community of Polish Jews that comprised almost one-quarter of the world Jewish population in 1939, had met Nazism with political, cultural, and spiritual resiliency in order to assert the collective Jewish will to live.

As postwar political thinkers, both Arendt and Dawidowicz were preoccupied with the security of the Jews in the modern world. Yet their conclusions regarding the role of Jewish leadership (the Judenräte, or Jewish councils) during World War II were diametrically opposed. In Eichmann, Arendt claimed, “Wherever Jews lived, there were recognized Jewish leaders, and this leadership, almost without exception, cooperated in one way or another, for one reason or another, with the Nazis.” Dawidowicz fired back in The War Against the Jews, “For all their weaknesses, failings, and wrongdoings, [the Jewish leaders] were not traitors... No Jew ever hoped for a New Order in Europe. The officials of the Judenräte were coerced by German terror to submit and comply. To say that they ‘cooperated’ or ‘collaborated’ with the Germans is semantic confusion and historical misrepresentation.”

The New York intellectuals celebrated Arendt in 1951 with Origins and then anathematized her when Eichmann appeared. They barely knew Dawidowicz before 1967, but increasingly looked to her as the authentic interpreter of the European catastrophe and East European Jewish culture as they began to embrace Jewish particularism in the 1970s. Juxtaposing the reception of Arendt and Dawidowicz by the New York intellectuals anchors all their experiences in the much larger story of the complex ways in which Ashkenazic Jewry, both Western and Eastern, encountered the modern world.

The Arendt-Dawidowicz divide was part of a long history of Jewish intellectual negotiations with Enlightenment universalism and Jewish national identification. In the mid-20th century—and far away from the European Jewish heartland—these two unusual Jewish women were part of that continuum.

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HADASSAH’S HIDDEN HERO

Rose Halprin speaking with Yitzhak Rabin, then outgoing Israeli Ambassador to the United States, at a farewell luncheon in his honor, 1973. Photograph by Alexander Archer, courtesy of Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America, Inc.
The Hadassah Collections, stored at the American Jewish Historical Society, provide an unmatched resource for the investigation of Jewish women’s experiences in 20th-century America. Archivist Susan Woodland offers a glimpse of their treasures in her depiction of several of the organization’s unsung leaders.
The path-breaking Zionist women’s group Hadassah is nearly synonymous with one towering individual, its founder Henrietta Szold. Szold was the moving force behind the development of the national fundraising machine Hadassah became, as well as the projects Hadassah chose to support. But Hadassah did not survive and grow for 100 years because of Szold alone. Many other brilliant, dynamic Hadassah leaders followed her example, women such as Alice Seligsberg, Rose Halprin, and Judith Epstein, who deserve greater recognition by historians and American Jews today.

Alice Seligsberg was born in New York City in 1873 and was a graduate of Barnard College. She was raised by Jewish parents in the Ethical Culture movement and, according to Rose Jacobs in her biographical essay in the 1941 American Jewish Year Book, Seligsberg’s “humanitarianism grew out of her extraordinarily strong and exacting sense of justice.” She identified with the Jewish community only after studying the ethical bases of Judaism, useful in her professional work with children and as a social worker. She came to Hadassah’s rescue twice: first in 1918, when Szold desperately needed a replacement director to lead the American Zionist Medical Unit through its first year in Jerusalem; and second in 1920, when Szold planned to move to Palestine to supervise the growing medical organization there and turned to Seligsberg to take over the presidency of Hadassah in New York. Seligsberg served two years as national president, from 1921 to 1923, when it was clear that Hadassah would survive Szold’s absence.

In her professional life apart from Hadassah, Seligsberg was responsible for the establishment in New York of a central agency for the study and allocation of dependent children, the Jewish Children’s Clearing Bureau, and worked as its first executive director from 1922 until a few years before she died in 1940.

Seligsberg’s strengths revolved around her ability to study the details of a challenging situation and arrive at a carefully considered resolution. Szold remarked upon this quality in a letter to former Hadassah national president Rose Jacobs, shortly after Seligsberg’s death. “How often,” Szold recalled, “when I was faced by a (for me) momentous decision, I found myself asking how Alice would approach the solution of my problem, how she would dissect and analyze it, how she would relate it to her past, to her surroundings, to the vital things of existence.”

The polar opposite of Seligsberg in temperament, Rose Halprin was born into a family of Zionists in New York City in 1896. If Seligsberg’s contribution to Hadassah lay in her careful leadership style, attention to detail, and professional training as a social worker, Halprin fought fiercely to maintain Hadassah’s independence in the male-dominated world of American Zionism. According to Marlin Levin’s oral history, Halprin joined Hadassah in about 1927 and within two years became a member of the national board. A few months after the start of her first term as president (1932-1934), Halprin wrote in Hadassah Newsletter about Hadassah’s evolution from a group of ladies that raised lots of money to a savvy body of strong women who successfully fought other American Zionists to maintain control over the allocation of their funds.

Halprin led the fight to assert Hadassah’s political clout as well. Recalling the struggle to win representation for Hadassah’s national board at the 1932 World Zionist Congress, she insisted that Hadassah representatives constitute one-half the number of delegates to which the General Zionists of America were entitled, noting that “this request registered our coming of age...It was no idle resolution, but the well considered statement of the duly accredited representatives of 30,000 Zionist women that they were aware of their mature responsibilities, and were prepared to meet them.” Halprin might have been talking about Jewish women rather than just Zionism when she proclaimed their “historic task of rebuilding a home and rehabilitating a people.”

It appears that a biography longer than a page has yet to be written of Judith Epstein. The Hadassah archives contain two boxes of her correspondence and reports, mostly from her extremely busy years in the 1930s and 1940s, as well as some other material scattered throughout the Hadassah collections. Born in 1895 to a family of Zionists in Worcester, Massachusetts, Epstein graduated from Hunter College in 1916 and taught English at Julia Richman High School in Manhattan. Judith’s mother was an early member of Hadassah, and at the time of Judith’s marriage to a man that already shared her last name, Moses P. Epstein, Judith joined the organization as well.
In Hadassah Epstein found an ideal focus for her leadership skills, her wise instincts, and her warm personality. As national president of Hadassah (her first term spanned from 1937 to 1939), she led delegations to the two World Zionist Congresses prior to the start of WWII, in each case demonstrating an awareness of the ominous times ahead. Subsequent to the 1939 Congress in Geneva, she noted that the American delegates knew they would not be seeing many of their European colleagues again. Britain and France declared war on Germany a day after her ship departed for New York. In her October 1943 speech accepting the Hadassah presidency for a second time, Epstein asked, “Is it too much to ask our own government, friend and champion of the underprivileged and oppressed, to stand forth and demand justice for the Jew through the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth?” As president of Hadassah she gave testimony at a 1946 hearing of the House of Representatives Foreign Relations Committee, recommending Israeli statehood and emphasizing the promise of Arab-Jewish reconciliation offered by Hadassah’s medical care for all denizens of British Mandate Palestine. “What I have tried to stress here in presenting the health work in some detail is the effective weapon which I believe it to be for bridging the gap between Arab and Jew, and supplying the means to bring two sections of the population together for the common good of the country and the whole population.”

Hadassah’s membership grew rapidly during the decade that framed Epstein’s presidencies. In 1947, under her leadership, Hadassah became the largest Zionist organization in the world. When Rose Halprin took over from Epstein as president in October 1947 both women worked to mobilize Hadassah’s 250,000 members to rally favor for the United Nations vote to partition Palestine, which successfully passed on November 29, 1947. Epstein remained active on the national board of Hadassah for more than 50 years, until her death in 1988.

For many decades Hadassah was led by women born too early to have been businesswomen, lawyers, doctors, or politicians of the highest level. Hadassah provided an outlet for these exceptional women, who directed their considerable talents to facilitating momentous changes in the lives of the Jewish people. Never married, Seligsberg was able to continue working as a professional throughout her life. In contrast, for Rose Halprin and Judith Epstein, involved in Hadassah soon after their marriages, further study or paid work outside the home was deemed inappropriate. All three thrived at Hadassah in the absence of paid outlets for their leadership skills. Alice Seligsberg: devoted to colleagues, family, and those helped through her social services work. Rose Halprin: determined to forge a powerful and fully independent women’s Zionist organization. And Judith Epstein: committed to building Hadassah into a dynamic and powerful organization. Their collective impact is palpable though their individual legacies have been unjustly forgotten.

Susan Woodland is an AJHS Senior Archivist and former archivist of the Hadassah Collection.
A JHS holds many significant collections of archival material documenting women’s history in America. The AJHS Personal Collections include:

- Letters of Abigail Franks, a pre-Revolutionary War New Yorker, whose long descriptive writings to her son in London provide rare insight into the daily life and activities of an upper-class Jewish New York family.
- Letters and scrapbooks of Alice Davis Menken, scion of a venerable New York Jewish family and pioneering penologist, who devoted her life to helping Jewish and non-Jewish girls escape lives of delinquency and crime.
- Papers of Lucy Dawidowicz, one of the first historians to come to grips with the full scope and profound evil of the Holocaust.

The AJHS Women’s Institutional Collections include significant holdings from:

- AMIT—the largest women’s religious-Zionist organization in the world.
- Women’s Division of the American Jewish Congress—which mobilized Jewish women for the cause of human rights, and in 1934 became the first American Jewish organization to call for the boycott of Nazi goods.
- Hadassah—whose archives, owned by Hadassah, Inc., have long been housed at AJHS New York.

Many additional AJHS archival collections contain the documents, letters, photos, and personal diaries of American Jewish women actively participating in and influencing American Jewish life.

United Jewish Appeal/Federation of North America Greater New York archives project

AJHS is just past the halfway mark of a four-year project to appraise, process, and preserve the voluminous records of the UJA and the Federation of New York. This historic collection will provide profound insight into the philanthropic activities of several generations of Jewish donors and the social service agencies, summer camps, job placement organizations, hospitals, senior citizen centers, and other community services that received funding. The Oral History Collection—over 200 transcripts, audio cassettes, and files of prominent members of the Federation of New York—is now completely available online at access.cjh.org. Read about the progress of this entire project and some of its exciting discoveries on the weekly blog thiscangobacktothearchives.wordpress.com.

American Jewish History portal

Visit the Portal to American Jewish History—a digital guide to a wide array of archives holding historical documents on Jews in America—at www.jewsinamerica.org. The portal provides access to far-flung collections and a single gateway to many others. This fall, AJHS is working with the Pratt School of Information and Library Science to add several regional Jewish Historical Society holdings to the portal, including those of the Jewish Historical Societies of Cleveland; Charleston, South Carolina; and Pittsburgh.

Other updates

- AJHS will loan nine objects from its peerless Jews in Sports Collection to The National Museum of American Jewish History’s 2014 baseball exhibit, Chasing Dreams. Included are a Sandy Koufax rookie jersey from 1955, a Hank Greenberg bat, and Moe Berg’s handwritten scorecard of Don Larsen’s perfect game in the 1956 World Series.

- AJHS Senior Archivist Tanya Elder was recognized by the Mid Atlantic Regional Archives Conference for her writing of the Mordecai Sheftall Papers finding aid, which contains embedded links to every Revolutionary War provision return within the collection. The finding aid also includes a searchable database for genealogists under the heading DATABASE:http://findingaids.cjh.org/?pID=1358081.

- The 200+ AJHS images now on the Center for Jewish History’s Flickr site have been viewed almost 25,000 times, which is over 1,000 views on average per image. Visit www.flickr.com/photos/center_for_jewish_history/sets/721576160832504049 and feel free to leave a comment!

Susan Malbin is Director of Library and Archives at AJHS.
PASSAGES THROUGH THE FIRE

JEWKS and the CIVIL WAR

THE EXHIBITION COMPANION VOLUME, FEATURING A FORWARD BY KEN BURNS, IS NOW AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE AT AJHS.ORG.
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