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Exhibiting Cultural Philanthropy: Women, Power, and Museums in Jewish America, 1920-1970

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia,
in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

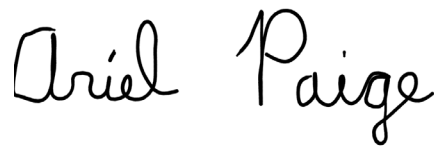
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Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ariel Paige". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Abstract

Exhibiting Cultural Philanthropy: Women, Power, and Museums in Jewish America, 1920-1970 argues that women spearheaded the movement to create Jewish museums in the U.S. and inspired the foundation of other culturally specific museums. Charting the emergence of Jewish public art spaces and recovering the invisible labor of the women who founded them, this dissertation focuses on four forgotten women and their influential approaches to the making of Jewish and American material culture. Beginning in 1921 and ending in 1970, this dissertation explains how women pioneered new forms of public culture that became central to Jewish communal life. Across the middle decades of the twentieth century, between American antisemitism, the Holocaust in Europe, the birth of Israel, civil rights struggles, and second wave feminism, women etched Jews into the fabric of American life through museums. Despite the tremendous amount of scholarship on American Jewish culture, these women are surprisingly still forgotten. This dissertation is in line with a new turn to reexamining philanthropy and social citizenship through critical perspectives on power and identity and recovering forgotten historical actors. Excluded from Jewish communal leadership because of their gender, these four women collectively forged places for themselves as the first generation of Jewish curators and cultural philanthropists. They imagined a relationship with the Jewish past that was essential to the creation of a new Jewish American public identity in their own time.

Acknowledgements

It is both a pleasure and a challenge to acknowledge the many ways in which my mentor, Dr. James Loeffler, made this dissertation possible. His grace, patience, kindness, and generosity of spirit always felt unparalleled to me both for teachers within the academy and mentors outside of it. His unwavering support formed the bedrock of a five-year exploration into the lives of several fascinating American Jewish women and the cultural institutions they created. As I explored many research paths along the way, most of which I left untaken, Dr. Loeffler guided me with a gentle hand toward the appropriate archival resources and toward my own inner voice – somehow, at once. He worked tirelessly to ensure that I could locate my ideas within broader conversations in various fields, and that my work had the potential to foster new kinds of discourse about art, Jewish institutions, and gender. He helped me to attain important outside fellowship support for archival research and to work alongside other scholars in the field. And most of all, as an extraordinary teacher and mentor and an exceptional human being, he modeled what it could mean to be a scholar engaged with the world around him. I watched his students come alive in his courses – and as his teaching assistant, I, too, came alive in his courses. I know that his next generation of students will say these same things about him.

Several other individuals at the University of Virginia were crucial to my development as a scholar and an individual in my five years in the PhD program. I will never forget that as someone with extended family, friends, and a partner in New York deciding between staying and moving to Charlottesville, I was convinced primarily by a wonderful Religious Studies professor insisting that the local Whole Foods had Challah shaped like hearts for Valentine’s Day. “Don’t worry,” she said, “There are Jews here!” Dr. Vanessa Ochs’s early interest in my dissertation

topic, her unique specialization in Jewish feminism, and her experience as an activist for women in various spaces have made her a terrific second mentor figure and a delightful friend. Intimate Shabbat dinners and bigger gatherings and receptions in the home of Drs. Vanessa and Peter Ochs have been forever etched into my heart. Dr. Asher Biemann, a brilliant thinker, a magnificent teacher, and an expert leader of the Jewish Studies program in my first few years at UVA, ensured my ideas were germinating in a large sea of diverse ideological frameworks. His help and guidance were especially instrumental to the research phase of this project. His famous Jewish Studies fellows gatherings left no idea unsaid and no mouth unfed (with homemade hummus to boot). He was, and always will be, one of my favorite people to walk in nature with and talk about philosophy and religion.

Outside of UVA, other scholars have encouraged me think bigger and deepen my engagement with topics related to this dissertation. Dr. Pamela Nadell's approach to the histories of Jewish women and Dr. Lila Corwin Berman's work on Jewish philanthropy have both inspired my own work more than I can describe here. Since her visit to UVA in 2018, Dr. Nadell has supported my work from afar in D.C. by writing letters of recommendation on my behalf and helping me think through my broader contributions to the field. She is a gracious and generous outside dissertation reader. Lauren Strauss's studies of Jewish art have encouraged me to think broadly about categories of Jewishness, politics, and art. Our informal conversations and her mentorship have been instrumental to my career trajectory.

Before Charlottesville, my time in New York was filled with mentors and teachers at the Jewish Theological Seminary who led by example and taught me what it meant to be a scholar-activist. Chancellor Shuly Rubin Schwartz was the first person I ever worked with as a teaching assistant, and her mentorship was instrumental to my path toward UVA. The introduction to her

2006 book, *The Rabbi's Wife: The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life*, laments the loss of “missing box 14” of the Rubenovitz papers: the box of Mignon Rubenovitz, the subject of one of chapters of this dissertation. Rubin Schwartz’s groundbreaking work as a scholar and a leader has ripple effects into this dissertation and into the broader community, as we all can see. Dr. Ismar Schorsch supervised my master’s degree work at the Jewish Theological Seminary and was one of the people who first helped me think like a historian. Dr. Barbara Mann helped me think like an artist by teaching me about the Jewishness of graphic novels and Israeli feminist poetry. Dr. Grace Cohen Grossman’s guidance and memories of oral histories she conducted decades ago contributed immensely to this dissertation and continue to enhance my understanding of the history of Jewish exhibitions. Dr. Idana Goldberg’s short article on Therese Loeb Schiff inspired me to do more detective work on female Jewish philanthropists in the early 20th century, including Therese’s daughter Frieda Schiff Warburg. Scholars whose work predated mine, including Vivian Mann (B’H), laid the groundwork for Jewish art as a field at JTS and elsewhere, and for this study of Jewish art.

The surviving relatives and friends of each of the four women in this dissertation were instrumental to its completion. Their willingness to engage with a researcher of their families was striking and gratifying. The legendary Jewish nonprofit leader Ruth Messinger, who is also the daughter of Marjorie Wyler (former JTS head of Public Relations), helped me map out the women who worked at the Seminary in the early 20th century and understand Anna Kleban’s role within this network. Kleban’s deceased niece’s memoirs were helpful as well. Bennett Kayser and his sons Noah and Nathan helped me to understand their (great-)grandparents, Louise and Stephen Kayser. So did Kayser’s former students and colleagues such as Dr. Steven Fine at Yeshiva University and Grace Cohen Grossman at the Smithsonian. Frieda Schiff Warburg’s

descendants on many sides of the family such as David Schiff, her brother's grandson, and Frederick Warburg, her daughter Carola Rothschild's grandson, offered intimate memories that enhanced the stories of this dissertation.

Several institutions made this dissertation possible by funding its research. The Hadassah-Brandeis Institute awarded two grants to this project in 2019 and 2020. At the University of Virginia, the Buckner Clay Endowment in Global Humanities, the Americas Center, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation UVA Graduate Fund, the Corcoran Department of History, and the Rachel Winer Manin Interdisciplinary Graduate Fund each helped me travel to archives and to conduct oral interviews. The American Academy for Jewish Research allowed me to travel to primary source collections in the summers of 2019 and 2020. The Center for Jewish History yearlong graduate fellowship supported my move to New York in 2019, and the New York Public Library-Fordham University short-term fellowship supported my staying to the end of 2020 to do research and interviews. The Myer & Rosaline Feinstein Center for American Jewish History grant helped support my summer research in 2020. Lastly, the Jefferson Foundation Graduate Fellowship ensured I could focus fully on my studies without the distractions of teaching or other part-time work. For that I am immeasurably grateful.

Above all, my family was the starting point of this dissertation. My dad David has guided me toward the tools to write my own story since I was born. He taught me I could accomplish anything I imagined, and as I get older, I understand the power of the example he set as somebody with a vision and a relentless drive. My mom Laurie taught me that empathy and forgiveness are secret superpowers, and that you don't need public recognition or to be in the limelight to play a powerful role in many peoples' lives. Thanks to her selflessness and

dedication, I survived the past 5 years of writing this thing. This dissertation is dedicated to my parents.

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Introduction

Perhaps it was appropriate that the first Jewish women's organization in the United States grew out of a conflict about a museum exhibition. The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) was fashioned from the limitations of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, which showcased cultures and religions in America and around the world but failed to include the voices of Jewish women. Born out of the unsuccessful attempts of several Jewish women to help shape the representation of Jews and of women at the World's Fair, NCJW aimed to give Jewish women an avenue through which to shape the American cultural landscape and national perceptions of Jews in scholarly, civic, and arts-based communities. The NCJW demonstrates

early affinities that Jewish women had for cultural representation and its equity. They wanted not only Jews, and not only women, but also Jewish women to be able to choose how Jews were represented in America. So they began organizing themselves to work toward these ends, realizing that they were stronger together as a movement projecting a group identity than apart as individuals.

The World's Fair, also known as the Columbian Exposition, showcased the work of the nation's best architects, sculptors, and curators. Designed to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival to the United States, the event exhibited the peoples and cultures of other countries and had profound impacts on the arts, sanitation, architecture, and Chicago's identity nationally. The Parliament of World Religions in the Exposition, considered to be radical at the time, was America's first gathering of international Eastern and Western spiritual traditions and one of the only instances in America in which world religions spoke publicly on their own behalf - not through white Christian scholars. The prominent activist and social reformer Hannah G. Solomon of Chicago was asked to represent Jewish women at the Fair and decided to base her group in the Parliament of World Religions instead of the Woman's Building. However, Jewish men in the Parliament of World Religions disregarded her as a woman, and the women in the Woman's Building ignored her as a Jew.¹

When Solomon looked for participants and speakers for the Jewish Woman's Congress at the Chicago Exposition, she had trouble locating them. She learned that many Jewish women avoided affiliation with Judaism and/or expressed apathy toward the cause of women's rights.²

¹ Faith Rogow and Joan Bronk, *Gone to Another Meeting: The National Council of Jewish Women, 1893-1993*, 2nd ed. edition (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2005), 10-14; Jonathan Sarna, "A Great Awakening: The Transformation That Shaped Twentieth Century American Judaism and Its Implications For Today," *Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education Essay Series*, Essay Series, 1995, 24. You should also cite Shaul Magid and Karla Goldman's writing on figures from 1893, especially Josephine Lazarus.

² Pamela S. Nadell, "Reflections on the 'Jewish Women and Philanthropy' Roundtable," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, no. 20 (Fall 2010): 127-31, <https://doi.org/10.2979/NAS.2010.-.20.127>.

Jewish men dominated the conversation around the public display of Judaism, and Christian women dominated discussions around early feminism and women's rights.³ The absence of Jewish women in these important conversations inspired Solomon to found the NCJW to organize Jewish women's involvement in such movements.⁴ By the 1920s, the NCJW, which grew from the seeds of exclusion, had earned its place amongst other philanthropic, political, and cultural organizations.

This dissertation is not about the National Council of Jewish Women. But it *is* about how gender-based exclusion ironically sparked communal innovation. It is also about how Jewish art and culture came to be imagined and represented in American museums and galleries, and how those new Jewish spaces helped shape American attitudes toward Jews at a formative time in U.S. history. In 1920, the same year as women received the right to vote in America, Jewish women began to emerge as the leaders of a Jewish artistic and cultural movement. Some men at the time saw Jewish cultural renaissance as a political remedy for antisemitism. In particular, the Haskalah, or Jewish enlightenment, and Jewish diaspora nationalism, both born in Europe, introduced the new idea of a separate sphere for Jewish expression separate from the practice of Judaism as a religion.⁵ But many women in America also saw Jewish art and culture as antidotes to the threat of acculturation and declining spiritual Judaism. These Jewish women saw a Jewish community participating in American capitalism and consumerism, and slowly ascending to

³ Faith Rogow and Joan Bronk, *Gone to Another Meeting: The National Council of Jewish Women, 1893-1993*, 14.

⁴ Riv-Ellen Prell, *Women Remaking American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 305.

⁵ The Haskalah, led by Jewish men in Europe, led to a proliferation of Jewish literature in Hebrew and other languages. Steven J Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha'am and the Origins of Zionism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), <https://search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/u2246291>, 15, 81; Michael Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil?: Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry*, Studies in Jewish History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), <https://search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/u1288269>. On Jewish nationalism and the ways in which it led to Jewish cultural renaissance, see: Kenneth B. Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution*, 1st edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), Introduction, especially 2-3; James Loeffler, "Between Zionism and Liberalism: Oscar Janowsky and Diaspora Nationalism in America," *AJS Review* 34, no. 2 (November 2010): 289-308, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40982834>.

middle-class status. Fearing these changes in the U.S., they imagined how traditional culture – specifically visual culture – could serve as an antidote, help Jews find themselves and their Jewish identities through objects. The women who were community organizers, philanthropists, and cultural activists in what can be termed the movement for Jewish objects have never before been studied, and existing accounts of the achievements of these Jewish women, including the foundation of America’s first-ever Jewish museum on 5th avenue, diminish their agency.

This dissertation attempts to restore the feminist history of American Jewish museums to Jewish Studies, Art History, Gender Studies, and American History, shifting the overarching narratives of each. Through the lives of four women, it examines American Jewish museums as instruments of community and as testing grounds for women to develop their own identities through philanthropic acts and cultural activity. These acts of reinvention included working as curators and museum educators, bequeathing objects, donating space, and providing funding for establishing Jewish museums. The four women in this dissertation articulated American Jewishness in the new spatial confines of the museum. By so doing, they redefined American Jewish values, norms, and aesthetic standards for Jews and a broader American public that had never encountered Jews or their practices on their own terms.

Discernibly, women comprise the foreground of this dissertation. However, while not the subject of this project, Jewish men serve here in both a comparative capacity – as counterpoints to the female narratives – and as architects of some of the processes in which women were participants or co-creators. Men such as patron Mayer Sulzberger and collector Ephraim Moses Benguiat offer fullness to this project, and they will zoom into and out of focus at various points to reflect the centrality of their own roles in each narrative thread. Furthermore, most of the men in the Jewish art world were entrenched in Jewish networks of both women and men. Cyrus

Adler, for example, corresponded regularly with dozens of significant female donors of Jewish objects. These women's stories could not be told – would not have unfolded - without Adler and men like him who are also at the heart of this history.

As Jewish men and women settled into early 20th century America, many of them immigrants, they struggled to become equal and accepted, but also to create new kinds of community and retain distinctiveness as a religious minority group. The master narrative of this period is one in which American Jews gravitated toward and invented new kinds of cultural, social, and economic institutions to secure places for themselves in America.⁶ Jews have been studied as creators of Hollywood, Tin Pan Alley, Wall Street, comedy, the liquor industry, journalism, and many other areas of American society.⁷ They have also been studied as creators of institutions dedicated to the endurance and continuous reinvention of Jewish religious life in America. The Young Men's Hebrew Association was formed in 1875.⁸ Other organizations founded by men included the Jewish Theological Seminary (1886), Jewish Publication Society (1888), American Jewish Historical Society (1892), Gratz College (1893), Jewish Chautauqua Society (1893), and Dropsie College (1907).⁹ Rising antisemitism in Europe and America at this

⁶ Naomi W. Cohen, "American Jewish Reactions to Antisemitism in Western Europe, 1875-1900," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 45 (1978): 29–65, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3622308>; Jonathan Sarna, "A Great Awakening: The Transformation That Shaped Twentieth Century American Judaism And Its Implications For Today," *Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education Essay Series*, Essay Series, 1995, 4-5; Hasia R Diner, *Julius Rosenwald: Repairing the World*, Jewish Lives; Jewish Lives (New Haven, Conn.) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), <https://search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/u7307073>.

⁷ Stephen J. Whitfield, *In Search of American Jewish Culture*, 1st edition (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2001); Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1954 - 2000* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2004); J. Hoberman and Jeffrey Shandler, *Entertaining America: Jews, Movies, and Broadcasting* (New York : Jewish Museum, under the auspices of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America ; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁸ Jonathan Sarna, "The Making of an American Jewish Culture," in *When Philadelphia Was the Capital of Jewish America* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1993), 147.

⁹ Jonathan Sarna, "The Making of an American Jewish Culture," in *When Philadelphia Was the Capital of Jewish America* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1993), 149.

time inspired and motivated the founding men of these organizations to protect and preserve Jewish culture, and to turn to issues of racial justice in American society.¹⁰

These founding stories have been studied extensively. Museums by contrast are almost entirely excluded from the narrative tropes of American Jewish history, yet they deserve attention because they differ from other arenas of Jewish cultural expression of the time in two key ways. As such, they can provide interesting and new perspectives on the American Jewish experience. Firstly, women played outsized roles as donors, educators, and curators in museums whereas other fields were male dominated. Secondly, most museum institutions were not-for-profit entities whereas other Jewish institutions sold culture to make a profit. Museums are therefore unique windows into the world of American Jewish philanthropy and show us how gender played a role within it.

The women of this story, two of them American-born philanthropists and two of them European immigrant professionals, each created new kinds of careers and roles for themselves and disrupted existing gender binary structures. They fashioned a new femininity with power and influence that radiated out from museum spaces and into American cultural life and took ownership over the curation of Jewish objects. This dissertation argues that museums became crucial sites in which American Jewish women fought for visibility and carved out roles for themselves.

This study joins vibrant and contemporary conversations in several fields. Firstly, scholars have for decades been asking the question: What is Jewish art? Who decides its boundaries and limitations? What can such a body of artistic output reveal about Jewish identity in modern times? Scholars such as Larry Silver, Samantha Baskind, and Margaret Olin use a

¹⁰ Steven J. Zipperstein, *Pogrom: Kishinev and the Tilt of History* (Liveright Publishing, 2018), xv-xix, 14, 188, and 194-203.

broad theoretical framework for defining Jewish art, including Jewish makers, subject matter, and functionality.¹¹ Scholars such as Vivian Mann use a narrower definition, considering Judaica to be the real Jewish art.¹² Looking at the histories of major art institutions and their philanthropists will shed new light on who was defining Jewish art and how. What were philanthropists' motivations in donating and displaying objects? Who was cultivating a body of Jewish art and why for the American, and/or Jewish, public? Why were people interested in defining Jewish art, and what did its definition mean for American society?

Secondly, historians have long told the story of American Jewish philanthropy through the institutions that most obviously shaped American Jewish identity, such as synagogues, Jewish Federations, the American Jewish Committee, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and even American Zionist organizations.¹³ They have looked to these histories to explain American Jewish history, immigration, acculturation, and philanthropy.¹⁴ But what about the visionaries who attempted to define and perpetuate American Jewish identity through *museums*, which were *also* a new kind of institution in Jewish life? There are a few histories of Jewish cultural philanthropy in America and accounts of the making of Jewish museum spaces, but women are

¹¹ Larry Silver and Samantha Baskind, *Jewish Art: A Modern History* (London, England: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2011); Samantha Baskind, *Raphael Soyer and the Search for Modern Jewish Art* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Larry Silver and Samantha Baskind, "Looking Jewish: The State of Research on Modern Jewish Art," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 101, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 631–52; Margaret Olin, *The Nation Without Art: Examining Modern Discourses on Jewish Art* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

¹² Vivian Mann, *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts* (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2000); Vivian Mann, *The Jewish Museum* (London and New York: Scala Books and The Jewish Museum, 1993); Vivian Mann, *Art & Ceremony in Jewish Life: Essays in the History of Jewish Art* (London, England: The Pindar Press, 2005).

¹³ Evyatar Friesel, "Jacob H. Schiff and the Leadership of the American Jewish Community," *Jewish Social Studies* 8, no. 2,3 (2002): 61–72; Naomi W. Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee 1906-1966*, n.d.; Rafael Medoff, *Militant Zionism in America: The Rise and Impact of the Jabotinsky Movement in the United States, 1926 – 1948* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 2002); Naomi W. Cohen, *The Americanization of Zionism, 1897-1948* (Brandeis University Press, 2003), <http://bir.brandeis.edu/handle/10192/28430>.

¹⁴ Jonathan D Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 210: "Philanthropy became the civil religion of American Jews." Reformat this quote for proper formatting.

rendered invisible within them.¹⁵ Rather than filling in the blanks by telling the stories of the women who were excluded from history, this dissertation asks other questions. How did Jewish patrons, funders, and object donors fashion Jews in galleries for a broader American audience? How was this process gendered?¹⁶ Why did people choose this kind of philanthropy and what did it mean to them? How did women justify their involvement in a man's world of philanthropy and institution-building, and how did that change the organized Jewish community's views or norms?

This interdisciplinary dissertation sits at the intersection of several fields: U.S. history, Jewish history, art history, and women and gender studies. It joins and contributes to some of the central conversations in each. In American history, much of the scholarship on the 19th and 20th centuries tries to make sense of connections between a fluctuating economy and social change in America, including the question of how much wealthy financial and industrial elites shaped the fundamental character of late 19th and early 20th century American society.¹⁷ Such scholars see economics as the driver of this period with cultural, political, and socioeconomic reverberations. Some are even focused on Jews and their relationship to capitalist impulses in America and

¹⁵ David G. Dalin, "Cyrus Adler and the Rescue of Jewish Refugee Scholars," *American Jewish History* 78, no. 3 (1989): 351; David G. Dalin, "Patron Par Excellence: Mayer Sulzberger and the Early Seminary," in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, vol. 1: The Making of an Institution of Jewish Higher Learning (New York, New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997); Richard I. Cohen, "Between Encyclopedias and Museums - Modes of Jewish Empowerment and Visibility," ed. Dan Diner, *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook IX* (2010): 459–72; Julie Miller and Richard Cohen, "A Collision of Cultures: The Jewish Museum and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1904 - 1971," in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, vol. 2 (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997); Ruth R. Seldin, "American Jewish Museums: Trends and Issues," *The American Jewish Year Book* 91 (1991): 71–117.

¹⁶ Other studies have gendered Jewish philanthropy. Beth Wenger, for example, has written about women's exclusion from traditional Jewish philanthropy. But such studies do not look at cultural organizations or museums. Beth S. Wenger, "Federation Men: The Masculine World of New York Jewish Philanthropy, 1880-1945," *American Jewish History* 101, no. 3 (2017): 377–99, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ajh.2017.0050>.

¹⁷ Jonathan Levy, "Altruism and the Origins of Nonprofit Philanthropy," in *Philanthropy in Democratic Societies: History, Institutions, Values*, by Rob Reich, Chiara Cordelli, Luch Bernholz (University of Chicago Press, 2016);

philanthropy.¹⁸ By foregrounding and tracing wealthy American families, such work emphasizes family structures and networks, and yet it marginalizes women by under-exploring the identities of donors who are from marginalized groups.¹⁹ My work brings to that field an understanding of a doubly marginalized group, Jewish women, and explains how they helped shape one crucial dimension of 20th century American philanthropy in museums. On the other hand, scholars of the Progressive Era often focus directly on women.²⁰ They ask how problems associated with the rise of large cities – clutter, filth, homelessness – bred certain anxieties that middle-class women sought to quell through reform efforts. They ask how and why women became leaders in Progressive activity, and in which gender constructs they worked. This dissertation puts Jewish art and philanthropy into conversation with the Progressive Era by viewing museums as spaces for a different kind of reformist activism, and in some ways an extension of the enhanced visibility of women toward the end of the 19th century. As alternative spaces for women to make an impact, museums also were fruitful avenues of inquiry for women who could lean on inherited gender constructs that linked women to philanthropy and social change. Further, during the Progressive Era and immediately afterward, it became more acceptable for minority immigrant women to work to support their families. Especially amongst east European Jewish immigrants, it became mainstream for women to migrate to America before their male family members and attempt to find factory and other work.²¹ These processes in America helped a

¹⁸ Lila Corwin Berman, “How Americans Give: The Financialization of American Jewish Philanthropy,” *The American Historical Review* 122, no. 5 (December 1, 2017): 1459–89, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/122.5.1459>.

¹⁹ Elisabeth Israels Perry, “Men Are from the Gilded Age, Women Are from the Progressive Era,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 1, no. 01 (January 2002): 25–48, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781400000086>.

²⁰ Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1991); Yeo, “Gender and Jewish Welfare Work in Britain and the United States, 1880-1930,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues*, no. 34 (2019): 7, <https://doi.org/10.2979/nashim.34.1.01>; Marjorie N. Feld, *Lillian Wald: A Biography* (UNC Press, 2012).

²¹ For women entering the garment industry in America, and the acceptability of sending east European Jewish daughters and wives to America before sons and husbands to work in factories, see Susan A. Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 40-49.

generation of women who wanted to make and shape Jewish culture by creating Jewish museums, whether as employed curators or institution-builders.

The study of Jewish museums in America offers new insights to American and Jewish economic, cultural, social, and art histories. Many scholars have attempted to assess the acculturation of Jews in the mid-20th century by studying the evolution of Judaism as a religion in a pluralistic America.²² Later studies have looked at the groups that Jews formed as outgrowths of their religious communities, shedding light on lesser-known, often non-institutional structures.²³ Yet by treating religion as the primary site of Jewish communal expression and development, such studies sideline cultural institutions not hinging on Judaism as a religion. Analyses of Jewish culture that don't center on religious evolution tend to view it through the lenses of economics or politics rather than philanthropy, and do not mention cultural philanthropy as its own phenomenon.

On the other hand, two generations of scholarship on Europe and especially Russia have looked at the interplay between philanthropy and culture.²⁴ For decades scholars have examined,

²² Jessica Cooperman has charted the expansion of Jewish religious practices with World War I. Jessica Cooperman, *Making Judaism Safe for America: World War I and the Origins of Religious Pluralism*, n.d. Riv Ellen Prell has looked at the reform of Judaism in America. Prell Riv-Ellen, "Boundaries, Margins, and Norms: The Intellectual Stakes in the Study of American Jewish Culture(s)," *Contemporary Jewry* 32, no. 2 (July 1, 2012); Riv-Ellen Prell, *Women Remaking American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007). Michael Meyer has studied the creation of the "modern Jew" through religious reform in Europe, and others have drawn parallels to religious practice in the United States. Michael A Meyer, *Jewish Identity in the Modern World*, Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990); Michael A. Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew: Jewish Identity and European Culture in Germany, 1749 - 1824* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1967). Jack Wertheimer at JTS looks at historical and contemporary Jewish practice in America to explain religion as the defining feature of American Jewish identity. Jack Wertheimer, *The New American Judaism: How Jews Practice Their Religion Today* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

²³ Synagogue sisterhoods, Hadassah groups, and philanthropy were all instruments of community-building in the United States. See, for instance Jenna Wollman Zollman's study of the synagogue gift shop. Joellyn Wallen Zollman, "The Gifts of the Jews: Ideology and Material Culture in the American Synagogue Gift Shop," n.d., 27. MARY MCCUNE, "Social Workers in the 'Muskeljudentum': 'Hadassah Ladies,' 'Manly Men' and the Significance of Gender in the American Zionist Movement, 1912-1928," *American Jewish History* 86, no. 2 (1998): 135-65.

²⁴ For philanthropy in music, see: James Loeffler, *The Most Musical Nation: Jews and Culture in the Late Russian Empire* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 2010). In literature see: Michael Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil?: Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry*, Studies in Jewish History (New York: Oxford

and contextualized, the institutions and movements Jews established and their reasons for funding and supporting them.²⁵ Some scholarship on Europe is analyzing what seems to be a particularly Jewish obsession with evaluating and displaying the past, and questioning how it was funded. S. Ansky, an author, war correspondent, ethnographer, and Yiddish playwright from Eastern Europe, famously drew from Jewish folk culture to create art that resisted categories of nationality.²⁶ He saw himself as a savior of the artifacts and culture of various ethnic groups, most prominently Jews, and Gabriella Safran asks why and how he came upon this cause and what supported his work. Some works examine the emergence of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, or The Science of Judaism, in the late 19th century. This new academic discipline marked the first instance in Europe of Jews studying Jews; previously, Christian theologians were leading the charge to write Jewish history at the highest echelons of the academies. *Wissenschaft des Judentums* also marked a new use of Jewish history: to combat antisemitism with Jewish self-description.²⁷ For the first time, Jews were using archives and objects to write and display Jewish history publicly to an academic, secular audience in Germany.

The ethos of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was carried over into the American context by several distinctive historical actors. For example, Cyrus Adler, the first curator of Judaica at the

University Press, 1988), <https://search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/u1288269>. See also Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (University of California Press, 2002). Brian J. Horowitz, *Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009); Jeffrey Veidlinger, *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire* (Indiana University Press, 2009).

²⁵ Richard I. Cohen, *Jewish Icons* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), especially Chapter 4, “Nostalgia and the ‘Return to the Ghetto,’” 154-184. Such work relates more broadly to European conceptions of foreign cultures and the portrayals of such people in art and culture. Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

²⁶ Gabriella Safran, *Wandering Soul: The Dybbuk’s Creator, S. An-Sky*, 1st Edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010); Lisa Moses Leff, *The Archive Thief: The Man Who Salvaged French Jewish History in the Wake of the Holocaust* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Jason Lustig, *A Time to Gather: Archives and the Control of Jewish Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021).

²⁷ Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Brandeis University Press, 1994); Ismar Schorsch and David Selis, “Building the Temple of *Judische Wissenschaft* in the United States,” n.d., 21.

Smithsonian in Washington in the late 19th century, organized exhibitions on Judaism as the founding religion for Christianity and therefore for America to underscore the importance of Judaism to the United States.²⁸ Like his academic predecessors in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement, Adler aimed to prove Judaism's importance to the Western world using history and its primary sources, including visual culture.²⁹ The resonance of American scholars and institutions with *Wissenschaft des Judentums* has not been studied at length.³⁰ My work employs similar methodologies as scholarship on European academic Jewish history to ask, what were American Jewish curators and philanthropists attempting to do by creating and displaying Jewish history? Though there is a body of literature looking at the intersections between philanthropy and culture in Europe, little such literature exists on America.

In part, perhaps this is because Jewish historians in America have long been engrossed in the question of whether America was exceptional in providing Jews with new kinds of freedom – political, legal, cultural, and religious – and whether this exceptionalism made room for Jews to create their communal lives themselves in ways inaccessible to them in Europe. While defining the American context, Hasia Diner examines how Jews make Jewish lives in America as immigrants, and how they became middle-class and philanthropic.³¹ Jonathan Sarna probes American Jews' fear of disintegration as a religious minority and how this motivated the formation of Jewish institutions.³² Tony Michels argues that antisemitism – not just American

²⁸ Grace Cohen Grossman, *Judaica at the Smithsonian: Cultural Politics as Cultural Model*, Smithsonian Studies in History and Technology (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), introduction, especially 1-5.

²⁹ Cyrus Adler and Ira Robinson, *Selected Letters*, 1st ed, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985), 113-115, 150-152, 209-211.

³⁰ Ira Robinson, "Cyrus Adler, Bernard Revel and the Prehistory of Organized Jewish Scholarship in the United States," *American Jewish History*; *Waltham, Mass.* 69, no. 4 (June 1, 1980): 500.

³¹ Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880*, vol. 2, *The Jewish People in America*, 1995; Hasia R. Diner, *Julius Rosenwald: Repairing the World*, Jewish Lives; Jewish Lives (New Haven, Conn.) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), <https://search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/u7307073>. These and all other citations should not include VIRGO links. Just print citations.

³² Jonathan D Sarna *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), introduction.

exceptionalism – was a strong driving force in the creation of Jewish community and the remembrance Jewish history in America.³³ Above all, historians of American Jews tend toward questions of change and continuity in a country that supposedly was uniquely favorable toward Jews relative to Europe.³⁴

More recently, historians of American Jews are studying both Jewish art and Jewish philanthropy – separately. In America, several early scholars, several of them European immigrants, wrote about Jewish art broadly from the 1960s to the late 1990s, laying the groundwork for later works on Jewish art in America. Avram Kampf, Joseph Gutmann, and Franz Landsberger first put Judaica on the American art historical map.³⁵ At the turn of the millennium, others continued writing about Judaica.³⁶ Some scholars also turned to ancient Judaism, rabbinic culture, and late classical synagogue art to demonstrate Jewish visual sensibility throughout time.³⁷ While both groups of scholars attempted to disprove the myth that

³³ Tony Michels, “Is America ‘Different’?: A Critique of American Jewish Exceptionalism,” *American Jewish History* 96, no. 3 (September 2010): 201–24, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ajh.2011.0007>; Tony Michels and Hasia Diner, “Considering American Jewish History,” *OAH Newsletter*, November 2007, 9.

³⁴ *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Hasia R. Diner, Jeffrey Shandler, and Beth S. Wenger, eds., *Remembering the Lower East Side: American Jewish Reflections*, Illustrated edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

³⁵ Avram Kampf, *Chagall to Kitaj: Jewish Experience in 20th Century Art* (New York, New York: Praeger Publishers In Association with Barbican Art Gallery, 1990); Avram Kampf, *Contemporary Synagogue Art: Developments in the United States, 1945 - 1965* (New York, N.Y.: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1966); Joseph Gutmann, “The Second Commandment and the Image in Judaism,” *Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion* 32 (1961): 161–74, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23524615>; Joseph Gutmann, “The Dura Europos Synagogue Paintings and Their Influence on Later Christian and Jewish Art,” *Artibus et Historiae* 9, no. 17 (1988): 25–29, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1483314>; Joseph Gutmann, “Kayser Was Museum Pioneer,” June 14, 2000, *Jewish Post* 14 June 2000 — Hoosier State Chronicles: Indiana’s Digital Historic Newspaper Program, <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=JPOST20000614-01.1.11&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-----1>; Franz Landsberger, *A History of Jewish Art* (Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1946).

³⁶ Vivian Mann, Rachel Wischnitzer, and Emily Bilski amongst several others produced works that defined Judaica for American audiences. Their sophisticated studies form the building blocks of the study of Jewish art. For a few examples of their works, see: Vivian Mann, *Art & Ceremony in Jewish Life: Essays in the History of Jewish Art* (London, England: The Pindar Press, 2005); Vivian Mann et al., *Masterworks of the Jewish Museum* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2004); Rachel Wischnitzer and Bezalel Narkiss, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Detroit, Macmillan Reference USA: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007); Rachel Wischnitzer, “Light from Our Past (Book Review),” *Jewish Social Studies; New York* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 1961): 62–63.

³⁷ Shalom Sabar, Steven Fine, and William Kramer, eds., *A Crown for a King: Studies in Jewish Art, History, and Archaeology in Memory of Stephen S. Kayser* (Jerusalem, Israel: Geffen Publishing House, 2000); Rachel Neis, *The*

the second commandment forbade Jews from creating Jewish art altogether, Kalman Bland more recently offered a nuanced examination of the idea of Jewish aniconism throughout time – one that inspired a wave of scholarship attempting to define Jewish art as a category.³⁸ Some are taking anthropological approach in analyzing twentieth- and twenty-first-century Jewish material culture and ritual, bringing visual evidence to bear on anthropological questions about Jews.³⁹ Others are now focusing on how Jewish artists use art as a vehicle of political activism.⁴⁰ Jewish philanthropy has long been a popular topic of conversation for Jewish historians of America, one that helps scholars answer questions about Jewish communal life, economic history, and American exceptionalism.⁴¹ Recent studies by noted historians such as Beth Wenger and Lila Corwin Berman examine philanthropy and even go one step further by gendering its narratives.⁴²

Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Ways of Seeing in Late Antiquity (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

³⁸ Kalman P. Bland, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000).

³⁹ Maya Balakirsky Katz, “Jewish Art, Modern and Contemporary,” in *Art History*, ed. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann (Oxford Bibliographies, 2014); Maya Balakirsky Katz, *The Visual Culture of Chabad* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Carol Zemel, “Jewish Art, Naturally,” *Images: Journal of Jewish Art & Visual Culture* 1, no. 1 (January 2007): 26–28; Carol Zemel, *Looking Jewish: Visual Culture and Modern Diaspora* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2015); Vanessa Ochs, “What Makes a Jewish Home Jewish?,” *Cross Currents* 49, no. 4 (1999): 491–510.

⁴⁰ Lauren Strauss, “Chapter 17, ‘Too Good to Have Been Made by a Woman’: American Jewish Women Artists as Political Activists from the 1920s to the 1940s,” in *Gender and Jewish History*, ed. Marion Kaplan and Deborah Dash Moore (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2011); Lauren B. Strauss, “Painting the Town Red: Jewish Visual Artists, Yiddish Culture, and Progressive Politics in New York, 1917–1939” (Ph.D., United States -- New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2004), <http://search.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/305099735/abstract/6F762E69C91244E4PQ/2>; Norman L. Kleeblatt, *Painting a Place in America: Jewish Artists in New York 1900-1945*, ed. Susan Chevlowe (New York: Bloomington: Indiana Univ Pr, 1991); Emily Bilski and Emily Braun, *Jewish Women and Their Salons: The Power of Conversation* (New York, New York: The Jewish Museum, 2005).

⁴¹ Hasia R Diner, *Julius Rosenwald: Repairing the World, Jewish Lives* (New Haven, Conn.) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), <https://search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/u7307073>; Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1954 - 2000* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2004).

⁴² Lila Corwin Berman, “How Americans Give: The Financialization of American Jewish Philanthropy,” *The American Historical Review* 122, no. 5 (December 1, 2017): 1459–89, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/122.5.1459>; Lila Corwin Berman, *The American Jewish Philanthropic Complex: The History of a Multibillion-Dollar Institution* (Princeton University Press, 2020); Beth S. Wenger, “Federation Men: The Masculine World of New York Jewish Philanthropy, 1880-1945,” *American Jewish History* 101, no. 3 (2017): 377–99, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ajh.2017.0050>.

Scholarship on Jewish philanthropy builds on earlier works on Jews and capitalism which look at how American economics shaped Jewish life.⁴³

Yet despite lending much attention to both Jewish art and Jewish philanthropy individually and producing enlightening studies, scholars of American history have largely ignored the intersection of the two.⁴⁴ But some of the core pieces of American Jewish history stem from American Jewish philanthropy and the cultural institutions it engendered. Other studies of America show an American interest in objects as purveyors the past. Barbara Kirshenblatt Gimblett's expansive theoretical work on museums in general and Jewish museums in particular examines the crafting of a language for expressing modern Jewishness. Her explorations of the performance of culture in museums and world's fairs in America are crucial for and central in this project, and her guiding questions relate tightly to those of this dissertation.⁴⁵ Jenna Weismann Joselit's path-breaking studies on American culture in the 20th

⁴³ Jonathan Sarna et al., *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism*, ed. Rebecca Kobrin, None edition (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2012). Rebecca Kobrin and Adam Teller, eds., *Purchasing Power: The Economics of Modern Jewish History*, n.d.

⁴⁴ On culture see: Grace Cohen Grossman, *Judaica at the Smithsonian: Cultural Politics as Cultural Model*, Smithsonian Studies in History and Technology (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997); Jenna Weismann Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture 1880-1950*, 1st ed (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994); Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp, eds., "Chapter 5, Performing the State: The Jewish Palestine Pavilion at the New York World's Fair, 1939/40," in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 98–115. On philanthropy see Lila Corwin Berman, *The American Jewish Philanthropic Complex: The History of a Multibillion-Dollar Institution* (Princeton University Press, 2020); Beth S. Wenger, "Chapter 6: Private Jewish Philanthropy in the Welfare State," in *New York Jews and the Great Depression: Uncertain Promise* (Yale University Press, 1996), 136–65. Contemporary writings also study Jewish culture and philanthropy, but not at once/not their intersection. Edward Rothstein, "The Problem with Jewish Museums," *Mosaic Magazine*, February 1, 2016, <https://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2016/02/the-problem-with-jewish-museums/>; Lila Corwin Berman, "How Americans Give: The Financialization of American Jewish Philanthropy," *The American Historical Review* 122, no. 5 (December 1, 2017): 1459–89, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/122.5.1459>.

⁴⁵ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ed., *Writing a Modern Jewish History: Essays in Honor of Salo W. Baron* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006); Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp, eds., "Chapter 5, Performing the State: The Jewish Palestine Pavilion at the New York World's Fair, 1939/40," in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 98–115; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, 1st ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998); Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production," *Museum International* 56, no. 1–2 (June 24, 2004): 52–65, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1350-0775.2004.00458.x>; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp, eds., *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

century show what objects can reveal about Jewish daily life and how they were tied to American consumer culture.⁴⁶ Yet even such sophisticated studies do not directly draw out the connections between philanthropy and the creation of culture in different kinds of settings.

This dissertation connects women and their communities of philanthropic cultural activists to a broader, international Jewish conversation about museums, commemoration, Jewish ritual objects, and philanthropy. This project pursues questions about Jewish cultural patronage and modernity in the American context, bringing in the angles of gender, American economic history, American social mobility, and American cultural salvaging during and after World War II. It adds new voices to the conversation around Jewish art history and explains that it was made in America by women and their creative organizing efforts. All four of the women highlighted in the dissertation were either European or first-generation immigrants, and their lives open us up to overlooked actors, power dynamics, and off-stage dramas about representation and legibility. Feminist theory provides much of the analytical framework of the study of these women. Teaching us to notice occlusions, partitions of public and private, formal and informal, the role of families, and the representation and understandings of bodies, existing feminist literature on women, gender, and history has guided much of the below analyses of these four lives.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Jenna Weissman Joselit and Susan Braunstein, *Getting Comfortable in New York: The American-Jewish Home, 1880 - 1950* (Indiana University Press, 1991); Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture 1880-1950*, 1st edition (New York: Hill & Wang Pub, 1994); Jonathan Sarna et al., *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism*, ed.

⁴⁷ Sarah Imhoff, *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism* (Bloomington ; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2017); Personal Narratives Group, ed., *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, Illustrated edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), especially 7-11; Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy*, Women and History; Lerner, Gerda 1920-2013 Women and History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (Yale University Press, 1987); Susannah Heschel, "The Impact Of Feminist Theory on Jewish Studies," in *Modern Judaism and Historical Consciousness*, ed. Andreas Gotzmann and Christian Wiese (Brill, 2007), 529–48, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004152892.i-658.26>.

Lastly, this project maintains a connection to historiography on Zionist art produced in Palestine and throughout the Jewish world in the pre-state period.⁴⁸ Yigal Zalmona and Dalia Manor probe the connections between politics and culture, investigating how Zionist and Israeli art attempted to represent the Jewish people and construct its own authority to do so. How did it attempt to connect, and actually connect, Jews into a single global interlinked community beyond the ties of memory and religious practice, they ask?⁴⁹ Scholars such as Jessica Carr and Joellyn Zollman research the circulation of Zionist images and visual culture of Palestine in America to ask these questions.⁵⁰ Jewish museum spaces in North America exhibited Israeli paintings, drawings, and sculptures within their walls from the late 19th century onward, and select few scholars are examining the meaning of these kinds of displays in America. Yet almost no scholars are asking one question this dissertation asks: what was Jewish cultural philanthropy in the United States doing to create and maintain ties to Eretz Israel in the pre-state period, and why?

This dissertation turns to the biographical method to answer these questions and more about the intersections between philanthropy, Zionism, art, institutions, and religious life.⁵¹ It brings four undiscovered voices to light, revealing a fuller history of American Jewish museums for the first

⁴⁸ Gilya Gerda Schmidt, *The Art and Artists of the Fifth Zionist Congress, 1901: Heralds of a New Age* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003); Martin Buber and Gilya Gerda Schmidt, *The First Buber: Youthful Zionist Writings of Martin Buber* (Syracuse University Press, 1999); Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siecle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2001); Asher Biemann, *Inventing New Beginnings: On the Idea of Renaissance in Modern Judaism* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

⁴⁹ Dalia Manor, *Art in Zion: The Genesis of Modern National Art in Jewish Palestine* (Abingdon, England: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005); Yigal Zalmona, *A Century of Israeli Art* (Jerusalem, Israel: Lund Humphries in association with The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 2013). Good

⁵⁰ Jessica Carr, "Picturing Palestine: Visual Narrative in the Jewish Art Calendars of National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods," *The American Jewish Archives Journal* LXVI, no. 1 & 2 (2014): 1–34; Joellyn Wallen Zollman, "The Gifts of the Jews: Ideology and Material Culture in the American Synagogue Gift Shop," n.d., 27. ?

⁵¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives*, Revised ed. edition (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 1997); Shulamit Reinharz and Lynn Davidman, *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, 1st edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992);

time. Rebbetzin Mignon Rubenovitz, **secretary** Anna Kleban, **cultural** patron Frieda Schiff Warburg, and **curator** Louise Kayser were all philanthropists in their own ways.

Chapter 1 focuses on Rebbetzin Mignon Rubenovitz (1884-1968). Well known as wife of Boston rabbi Herman Rubenowitz, Rubenowitz inaugurated her own Jewish Museum in the early years of the 20th century as an appendage to the famed Temple Mishkan Tefila synagogue in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. Rubenovitz's work included organizing rotating exhibitions, collecting objects, fundraising, writing and mounting plays, co-writing a book with her husband about their lives, and organizing the Temple Sisterhood, which became the arm for raising funds and collection development at the museum. The Rubenovitz papers were only recently processed at the Jewish Theological Seminary in August 2018 and have never before been examined by researchers. I use these materials along with other archival sources to reveal her instrumental role in mobilizing the women of her community to think more broadly and creatively about objects and their use, and also to reconsider the role of women in organizing such objects into museum spaces – in synagogues and beyond. This chapter will also situate the Jewish Museum of Boston as an emerging point of interest in the Boston arts scene and in the American diplomatic scene. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt's visit to the museum in 1942 endowed it with early recognition and stature as an institution devoted to religious pluralism and upholding American democracy.

Chapter 2 examines public historian and educator Anna Kleban (1899-1990). Kleban was forced out of eastern Europe when her home in Grodno was burned to the ground in pogroms. She immigrated at the behest of her uncle Dr. Israel Davidson, a Seminary professor. Known to posterity merely as the “secretary” to Alexander Marx, the longtime chief librarian of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, she was in fact single-handedly responsible for curating the JTS Library's Museum in its first five decades and guided generations of visitors

through the displays of Judaica and manuscripts. Furthermore, when JTS established the Jewish Museum on 5th Avenue, Kleban oversaw the transition and migration of its objects over to the East Side, where she served in various capacities at the Museum, largely without formal recognition by the museum administration.

As in the case of Rubenowitz, reconstructing Kleban's biography required careful, critical re-examination of the archives to tease out her life and work. The Alexander Marx papers at JTS turn out to provide ample evidence of Kleban's multi-faceted career at the Seminary and the Museum that extended well beyond the formal purview of her job description as a professional secretary and personal assistant. But the never-before examined personal archive of Kleban herself, still unprocessed and in a state of disarray, offer unprecedented access to the interior of her life experience and range of activity. While Kleban still looms large in JTS's institutional memory, she has never been recognized or commemorated by either the broader Jewish arts community or the Jewish Museum. Not yet.

Chapter 3 turns to the life of philanthropist Frieda Schiff Warburg (1876-1958). Daughter of renowned New York Jewish philanthropist Jacob Schiff and wife of noted Jewish diplomat and philanthropic activist Felix Warburg, Schiff Warburg's own philanthropic work shifted gender norms in the American and Jewish communities. Born into what was arguably the first and founding family of American Jewish philanthropy, Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jacob and Therese Schiff's only daughter, has been totally overlooked in spite of her family's renown. As the first female board member of the Seminary in 1937, she slowly changed the culture of board meetings and paved the way for later generations of women. Schiff Warburg's 1944 announcement of the donation of her home as a Jewish museum marked her creative re-use of a feminized domestic space, her home, as a public art museum. The donation changed the course

of Jewish art in America. Despite her importance to American and Jewish history, the only files specifically organized under Schiff Warburg's name at the Seminary are contained in a scrapbook she made herself, labeled "Frieda Scrapbook" in the finding aid. This scrapbook is a collection of precious and critical articles, letters, media announcements, and minutes of meetings – all to do with her museum donation. This lengthy document – containing also original images and the voices of Frieda's children – is the only archive I have found in the United States directly containing Frieda's voice, and which is labeled under her own name. I read it against her own privately published memoir, *Reminiscences of a Long Life* (1957), which has been instrumental in the telling of her story as well as the restoration of her voice.

Chapter 4 illuminates the life of European-born curator Louise Kayser (1892-1983). Herself a prolific artist, she was also a behind-the-scenes curator of the Jewish Museum, famously sneaking downstairs from the upstairs loft she lived in with her husband – Frieda Schiff Warburg's former racquetball court. Kayser's husband, Steven Kayser, was formally the first curator of the Jewish Museum and was the only salaried one. But once again the archives reveal a different behind-the-scenes story, one in which she performed not just her equal work, but made distinctive contributions to the Jewish museum's exhibitions and added her personal works to the museum collection.⁵² This dissertation chapter marks the first scholarly exploration of Kayser and will use little-known archives to explain how Kayser offered her talent to the Jewish museum as a creative architect, engineer, and an artist. There from its founding in 1947 to her departure in 1961, she made a heavy impact on the first decade of the Jewish Museum's existence.

⁵² Grace Cohen Grossman's scholarship has made mention of Louise Kayser but has not told her story head-on. Grace Cohen Grossman, "Dr. Stephen S. Kayser: A Personal Testimonial," in *A Crown for a King: Studies in Jewish Art, History, and Archaeology in Memory of Stephen S. Kayser* (Berkeley, California: Judah L. Magnes Museum, 2000), 1–22.

These women and their museums lurk behind the famous facades and founding myths of museums in America. As the stories of their lives show, their institutions ultimately created a broader template for culturally specific museums – one that other minorities co-opted as these Jewish museums faded from public imagination and disintegrated. A fuller, more equitable picture of American art history, including the new archives and voices in this dissertation, shows that Jewish museums created by women predated and inspired a flurry of identity museums that emerged in the 1960s. Such museums emerged to give voice to minorities and underrepresented groups as Jews and their institutions in America attempted to do decades earlier. Now without further ado, let us hear the voices of four women who shaped the history of American museums and their role in society.

Chapter I

The Rebbetzin: Mignon Levin Rubenovitz and the Jewish Museum of Boston

On Seeing the First Bezalel Exhibit (1916)

The tale, long trumpeted and grown apace
Proclaiming Israel but a bartering race,
Whose longings center in the market-place,
I thought was true. I said, 'Our sorrowful tears
Have held us steadfast to our ancient light,
But we have not escaped oppression's blight,
Of being blind to beauty for our tears.'

To beauty lost? How manifold and fair
The answer comes. It comes in silver scroll,
In shimmering tapestry, in metals wrought
To lovely shapes, whose Eastern patterns rare,
With many-branched radiance flood our soul.
With star ascendant wake prophetic thought.
-Mignon Levine Rubenovitz⁵³

Zion in America, 1914: Jewish Objects from Palestine at Madison Square Garden

In July 1914, a young, unmarried woman named Mignon Levine went to the concert hall of Madison Square Garden to find an exhibition of Jewish arts and handicrafts from Palestine.⁵⁴

⁵³ Mrs. Herman H. Rubenovitz, "Museum Within a Temple," *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990)*; Boston, Mass., December 11, 1958. Quote from a 1916 sonnet she first wrote in her personal diaries.

⁵⁴ The bulk of objects were metal works, wood carvings, and rugs. *Arts & Decoration*, vol. 4 (Artspur Publications, Incorporated, 1913).

Created by Boris Schatz in 1913 as a traveling exhibit, it was the first exposition of Jerusalem's new art academy in the United States and also the place in which Levine first encountered an organized room full of objects created by Jews.⁵⁵ On that summer day in New York, as Levine witnessed the intermingling of Zionist politics and Jewish aesthetics, she was struck by the ways in which exhibits might foster a uniquely American Jewish identity far from Palestine.⁵⁶ Here, for the first time, she began to imagine ways to weave together the narrative threads of her own life: Zionist activism, Jewish ritual objects, and religious practice. In particular, she began to conceive of how to use objects to create a more meaningful, appropriate spiritual experience for a generation of Jews newly entering the American middle class.⁵⁷

In response to the temporary Bezalel exhibition in New York, America's first physical space of Zionist objects, Rubenovitz wrote the sonnet *On Seeing the First Bezalel Exhibit*, capturing her realization that physical objects could create a portable home for Jewish identity and evoke a stable one within their viewers. The Bezalel exhibition codified the beauty and aesthetics in Judaism that Rubenovitz knew from her own home growing up and from the homes and synagogues of her friends and family.⁵⁸ It suggested what a Jewish museum could be and pointed to the interrelationship between Jews in America and a Jewish diasporic past.⁵⁹ Most significantly, it inspired in Rubenovitz the idea that Jewish objects and exhibitions could

⁵⁵ *Arts & Decoration*. Vol. 4. Artspur Publications, Incorporated, 1913, 330; Alfred Emanuel Smith and Francis Walton, *New Outlook* (Outlook publishing Company, Incorporated, 1914); Jenna Weissman Joselit, "Bezalel Comes to Town: American Jews and Art," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 11 (2004): 354–65.

⁵⁶ Naomi W. Cohen, *The Americanization of Zionism, 1897-1948* (Brandeis University Press, 2003), <http://bir.brandeis.edu/handle/10192/28430>.

⁵⁷ Jonathan D Sarna and Ebook Central - Academic Complete, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 272-4; Beth Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, 1st ed. (New York, New York: Doubleday, 2007), Part Three: The Best of Times, The Worst of Times, 1924-1945, especially pages 198-201.

⁵⁸ Jenna Weissman Joselit, "Bezalel Graduates Hold Their Own," *The Forward*, January 30, 2013, <https://forward.com/schmooze/170074/bezalel-graduates-hold-their-own/>.

⁵⁹ "Bezalel: Its Aims and Purpose. Selected Articles and Extracts from Magazines and Newspaper Comments of Writers, Critics and Public Men during the Bezalel Art Exhibits in America" (Friends of Professor Boris Schatz, 1925).

reconnect American Jews to their diasporic Jewish heritage. American Jews could leave an exhibition of art and artifacts with a new sense of unity between their past and present.

Rubenovitz wrote that by illuminating the interrelationship between the idea of Zion and Jews in America, “the mighty spirit that has kept us one” would “surge... and in our time weld the many fragments of Israel from driftwood.”⁶⁰ Ultimately, Mignon Rubenovitz’s museum was the outcome of the convergence of Zionism, the ascension of many American Jews into the middle class, and Rubenovitz’s interest in pursuing Jewish cultural renaissance.⁶¹ This convergence made possible something fundamentally new in American Jewish life: the public staging of identity in a museum.

The rise of the American Zionist movement coincided with the entrance of Jews into American middle-class society.⁶² Over the course of the 1930s, Jews increasingly saw themselves as members of an expanding socioeconomic group of Americans characterized by economic stability, comfort, and suburbia.⁶³ More Jews than ever before were entering public life by serving as lawyers and political leaders.⁶⁴ By the end of World War II, 79% of Jews self-identified as “middle-class,” a “self-conscious category that individuals and groups used to

⁶⁰ Mignon Rubenovitz and Herman Rubenovitz, *The Waking Heart* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Nathaniel Dame & Company, 1967), 234; Beth Wenger and Jeffrey Shandler, *Encounters With the “Holy Land”: Place, Past and Future in American Jewish Culture* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: National Museum of American Jewish History, 1997).

⁶¹ The Jews of Boston were less divided on Zionism than in other places in America because of the high concentration of east European Jews who lived there. Louis Brandeis, “the city’s best known and highly respected Jew,” was also famously a liberal Zionist who architected and led a certain ideology of Zionism in Boston. His influence cannot be overstated. Jonathan D Sarna, Ellen Smith, and Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, *The Jews of Boston: Essays on the Occasion of the Centenary (1895-1995) of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston*, 1st ed (Boston: Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, 1995), 7.

⁶² Mark A. Raider, *The Emergence of American Zionism* (NYU Press, 1998); Ben Halpern, *A Clash of Heroes: Brandeis, Weizmann, and American Zionism* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1987); Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo, *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made* (NYU Press, 2005).

⁶³ Gerald Sorin, “Jewish Immigrants and American Capitalism, 1880-1920: From Caste to Class,” *American Jewish History* 95, no. 1 (2009): 123–VII.

⁶⁴ Arthur A. Goren, *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews*, First Edition edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), Chapter 6: “Paths of Leadership,” 110-142.

characterize economic, cultural, social, and political behavior.”⁶⁵ These developments raised fundamental questions of belonging: How might Jews best exist in a country that outwardly welcomed them and inwardly held both whiteness and Christianity at its cultural cores?⁶⁶ What kind of physical space could facilitate the making and remaking of Jewish identity in America?⁶⁷ The answers would come through Rubenovitz’s embrace of Jewish material culture not only as a way to bolster cultural Zionism, but also as a tool to create the very idea of the past for American Jews. She imagined the display and interpretation of Jewish objects as a means by which Jews could imagine themselves as custodians of the Jewish past.

That process began with her early encounters with cultural Zionism in New York City. But it only developed thanks to her own relocation to Boston, where she entered the role that would define her: rebbetzin.⁶⁸ At Congregation Mishkan Tefila in Boston, Rebbetzin Rubenovitz created a synagogue sisterhood focused on Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America, and on Jewish history, founded a Jewish library for the Sunday school that later served the broader Jewish community in the Boston area and developed the concept of a Jewish

⁶⁵ LILA CORWIN BERMAN, “American Jews and the Ambivalence of Middle-Classness,” *American Jewish History* 93, no. 4 (2007): 413.

⁶⁶ This wasn’t just a Jewish question. This was a question about democracy, diversity, and civic participation that many ethnic groups were asking all over the country. See the below for a case study on Cincinnati: Henry D Shapiro, “Ethnic Diversity and Civic Identity: An Introduction to the Problem and the Essays,” 1-38, and Jonathan Sarna, “A Sort of Paradise for the Hebrews: The Lofty Visions of Cincinnati Jews,” 131-164, Eds. Jonathan D Sarna and Henry Shapiro, *Ethnic Diversity and Civic Identity: Patterns of Conflict and Cohesion in Cincinnati Since 1820*, Greater Cincinnati Bicentennial History Series (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

⁶⁷ Jonathan Freedman, *The Temple of Culture: Assimilation and Anti-Semitism in Literary Anglo-America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000).

⁶⁸ “Rebbetzin” is a Yiddish term referring to a rabbi’s wife. Since Medieval times, women in Europe who married rabbis were expected to serve as educators, communal leaders, and lead their own ventures in the synagogues. In 19th century America, rebbetzins inherited this tradition and also co-evolved with the wives of American clergy. Women who were wives of ministers and pastors began to embody on a definitive communal identity in the mid-1800s, working alongside the notion of “domestic feminism... according to which women possessed an innately religious nature that predisposed them to serve as society’s moral guardians.” “Domestic feminism” allowed space for a more public role for the wives of clergy members, yet it also “reinforced their social subordination to men.” Shuly Rubin Schwartz, *The Rabbi’s Wife: The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 13.

museum within the synagogue.⁶⁹ Most importantly, in all of these ventures, Rubenovitz publicly workshopped an expansive notion of Judaism that included, at its core, the reinterpretation of Jewish life and identity through objects. Her exhibitions were visual manifestations of the idea that Judaism was not only ever-evolving, but that its very historical evolution – as represented through ritual objects – lay at its spiritual core. Rubenovitz’s visually-constructed Jewish history offered elasticity and meaning to the Jewish middle-class, suburban experience of her constituents.⁷⁰ She created a new kind of sacrality rooted in historically-contingent Jewish ritual objects that linked the Jewish American present to the Jewish ancient, medieval and modern pasts. By so doing, she licensed American Jews to integrate Jewish history into their newfound middle-class American lifestyles by engaging with Jewish objects from throughout the Jewish past. Rubenovitz’s creative ideas culminated in 1940 with the birth of her museum, which ultimately offered Americans a lasting model for the stable formulation of identity in process.

Rubenovitz’s story unfolded alongside an American arts scene in a period of flux. Particularly in the 1930s and 40s, many American critics and artists shared in a continual effort to define artistic modernism in a sea of abstraction, symbolism, formalism, figuration, and objectivity – all movements with vastly different aesthetics and ideas about what constituted modern art. Many Boston artists, existing on the periphery of these debates that centered in downtown New York, considered figurative art to be the epitome of modernism – not abstract. With a heavy immigrant population that mostly arrived in the late 19th century, many of whom were German, Boston maintained the aesthetic influences of the Germanic avant-garde of the early 20th century which favored an aesthetic that was grounded in reality – with human bodies

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⁷⁰ Eli Lederhendler, *Jewish Immigrants and American Capitalism, 1880–1920*, 1 edition (Cambridge England ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

and often making political statements. Amidst artistic exploration and debates about what constituted modern art, the museum and gallery scenes in Boston were changing as was the art market.⁷¹ At the same time as it was trying to be artistically experimental and complex, Boston was also politically conservative; many of its inhabitants were anti-immigration, even the immigrants among them.⁷² Many favored art with a more classical aesthetic and historical bent. During a moment in which the notion of art was thrown into question, Rubenovitz, not an artist nor a curator yet, emerged with new ideas about Jewish art, and how art could represent identity.⁷³

The Boston Jewish context provided unique grounds for the new notion of a Jewish museum. Boston was home to academic and cultural explorations of Jewish ideologies unlike those anywhere else in the United States. The Menorah Society, founded at Harvard University, emblemizes what historians have understood as a Jewish community that was “enchanted with the life of the mind.”⁷⁴ Founded in 1906, the Menorah Society involved Jews who wrote about pluralism and democracy, and Judaism’s place as a minority in a majority-Christian country. Seeking a Jewish renaissance of its own, the Menorah Society uncovered ancient histories and rewrote them as modern – made them relevant, relatable, and helpful to modern Jews. Meanwhile, Harvard scholars such as Harry Wolfsohn were writing about the parallels and

⁷¹ Judith Arlene Bookbinder, *Boston Modern: Figurative Expressionism as Alternative Modernism* (UPNE, 2005), 6-10.

⁷² There was a long history of anti-immigrant sentiment in Boston that even Jewish immigrant families participated in. In 1882, German Jews decided to ship over 400 impoverished Jewish refugees from Europe over to New York rather than accept them in Boston. Jonathan D Sarna, Ellen Smith, and Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, *The Jews of Boston: Essays on the Occasion of the Centenary (1895-1995) of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston*, 1st ed (Boston: Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, 1995), 6-7.

⁷³ Nancy S. Seasholes, *The Atlas of Boston History* (University of Chicago Press, 2019), 106.

⁷⁴ Jonathan D Sarna, Ellen Smith, and Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, *The Jews of Boston: Essays on the Occasion of the Centenary (1895-1995) of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston*, 1st ed (Boston: Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, 1995), 15.

compatibilities between Hellenism, or Greek and Roman thought, and Judaism.⁷⁵ Louis Brandeis was writing and speaking about how Zionism and liberalism went hand in hand, embodying the argument historians have made for generations: that Boston's Jews were some of the most eager to form updated and new Jewish ideological suppositions that felt resonant with the socio-political direction of America.⁷⁶

Mignon Rubenovitz's story lives along the boundaries between the above phenomena to illuminate a lesser-known agent of American Jewish history: the Jewish museum.⁷⁷ Shuly Rubin Schwartz once wrote of Mignon Rubenovitz's seeming silence in the archives of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and her unknown creative expansion of the possibilities of the rebbetzin role. She wrote of missing box 14 in the 13-box archives of Herman Rubenovitz, which was abandoned to an uncatalogued storage area at JTS from 1978 to 1998 until discovered by historian Julie Miller.⁷⁸ The recent 2016 reorganization of the Congregation Mishkan Tefila archives has allowed for a deeper exploration of Mignon Rubenovitz's life in the context of Boston's Conservative Jewish community that was perhaps incomprehensible to earlier scholars of Conservative Judaism, of Boston, of Jewish art, and of the women who built Jewish life in America through alternative means. Mignon Rubenovitz's project of Jewish art for America was

⁷⁵ Jonathan D Sarna, Ellen Smith, and Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, *The Jews of Boston: Essays on the Occasion of the Centenary (1895-1995) of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston*, 1st ed (Boston: Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, 1995), 16.

⁷⁶ Melvin I Urofsky, *Louis D. Brandeis: A Life*, 1st ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 2009), Chapter 6: Traction and Utilities, pages 130-154.

⁷⁷ Historians often attribute changes in early 20th century American Jewish life to mass waves of immigration. As more Jews arrived, there was more and more need for different kinds of community. However, this interpretation, which uses immigration as a catch-all agent for change, skews our scholarly understandings of the movements that emerged such as JCCs, new kinds of synagogues, and Jewish museums. Such institutions were not direct results of immigration but rather organizations shaped by many complex and broader societal forces. Jonathan Sarna, "A Great Awakening: The Transformation That Shaped Twentieth Century American Judaism And Its Implications For Today," *Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education Essay Series*, Essay Series, 1995.

⁷⁸ Rubin Schwartz, *The Rabbi's Wife*, 1.

a political act, one that reclaimed Jewish history as a pressing American spiritual, religious, and aesthetic need.

Scholarship has examined the creation of new kinds of institutions like JCCs and their blended social and cultural profiles, summer camps and fraternal and philanthropic organizations, and synagogues and their architecture. Museums, too, have had some important studies, albeit few in number. But what Mignon Rubenovitz's life reveals is the complex interweaving of social, political, and economic changes in Jewish America – and how women can work with these shifting elements to pursue *cultural* renaissance.⁷⁹ The idea of a Jewish cultural renaissance was not new.⁸⁰ Yet, in America, Mignon Rubenovitz pursued an aesthetic renaissance that was both made possible changes amongst American Jews *and* served their dramatically new spiritual needs. Unlike other women married to clergy members in America, many of whom were involved in the existing structures of their religious institutions, Rubenovitz looked outside of her role as rebbetzin and her synagogue as a well-known Conservative Jewish religious center to locate a missing piece of Jewish life – visual culture. Inspired and helped by the broader forces of Zionism, American democratic mobilization, acculturation, and institution-building, Rubenovitz's museum embodies not just one woman's determination, vision, and ability to leverage resources, but also the connections between broader American forces and the Jewish cultural renaissance she and other women inaugurated.

⁷⁹ Noam Pianko, *Jewish Peoplehood: An American Innovation* (Rutgers University Press, 2015); Arthur A. Goren, *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews*, First Edition edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Ken Arnold Eisen, "Postscript: Thinking Jewish Culture in America," in *Thinking Jewish Culture in America* (Lexington Books, 2013), 313–18; Noam Pianko, "Jewish Peoplehood and the Nationalist Paradigm in American Jewish Culture," in *Thinking Jewish Culture in America* (Lexington Books, 2013), 15–30; Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture 1880-1950*, 1st ed (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994).

⁸⁰ Asher Biemann, *Inventing New Beginnings: On the Idea of Renaissance in Modern Judaism* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

From Baltimore to Boston

Rebbetzin Mignon Rubenovitz was born Mignon Levine in 1884 in Baltimore to Russian-Lithuanian Jewish immigrants from the borderland of Kovno. Her father, Harris, had immigrated alone as a teenager and become a street peddler. Her mother, Dora, had immigrated as a young child with her father, a rabbi who made the transatlantic passage with the help of his brothers-in-law who already lived in America.⁸¹ They met in Virginia when Dora was 18 and married in Richmond. Shortly thereafter, Harris enlisted as a combat soldier for the Confederacy in the Civil War and Dora became a Confederate nurse. After the war they moved to Charleston with their two children for a short time and then to Baltimore, where Mignon was born as their eighth child and where her maternal grandparents resided. Harris Levin opened a general store there.⁸² They became longtime members of Dr. Rabbi Benjamin Szold's congregation, the Reform Temple Oheb Shalom.⁸³ Bertha Szold, the youngest of the five Szold sisters, married Mignon Rubenovitz's brother Louis in 1901 when Rubenovitz was just seven years old, ushering the Levins into the Szold family fold. All of the Levine children attended Baltimore public schools.

In 1908, Rubenovitz left Baltimore to study psychology and childhood education at Barnard and Columbia Teachers College, graduating with her BA in 1911. Between the years 1911 and 1915, she taught child Psychology, English Literature, and "Child Study" in Baltimore

⁸¹ Theodore Rosengarten, Dale Rosengarten, and McKissick Museum, *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press in association with McKissick Museum, 2002), 98; "Rabbi Hirsch Zvi Levin - College of Charleston," accessed March 24, 2020, <http://jewish.cofc.edu/about-the-program/founders-wall/rabbi-levin.php>; "Esther Rachel Levin," managed by Randy Schoenberg, Richard Michael Winstock, and other surviving relatives, accessed March 1, 2020, <https://www.geni.com/people/Esther-Levin/6000000002764784378> "R' Hirsch Zvi (Harry) Levine (Margolis). <https://www.geni.com/people/R-Hirsch-Zvi-Levine/6000000002764784372?through=6000000002764784378#/tab/timeline>.

⁸² Alexandra Lee Levin, *Dare to Be Different: A Biography of Louis H. Levin of Baltimore* (New York, New York: Bloch Publishing Company, Inc., 1972), 2.

⁸³ Alexandra Lee Levin, *Dare to Be Different: A Biography of Louis H. Levin of Baltimore* (New York, New York: Bloch Publishing Company, Inc., 1972), 15.

and in Brooklyn at two different teacher's colleges.⁸⁴ In those years she also became involved in Zionism. At a historic 1912 gathering at Temple Emanu-El in New York City, Rubenovitz was among the 38 women who founded the first Zionist women's organization in America:

Hadassah.⁸⁵ In 1913 Rubenovitz joined the newly formed Hadassah Central Committee and became the Baltimore chapter's first president.⁸⁶ In 1915, Rubenovitz lectured on "Zionism and American Patriotism" in Baltimore and Newark.⁸⁷ These talks foreshadowed her career-long commitment to expressing the resonance of Jewish and Zionist values with American middle-class life, especially for women.

In July 1915, Mignon Levine became engaged to Herman Rubenovitz, a Lithuanian immigrant from her parents' native Kovno who had recently become the rabbi at Mishkan Tefila in Boston.⁸⁸ Mishkan Tefila was formed in 1895 with the merging of two smaller Conservative communities, Mishkan Israel (1858) and Shaarei Tefila (1860s). The founders were Conservative East Prussian Jews who broke from the predominantly Polish Orthodox synagogue. Rabbi Rubenovitz had first met Mignon Levin at a Zionist conference in New York in 1907. Rabbi Rubenovitz was one of a few early disciples of Chancellor Rabbi Solomon Schechter of the Jewish Theological Seminary and was destined for a public career in Conservative Judaism. The two were married that mid-October in the Levine family home in Baltimore.⁸⁹ Their collective

⁸⁴ Shuly Rubin Schwartz, *The Rabbi's Wife: The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 93; "A Juror to Judge Greenbaum," *The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger* (1903-1922); *New York, NY*, June 3, 1910; Jen S. Margolis, "Mignon L. Rubenovitz 75 Years Young," *Jewish Advocate* (1909-1990); *Boston, Mass.*, May 7, 1959; "MRS. HERMAN RUBENOVITZ," *Jewish Advocate* (1909-1990); *Boston, Mass.*, August 15, 1957.

⁸⁵ Marlin Levin, *It Takes a Dream: The Story of Hadassah* (Gefen Publishing House Ltd, 2002); Rose G. Jacobs, "The Beginnings of Hadassah," in *Early History of Zionism in America*, ed. Isidore S. Meyer, 1958, 228-44; Tamer de Sola Pool, President of Hadassah, 1939 to 1943, *Henrietta Szold, 1860 - 1945*, n.d.

⁸⁶ Schwartz, *The Rabbi's Wife: The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life*, 92; Rubenovitz and Rubenovitz, *The Waking Heart*, 205.

⁸⁷ "Congregation Oher Shalom," *The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger* (1903-1922); *New York, NY*, February 26, 1915.

⁸⁸ "Social Items," *The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger* (1903-1922); *New York, NY*, July 2, 1915.

⁸⁹ "Roxbury," *Jewish Advocate* (1909-1990); *Boston, Mass.*, October 15, 1915.

memoirs do not mention the option of having children, and it appears that they did not want to. This decision would have been more fitting with the context of American Jewish religious leadership than it might appear. Childless Christian and Jewish religious leaders in America at the turn of the century were often viewed by their communities as selfless agents of congregational change and growth.⁹⁰ Many Jews understood rebbetzins as congregational mothers of their broader communities and having children might have made this work more difficult. In part because she was not encumbered by motherhood, Rubenovitz could travel, devoting time to building both Hadassah and the Conservative women's movement across the Northeast. Rubenovitz was amongst the founding leadership of the Women's League of Conservative Judaism in 1918 as well as that of Hadassah, and she facilitated the Mishkan Tefila Sisterhood's involvement in both.⁹¹

While her husband was the first English-speaking rabbi of the congregation, Rubenovitz was the first highly educated, non-immigrant rebbetzin to do more than just head the synagogue's early childhood educational ventures. In their first year together in Boston, she began to imagine herself initiating new ventures in the synagogue that could access peoples' hearts and spirits beyond the prayer book and the sermon. As she later wrote about her first Rosh Hashanah at Mishkan Tefila, "sitting, apparently, so containedly in my pew, within myself... the rabbi's thoughts sway me... Yes, I am an aeolian harp at this point in the year." While she felt herself played like an instrument by the temple's religious service, the new year rituals, and her own memories of the holiday from childhood, she simultaneously noticed mothers and fathers

⁹⁰ Schwartz, *The Rabbi's Wife: The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life*, 94. See also Kirkley, Evelyn A. "Mrs. God': The Role of the Minister's Wife, 1930-1980," 1985, 14-16, 19.

⁹¹ Michael Cohen, "Chapter 4: On the Brink of Irrelevance," in *The Birth of Conservative Judaism: Solomon Schechter's Disciples and the Creation of an American Religious Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 91-92.

tuning out during the sermon. She asked herself, “Can the rabbi open the door of Judaism’s basic truths to them and speak their language?”⁹² From Rubenovitz’s perspective, male congregants focused on business and professional ideas and female congregants distracted by “clothes and households and petty tasks” were finding religious worship to be inaccessible. She began to seek tools that could help build a more meaningful, spiritual Jewish existence in America other than words and prayer. An answer would later come to her but was already brewing in her psyche: Jewish culture.

From an early age, ritual objects captured her imagination. She wrote of the holiest day of the Jewish year in her childhood Baltimore home: “I can never recall Yom Kippur in the home of my youth without seeing... the Nashoma Licht, the soul’s light.... My mother made the candle herself.”⁹³ She went on to describe how her mother used to go to the cemetery every year and lay a white string around the graves of her two parents and her deceased daughter, cutting it to measure each plot. When she came home, these strings formed the wicks she used as the centers of the beeswax she shaped for candles. Rubenovitz learned at an early age that physical objects could ground and recontextualize timeless physical traditions and strengthen Jews’ connection to a shared peoplehood, wherever they lived. Since the material culture of her childhood gave her the gift of a lasting sense of Jewish values, one that withstood the forces of suburbanization, Americanization and even an undercurrent of anti-Semitism, she hoped to exhibit Jewish objects to offer American Jews the same sense.

Mignon Rubenovitz was not the only person thinking about the propagation of Jewish culture in Boston as an antidote to assimilation and secular middle-class suburban life. In the first few years of the 20th century, as Jewish students grew in number at Harvard yet remained a

⁹² Rubenovitz and Rubenovitz, *The Waking Heart*, 188.

⁹³ Rubenovitz and Rubenovitz, *The Waking Heart*, 176.

minority with strict quota restrictions, some questioned how to maintain Jewish identity in an overwhelmingly Christian setting. The Menorah Society, the first Jewish club at Harvard, was founded in 1906 to revitalize the study and practice of Jewish culture on campus. The hope of its founders was that the group would encourage Jews other campuses to pursue Jewish cultural renaissance as well. The same year The Menorah Society was founded, Harvard student Horace Kallen defended his dissertation on the notion of cultural pluralism (though he would only formally coin the term later). He was an important champion and intellectual guide of The Menorah Society, believing that culture and its expression were the bedrocks of a healthy American democracy – especially for Jews. In Kallen’s and The Menorah Society’s view, Jewish culture was the answer to the threats of American homogeneity and Jewish assimilation.⁹⁴

At the same time as Harvard students were changing the landscape of Jewish intellectual and cultural life, The Armory Show of 1913 was introducing new kinds of culture into big cities like Boston. The Armory Show was the first large-scale exhibition of modern art in the United States and shocked spectators with its abstract European and American pieces, many of which were previously rejected by establishment museums and galleries. It began in New York and traveled next to Chicago before finishing in Boston. The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s purchase of an aesthetically provocative Cezanne painting from the show signaled that some curators and art historians in America were attempting to normalize the avant-garde. Still, Boston, a conservative city interested in classical art history which established its famed and still-existing Copley Society of Art in 1879, was reticent to accept abstract art as part of the Western art canon. Starting in 1911 Copley itself hosted heated debates about whether to allow the Armory

⁹⁴ These founding students Daniel Greene, *The Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism: The Menorah Association and American Diversity*, 2011, 15-16; Jonathan D Sarna, Ellen Smith, and Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, *The Jews of Boston: Essays on the Occasion of the Centenary (1895-1995) of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston*, 1st ed (Boston: Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, 1995), 16.

Show to exhibit in Boston.⁹⁵ The Armory Show ultimately threw into question the very foundations of art museums, artistic realism, and proved that artists and curators didn't need establishment approval to become canonized.⁹⁶ Some thought this scandalized Boston's art scene. Perhaps it also made room for new kinds of museums to emerge, ones that defied categorization and introduced new kinds of art.

Mignon Rubenovitz did not intend to enter the broader conversations in Boston about Jewish culture on college campuses, nor about what constituted art and art history. In fact, she never wrote about The Menorah Society, and she seldom engaged with abstract art. There are no records that she attended the Armory Show. Yet these changing dynamics in her city around Jews and art formed the backdrop for her exploration into a new kind of institution in a new kind of Boston. These changes made room for her to build something new at Mishkan Tefila.

Rubenovitz once wrote about the experience of Yom Kippur at Mishkan Tefila and explained that her husband attempted to play congregants like “harps” in the pews. The music he made was ethereal, spiritual, and impermanent, as she illustrated. It was confined to the sacred space of the synagogue, and the prayer books guiding liturgy lacked the dynamism and interactivity of objects and rituals. Upon her arrival in Boston Rubenovitz quickly sought alternative models. In 1915 she rebranded the synagogue Sisterhood and then in 1920 founded a library and collection of objects with just a former bridge table and a back closet, thereby creating her first living, breathing, functional space with potential for constant growth. Display,

⁹⁵ “The Shows That Made Contemporary Art History: The Armory Show,” *Artland Magazine* (blog), September 18, 2020, <https://magazine.artland.com/the-shows-that-made-contemporary-art-history-the-armory-show/>.

⁹⁶ “American art institutions as a whole were shaken by the force of the Armory Show – the blast sent old establishments with rotting foundations tumbling to the ground. Before the show, the National Academy of Design... dominated U.S. tastes and shaped (or denied) the careers of U.S. artists. The Armory Show demolished the power of the Academy and proved artists didn't need associations to succeed in the twentieth century. They could be modernists on their own terms.” Elizabeth Lunday, *Modern Art Invasion: Picasso, Duchamp, and the 1913 Armory Show That Scandalized America* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), xii.

ambiance and décor shifted with the flows of people and books. The library turned into a large public culture endeavor that sent pieces of Judaism home with congregants who wanted to engage with Jewish history in their own homes and integrate it into their day-to-day lives. The process sounded a different kind of tune, one that echoed within families' otherwise more secular American suburban lives. By creatively making and remaking Jewish history through "things," Rubenovitz offered the pieces of collective memory that mothers took with them to the grocery store, that fathers took on their morning commutes to Boston, that children found in their home life in the form of rituals. That process began with her new model of shared activism with women in the synagogue.

From Auxiliary to Sisterhood(s): Zionist Publicity and Public Culture

When Rubenovitz moved to Boston in 1915, a delegation of women from the Women's Auxiliary of Mishkan Tefila met her at the railroad station.⁹⁷ As the community's new rebbetzin, Rubenovitz was expected to serve congregational needs in the domestic sphere of her home with the rabbi. She was also expected to become the head of the preexisting Mishkan Tefila Women's' Auxiliary.⁹⁸ But she was not expected to turn it into an independent platform for altogether new ventures within the synagogue, nor to usher the organization into the American worlds of libraries and art museums.

⁹⁷ Herbert J. Selib, Walter C. Feinberg, and Editorial Advisors Rabbi Herman Rubenovitz, Mignon L. Rubenovitz, Rabbi Israel J. Kazis, Abraham A. Bloom, Harry L. Katz, *Temple Mishkan Tefila: A History, 1858-1958*, 2nd ed. (Newton, Ma.: Temple Mishkan Tefila, 1958), 71.

⁹⁸ Mathilde Schechter played a big role in the growth of synagogue sisterhoods at the turn of the 20th century. When she left her office at the Women's League of Conservative Judaism in 1919, which she helped found, she reported 57 Sisterhoods with a collective membership of over 6,000. Shuly Rubin Schwartz, "Tradition and Change: Finding the Right Balance in Conservative and Reconstructionist Judaism," ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller et. al., *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America 2* (2006), 181. For Sisterhoods in Reform Judaism see: Carole Balin et al., eds., *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 2013), 160-161.

Since its founding in 1907, the Women’s Auxiliary of Temple Mishkan Tefila had focused on funding architectural renovations, repairs, moves, pew renovations, and other basics of the physical space. It secondarily funded renewed liturgical materials as per the desires of all-male religious leadership, which was involved in its affairs. The month she arrived in 1915, Mignon Rubenovitz revamped and rebranded the Auxiliary as an independent Sisterhood run solely by the women of the congregation. She shifted its focus to creating separate educational content from religious services or liturgy for the entire congregation, starting with a library and culminating in a museum.⁹⁹ The women of the new Sisterhood also became Hadassah activists and advocates, and Mishkan Tefila became one of the country’s best-resourced supporters of the women’s Zionist organization.

The connection of Zionism was not incidental, for Zionism was a key focal point for these activities. In 1915 she inaugurated Mishkan Tefila as a home base for political Zionist groups around the Northeast.¹⁰⁰ She chaired the cultural work committee for Hadassah throughout the 1920s and 30s.¹⁰¹ She organized events within and outside of the Temple educating Americans on Palestine, and especially the arts and culture that flowed from it.¹⁰² In 1934 she gave a seminal speech for Hadassah’s yearly conference “appraising the value of [Hebrew poet Hayim Nachman] Bialik's life and accomplishments to Jewish womanhood and to Palestine.” Introduced at this event and others as “a distinguished leader of American Jewish

⁹⁹ In her earliest published writing in 1927, Rubenovitz wrote about the special role of American Jewish women in studying Jewish history and creating educational content for the rest of the community. Mignon Rubenovitz, “‘The Three Pillars,’ by Deborah M. Melamed,” *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990); Boston, Mass.*, July 14, 1927.

¹⁰⁰ Lewis Goldberg, Justice of Superior Court, Commonwealth of Massachusetts to Rabbi and Mrs. Rubenovitz, 1964, Congregation Mishkan Tefila [Chestnut Hill, MA] Records, Arc.2016.04, Box 4, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

¹⁰¹ “Local Lines,” *The Boston Globe*, October 15, 1922; “Women’s League Of Sisterhoods Confers May 9th: Mishkan Tefila Host--To Exhibit Paintings of Oded Bourla,” *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990); Boston, Mass.*, May 4, 1944.

¹⁰² “Boston Unit, Junior Hadassah,” *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990); Boston, Mass.*, February 3, 1927.

womanhood and outstanding representative of Hadassah,” Rubenovitz represented the women of Zionism.¹⁰³ It was through this Zionist activity that she came to the idea of creating a public Jewish museum in Boston.

Extending Bezalel to America: the 1916 Encounter and an Extension of Jewish Nationalism

When Rubenovitz was in high school in 1905, the Lithuanian (Kovno-born), Paris-trained sculptor artist Boris Schatz established the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem for Jewish migrants to Palestine.¹⁰⁴ Previously, Schatz had served as the official court sculptor for Bulgarian royalty and a drawing professor in Berlin and Vilnius. He envisioned that Bezalel would “develop art in the land of Israel... where all arts and industries are in a very primitive phase of development.” Particularly, he wanted to teach Jewish “children” how to make “beautiful objects for domestic use and for home decoration.”¹⁰⁵ Schatz came to the United States to curate the 1914 exhibition that inspired Rubenovitz’s poem above; he hoped to sell objects made by Jews in the school’s early years to raise money for scholarships, art materials, and Jerusalem infrastructure. It was here that Rubenovitz first encountered a new modality of creative politics and later that she understood the implications of Schatz’s fundraising.

After the exhibit she became one of the few American Zionists to fiscally support the Bezalel cause before 1920. Though American Jews increased their support of other Zionist cultural movements such as dance and literature throughout the 1930s and 40s, the Jewish visual

¹⁰³ “Statler Thronged with Bialik Admirers,” *Jewish Advocate* (1909-1990); Boston, Mass., August 21, 1934.

¹⁰⁴ Asher Biemann, *Inventing New Beginnings: On the Idea of Renaissance in Modern Judaism* (Stanford University Press, 2009); Asher D. Biemann, “Zionism and Nationalism (1929),” in *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings*, ed. Asher D. Biemann (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2002), 277–80, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-07671-7_31.

¹⁰⁵ “Bezalel: Its Aims and Purpose. Selected Articles and Extracts from Magazines and Newspaper Comments of Writers, Critics and Public Men during the Bezalel Art Exhibits in America” (Friends of Professor Boris Schatz, 1925). Israel Museum Archives, Jerusalem.

arts of Palestine remained underfunded and little-known in this period. Because most American Zionist leaders did not believe in the school's ability to stay alive financially or to contribute meaningfully to the economy, Schatz found himself organizing his 1914 exhibit for America almost single-handedly. Eventually, owing to Schatz's colorful personality and persistence, New York City's 20,000-plus attendees purchased \$12,000 worth of Jewish objects in the initial showing in NYC.¹⁰⁶ If Schatz asserted a Hebrew national voice in the crafting of a diverse world stage, Rubenovitz would soon declare a Jewish religious voice in the making of the new, suburban American middle class.

Rubenovitz was able ultimately to bring some of the ethos of his exhibitions into her own, buying several sculptures by Boris Schatz himself, likely that day, that would later be exhibited in Mishkan Tefila's museum.¹⁰⁷ Rubenovitz wrote that as a result of seeing the Bezalel exhibit in 1914, she realized the power that objects have to "quicken appreciation of our heritage." She continued, "when I came to Boston, shortly thereafter, I set about collecting ceremonial objects, art books, paintings and etchings illustrative of Jewish ways in ages past. Fortunately I found a number of women, perceptive and sympathetic, who were ready to go along with this effort of mine."¹⁰⁸ The Auxiliary-turned-Sisterhood began to develop the Temple's collecting practices.

The Foundation of a Library and the Collection of Objects, 1920 – 1940

¹⁰⁶ Gideon Ofrat-Friedlander, "IX: Bezalel Sales and Promotion," in *Bezalel, 1906 - 1929* (Israel: The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 1983), 327.

¹⁰⁷ Mignon L. Rubenovitz, *Altars of My Fathers*, Revised Second Edition (Boston: The National Women's League of the United Synagogue of America, 1957), 13.

¹⁰⁸ Mrs. Herman H. Rubenovitz, "Museum Within a Temple," *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990)*; *Boston, Mass.*, December 11, 1958.

The Jewish museum began as a library, which in turn began as a back closet. In 1920 Rubenovitz repurposed an old bridge table previously used by the women's auxiliary to Mishkan Tefila as a wobbly counter for the librarian's books.¹⁰⁹ In 1925, when Mishkan Tefila opened its new, expanded synagogue on Elm Hill and Seaver Streets, the library expanded its collection dramatically and acquired its own room.¹¹⁰ In her book, Rubenovitz writes that her "pioneer effort" of the Jewish museum required travel to acquire objects and involved many years of networking.¹¹¹ In the early 1920s, Rubenovitz began to expand her fundraising efforts for the Library & Museum and to rally the Sisterhood behind the mission. The women in the Sisterhood enlisted men, many of whom were already donors for other causes within the temple, to give to the museum in those initial years.¹¹² Sisterhood members also encouraged one another in meetings to give to the cause themselves and wrote up materials to send to the women of the congregation who were not involved in the group. In 1929, Rubenovitz expanded the library space in preparation for the founding of a museum. When the Sisterhood and Mothers' Club merged in 1921, the women involved in each collectively focused their efforts on library expansion and a burgeoning museum.¹¹³

Rubenovitz envisioned a Judaica collection that could remind Jewish visitors of the ability to invigorate their lives with meaning through objects. The central narrative thread of her emerging museum collection was "Israel's struggle for freedom," but instead of adhering to old Jewish tropes of triumph in the face of oppression, the museum project represented a different

¹⁰⁹ Mrs. Herman H. Rubenovitz, "Museum Within a Temple."

¹¹⁰ For the synagogue's expansion see Jonathan D. Sarna, "Leonard Bernstein and the Boston Jewish Community of His Youth: The Influence of Solomon Braslavsky, Herman Rubenovitz, and Congregation Mishkan Tefila," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 3, no. 1 (February 2009): 35, 37.

¹¹¹ Rubenovitz and Rubenovitz, *The Waking Heart*, 250.

¹¹² In 1927 Rubenovitz presented a pageant she had directed for a fundraiser to an audience of men and women. "Local Lines," *Boston Daily Globe (1923-1927)*; *Boston, Mass.*, December 4, 1927.

¹¹³ Mrs. Herman H. Rubenovitz, "Museum Within a Temple."

kind of Jewish freedom: the license to create, ritualize, and beautify. The collection came to embody Jewish history as a history of aesthetic liberty in different contexts rather than one characterized by a constant fight against subjugation. Rubenovitz herself rarely experienced anti-Semitism, and her congregation was an economically advantaged group largely sheltered from its most overt manifestations. Rubenovitz once wrote, “Hanukah lamps speaking of every time and clime – of Jewries in Morocco, Palestine, Germany, Russia, Peru – recall the first struggle in recorded history for man’s right to worship God in his own way.” As the museum developed, its objects and their labels were rarely tied to historical moments of persecution, and exhibitions were not themed by catastrophic events (for example, the Inquisition and even World War II never appeared in the exhibitions as themes). Rather, the purpose of these objects and of the museum was to express the constancy of Jewish aesthetic splendor throughout history, and the adaptability of rituals and mutability of Jewish objects in different contexts.¹¹⁴ Through her museum, Rubenovitz gave American Jews the freedom to reimagine Jewish identity in America through objects just as Jews had throughout history. In middle-class America, Jewish relics spanning time and space seemed to grant Jews with newfound resources the freedom to honor old practices by creating new, contextually resonant ones.

In 1930, as Mignon and Herman Rubenovitz were readying for a yearlong sabbatical in Palestine, the women of the Sisterhood of Mishkan Tefila surprised Rubenovitz with a small plaque on the library reading: “the Mignon L. Rubenovitz Library.” The plaque and the name honored her visionary role in leading the Sisterhood to make the library a reality. At the last Sisterhood gathering of the year weeks before the Rubenovitz’s left, the women marched to the library’s front door, where they’d assembled a surprise gathering to show her the plaque and

¹¹⁴ Rubenovitz and Rubenovitz, *The Waking Heart*, 250-1.

send her off.¹¹⁵ They reassured her that they would manage object donations and run the library in her absence, keeping it open, as usual, three days per week. Rubenovitz returned from Palestine in 1932 with a reinvigorated mission to exhibit Jewish objects; records of acquisitions show an uptick in fundraising and in donations of objects of Judaica upon her return, including Chanukah menorahs, Sabbath candlesticks, ceramics, sculptures, and more.¹¹⁶

In 1934, a watershed event changed the interior landscape of the library: the Sisterhood Room Furnishing Committee purchased two new curio cabinets to house and display ceremonial objects. For the first time, objects were becoming slowly visible in the library space in cabinets, though not yet on walls. In 1936 artist Joseph Tepper presented Mignon and Herman Rubenovitz with portraits of each of them in a ceremony likely endowed by Temple leadership.¹¹⁷ The acquisitions marked major additions to the preexisting collection of art objects and the first instance of paintings adorning the library walls.

The following year, in 1937, the Mignon L. Rubenovitz Library had its first formal exhibition of Judaica with objects on the walls, in the curio cabinets, and in other brand-new display cases.¹¹⁸ Two years later, in 1939, the Sisterhood displayed objects in the vestry on a festive Chanukah meeting of the Sisterhood.¹¹⁹ In 1940, the 20th anniversary celebration of the

¹¹⁵ Herbert J. Selib, Walter C. Feinberg, and Editorial Advisors: Rabbi Herman Rubenovitz, Mignon L. Rubenovitz, Rabbi Israel J. Kazis, Abraham A. Bloom, Harry L. Katz, *Temple Mishkan Tefila: A History, 1858-1958*, 69.

¹¹⁶ Sisterhood Temple Mishkan Tefila, *Record Book of Ceremonial Objects and Jewish Antiquities*, n.d., Jewish Theological Seminary Archives, Congregation Mishkan Tefila [Chestnut Hill, MA] Records, Arc.2016.04, Box 36.

¹¹⁷ "The Jewish Museum of Temple Mishkan Tefila: Inventory as of August, 1951" (Temple Mishkan Tefila: Temple Mishkan Tefila, August 1951), Congregation Mishkan Tefila [Chestnut Hill, MA] Records, Arc.2016.04, Box 26, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

¹¹⁸ "The Record of the Exhibit of Rare Books and Ceremonial Objects, Held in the Sisterhood Room and Library in Celebration of the 18th Anniversary," November 28, 1937. Congregation Mishkan Tefila [Chestnut Hill, MA] Records, Arc.2016.04, Box 36. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

¹¹⁹ "Chanukah Meeting Of Mishkan Tefila Sisterhood Dec. 5," *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990)*; Boston, Mass., December 1, 1939.

Mignon L. Rubenovitz Library doubled as the formal opening of the Mishkan Tefila Sisterhood Museum.¹²⁰

“A Visible Bond Uniting the Nations”: The Jewish Museum Opening in 1940

On December 20, 1940, the front page of the Boston *Jewish Advocate* explained that the museum would open to the public five days later, on the second night of the eight-day Jewish holiday of Chanukah. Sisterhood members would proceed from the Mishkan Tefila assembly hall to the museum, each carrying their own Chanukah menorahs and singing the Chanukah hymn “Rock of Ages” (Maoz Tzur) before formally inaugurating the museum.¹²¹

In the *Program of the Dedication of the Museum*, Rubenovitz wrote: “in these beautiful, ceremonial objects... we find the bond that unites the generations. For here we have visibly demonstrated the continuity of Jewish life... a source of pride and education, not only for us of the Mishkan Tefila family but for the Jewry of New England as well.” From 15th-century Italian wedding contracts (*ketubot* in Hebrew) to modern Zionist paintings to portraits of Maimonides, the museum’s wide variety across space and time created the sometimes-cacophonous symphony of an international Jewish nation defined by its imaginative creation, recreation, and usage of objects in diverse contexts. Upon its founding Rubenovitz wrote of the museum’s wide range:

You will see a great variety of objects. Let us pause for a moment before an ancient Sephardic hanukia with its oil lamps, its back decorated with mosque windows. Its artistry shows Arabic influence. Perhaps your attention will be attracted to an illuminated Haggada. That would tell us of Jews who lived in medieval Germany in the 14th century before printing was invented. Everything in the Museum, from the Ketuba written for a bride and groom in Rome 142 years

¹²⁰ “Garden Party to Benefit Library Fund of Women,” *Jewish Advocate* (1909-1990); Boston, Mass., August 2, 1940, sec. Womens Activities.

¹²¹ “Museum to Be Dedicated on Wed. Evening: Impressive Affair Under Auspices of Mishkan Tefila Sisterhood,” *Jewish Advocate* (1909-1990); Boston, Mass., December 20, 1940; “Jewish Museum Dedicatory Exercises: To Take Place December 25--Gift of Sisterhood Mishkan Tefila,” *Jewish Advocate* (1909-1990); Boston, Mass., December 13, 1940.

ago to the rare Ner Tamid wrought in Jerusalem last year... tells us a Jewish tale.¹²²

The space which had for a decade exhibited Jewish books and several objects now was suddenly filled with Judaica and accessible, though scholarly, wall labels while some of the books moved to the Rubenovitz's two offices and home.¹²³

Contemporaneous Jewish press marveled at the creation of a new kind of institution in the Jewish community – one that had been extant outside of it for decades. After explaining that museums in general could be “valuable link[s] between the past and the present,” a writer for Boston’s *The Jewish Advocate* remarked: “in a *Jewish* museum [author’s emphasis], we are helped to visualize the yearning for the beautiful and artistic which our enemies and detractors would deny us.” The Jewish museum of Boston, the author continued, provided “the material for an authentic account of Jewish life in this part of the country” that “will be available for the future historian.”¹²⁴ Another article remarked, “Quietly, and without blare of trumpets, a unique and very significant institution is being built up in this community... The purpose which this Museum is to serve is to convey to the beholder in vivid and impressive form some idea of the spiritual richness and mansidedness of Jewish life throughout the ages. Thus, the Museum becomes an important element in a program of 'spiritual defense' which the Jew of today, harassed and attacked on all sides, so greatly needs.”¹²⁵ Several years later in 1949, the *Jewish*

¹²²“Program of the Dedication of the Museum,” December 25, 1940. Congregation Mishkan Tefila [Chestnut Hill, MA] Records, Arc.2016.04, Box 26. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

¹²³ Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, European Jewish scholars were rewriting Jewish history through a Zionist framework and reinventing modern Jewish studies. Though their efforts to invent new narratives for Jewish history and culture were confined to the university, their work from 1924 through the 1950s is the scholarly, academic version of Rubenovitz’s project and embodies an international Jewish interest in rewriting the Jewish story – one that Jewish women like Rubenovitz capitalized on to invent a new kind of institution: the Jewish museum. David N. Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹²⁴ “A Jewish Museum,” *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990); Boston, Mass.*, December 13, 1940.

¹²⁵ “Exhibiting Rivkind Collection: Rare Books Now Being Shown at Temple Mishkan Tefila Museum,” *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990); Boston, Mass.*, April 17, 1942.

Advocate reflected Rubenovitz's unique motivations in establishing a museum: "Soon after coming to Boston, almost 35 years ago, Mrs. Rubenovitz realized that the Jewish educational process of that day was woefully incomplete. As an educator of experience she felt that the instruction in our religious schools needed supplementing... [so] Mrs. Rubenovitz pioneered... a... cultural step - the establishment of a Jewish Museum."¹²⁶ Other articles emphasized the diversity of visitorship to the museum as its defining feature: "the Sisterhood opened its Jewish museum to the public," it offered "an unusual service to the people of Boston and its outlying communities. Its priceless collections of ancient ceremonial objects and works of art, augmented from time to time, have given this project a position most unique in the community: and Jew and Gentile, young and old, may be found at its public exhibits and private showings."¹²⁷

The museum was new in many ways. As head of the Sisterhood and manager of the library, Rubenovitz had ample experience with donors. And yet, there was no fundraising precedent for a Jewish museum in its own physical room within a synagogue. On its opening night, Rubenovitz, whom had been using library funds and Sisterhood funds to launch the museum, proclaimed a new "Museum Guild," announcing: "I hope that many present whose interest has been aroused in the museum, who see its educational value, may be desirous of joining."¹²⁸ She made April "Guild Month." Annual dues, awarded by having one's name in the synagogue Guild book, cost only one dollar a year without an upper cap (the equivalent of \$16 today).¹²⁹ Upon its foundation the museum and its Guild had at least three direct sources of

¹²⁶ "Contributor to Culture," *Jewish Advocate* (1909-1990); *Boston, Mass.*, November 24, 1949.

¹²⁷ "Final Plans of Mishkan Tefila Queen's. Lunch," *Jewish Advocate* (1909-1990); *Boston, Mass.*, February 28, 1946, sec. Social and Personal.

¹²⁸ "Program of the Dedication of the Museum," December 25, 1940. Congregation Mishkan Tefila [Chestnut Hill, MA] Records, Arc.2016.04, Box 26. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

¹²⁹ "Sisterhood Temple Mishkan Tefila: April Meeting," April 6, 1943. Congregation Mishkan Tefila [Chestnut Hill, MA] Records, Arc.2016.04, Box 13. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; "Hub Jewish Museum Guild Asks Support: To Help Maintain a Unique Institution at Temple Mishkan Tefila," *Jewish Advocate* (1909-1990); *Boston, Mass.*, February 12, 1943.

income, all of which Rubenovitz orchestrated. One was “an annual allocation from the Sisterhood.” Another was “Gifts in celebration of happy family events or in memory of loved ones who have passed on;” these could come in the form of objects or finances and usually came from individuals. The last was a “Happy Day Fund,” established by the Mothers’ Club that formed in 1919 to fund Jewish education of children. The “Happy Day Fund” was created specifically to fund the library at Mishkan Tefila, and the Mothers’ Club formally merged with the Sisterhood in 1920 at Rubenovitz’s urging.¹³⁰

When a donor gave \$25 or more to the Guild, his or her name would be publicly engraved in the Golden Book of the Library and in the museum's Historical Record Book.¹³¹ The Golden Book was handmade with vellum by the local, nondenominational Society of Arts and Crafts in Boston.¹³² Separately, the Historical Record Book was a bookkeeping item of the museum to keep track of donations. It revealed that throughout the ‘40s and ‘50s, many of the object donations were given to memorialize the deceased or mark life cycle events.¹³³

At Sisterhood meetings throughout the 1940s and early ‘50s, Rubenovitz often solicited donors by describing specific objects in detail which she hoped to acquire for the museum.¹³⁴ As

¹³⁰ Rubenovitz’s first mention of the Happy Day Fund was in 1933 when she explained that the maintenance of the Library depended on the Sisterhood’s donations to the Fund. “Diamond Jubilee - Temple Mishkan Tefila,” November 7, 1933. Congregation Mishkan Tefila [Chestnut Hill, MA] Records, Arc.2016.04, Box 13. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

¹³¹ “The Jewish Museum (1940 - 1945) and The Mignon L. Rubenovitz Library (1920 - 1945): Established and Maintained by The Sisterhood of Temple Mishkan Tefila; Celebrating Our Anniversaries on the Fourth Candle of Hanukah, 5706,” December 2, 1945. Herman H. Rubenovitz Papers, Box 14, Folder 6. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

¹³² “Sisterhood Temple Mishkan Tefila: Installation and Strawberry Festival,” June 2, 1942. Congregation Mishkan Tefila [Chestnut Hill, MA] Records, Arc.2016.04, Box 13. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

¹³³ In 1943, a reporter wrote about the Museum, “New acquisitions are constantly being added to the Museum by those who wish to mark happy events in family life or to memorialize dear departed ones.” “Hub Jewish Museum Guild Asks Support.”

¹³⁴ When she listed such objects in the 1942 Purim meeting, she described one of them as “a very precious and unique addition to our collection” and another as “a beautiful bronze sculpture.” “Passover Exhibit at the Mishkan Tefila Museum,” *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990)*; *Boston, Mass.*, March 27, 1942.

Chanukah approached in 1942, Rubenovitz wrote in another Sisterhood meeting pamphlet, “Should a donor be forthcoming, the museum would be able to acquire an old, hand-written on parchment Megillath Esther. The scroll is contained in a handwrought silver case, individual and rare, a true Museum piece.” Another of Rubenovitz’s tactics for acquiring Jewish objects was to solicit specific types of objects to add to preexisting collections. In the early 1940s she wrote a “Request for War Souvenirs”:

Recently we received two coins from Iceland, brought to us by Barney Freedman, an engineer in the air service between U. S. and Iceland. Perhaps you have something sent by your son or brother - a microfilm letter, a letter containing an interesting story, other souvenirs. Give these to us to treasure. They will be prized, exhibited and will tell a wonderful story of these war times.¹³⁵

In several cases Rubenovitz purchased objects before she guaranteed there would be donors for them. For example, in 1942, Rubenovitz wrote, “The Museum has just acquired a very ancient cabbalistic amulet chain of Persian origin. It is a very precious and unique addition to our collection. Note: we seek a donor for it.”¹³⁶

Often, the Sisterhood stepped in to purchase items on the market in honor of Mignon Rubenovitz, but without her financial backing. In 1942 the Sisterhood acquired “a superb collection of illuminated prints showing artistic designs and decorations used in synagogues in Europe for the last 1,000 years... collected through... the late Baron David Günzburg of St

¹³⁵ “Sisterhood Temple Mishkan Tefila: November Meeting,” November 3, 1942. Congregation Mishkan Tefila [Chestnut Hill, MA] Records, Arc.2016.04, Box 13. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

¹³⁶ “Passover Exhibit at the Mishkan Tefila Museum.”

Petersburg.” The members of the Board of the Sisterhood called themselves “the donors of this collection in honor of Mrs. Rubenovitz.”¹³⁷

The outbreak of World War II in 1941 fortified collecting efforts amongst lay American Jews and bolstered the Jewish museum project as a protective mechanism for European Jewish culture. When America entered the war in 1941, many American Jews were galvanized to pursue a strategy of cultural rescue and recovery in line with Rubenovitz’s vision for a museum.¹³⁸

Rubenovitz’s museum mission slowly moved from Zionist cultural renewal to American Jewish cultural salvage.

“American Jewry as the Custodian of Hebraic Culture” in World War II

On October 19, 1941, Eleanor Roosevelt came to Mishkan Tefila to speak about the foundations of American democracy and the four freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. She said, “There are times when some people say things which are not agreed with by other people. But everybody is guaranteed free speech: I agree with the statement by the late Justice Brandeis, who said, 'When differences of opinion arise, more speech is needed - not suppression of speech.'” She also insisted that Jews exercise their freedom of worship in the United States to serve as an example for the rest of the world: “people in this country must cherish their freedom to worship God in their own way. In

¹³⁷ “Sisterhood Temple Mishkan Tefila: Passover Tea and Meeting,” April 7, 1942. Congregation Mishkan Tefila [Chestnut Hill, MA] Records, Arc.2016.04, Box 13. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

¹³⁸ Elisabeth Gallas, *A Mortuary of Books: The Rescue of Jewish Culture after the Holocaust*, trans. Alex Skinner (New York: NYU Press, 2019); Dana Herman, “Hashavat Avedah: A History of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc.” (Ottawa, Canada, McGill University, 2008), <https://www.proquest.com/docview/762373830/abstract>.

the future, we want, for all in the world, freedom of worship. I hope we always insist upon it as one of the basic freedoms.”¹³⁹When Roosevelt spoke at the temple, the congregation was one of the best-funded and most publicly engaged Conservative Jewish outposts in the nation. After hundreds of people applauded Roosevelt’s speech about the defense of civil liberties in a world at war, Rubenovitz presented the First Lady with a bouquet of flowers. She thanked her for her words and called her a “woman of valor – of great courage.” The phrase would have been identifiable to Jews as a biblical quotation used in a Friday night hymn.

Roosevelt’s visit shone a spotlight on Boston’s Jewish museum as an expression of one of the four freedoms and drew attention to Rubenovitz’s achievement. Rubenovitz publicly and ceremoniously thanked Roosevelt for her interest in the museum and her support of Jewish culture, history and objects as representative of religious freedom. At the end of the event Rubenovitz gave Roosevelt a private tour of her museum, pointing out especially the objects with ritual meaning and significance and explaining their associated customs.¹⁴⁰ Roosevelt’s visit changed the museum’s public image indelibly, offering Rubenovitz’s project the symbolic backing of an American leadership devoted to the celebration of Jewish heritage as integral to the American experience.

The 1941 visit also solidified Mishkan Tefila’s role as a source of hefty intellectual and political capital for the politically engaged Jews of the rising American middle-class. Before Roosevelt visited the Temple, Mishkan Tefila attracted countless diplomats, thought leaders, scientists, artists, and religious leaders from around the world. Mrs. Chaim Weizmann and Mrs. Albert Einstein each toured Rubenovitz’s Sisterhood library, the precursor of her museum. Well-

¹³⁹ “Mrs. Roosevelt Stresses, the 4 Freedoms: First Lady Attracts Record Audience at Temple Mishkan Tefila,” *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990); Boston, Mass.*, October 24, 1941.

¹⁴⁰ “Mrs. Roosevelt Stresses, the 4 Freedoms: First Lady Attracts Record Audience at Temple Mishkan Tefila,” *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990); Boston, Mass.*, October 24, 1941.

known author, chaplain, sociology professor, and later civil rights activist S. Ralph Harlow of Smith College brought several groups of his students to study the Jewish Museum.¹⁴¹ Rubenovitz also hosted delegates of the American Library Association and the religious and literary leaders of Boston's Interfaith Book Week.¹⁴² But Eleanor Roosevelt's visit, coinciding with the first full year of the museum's existence, brought Mishkan Tefila a new level of celebrity and credibility. It also publicly marked a transformative process in which American Jews became custodians of global Jewish culture.

Rubenovitz later recalled that the First Lady had "exhorted us to feel ourselves personally involved in this terrible and devastating World War II, and to volunteer our services so as to assure the victory of a free society." At the end of her speech, the audience at Mishkan Tefila "rose as one" and applauded her insistence that American citizens safeguard democratic values around the world.¹⁴³ Underlying Rubenovitz's museum was a similar ethos: that Americans should protect democracy and freedom of religion from its foes, and protect international "Hebraic [material] culture," under threat by the Nazis in Europe, as a representation of these values. In 1942, the Jewish Book Week festival, a yearly occurrence in Boston since 1930, ended on a Sunday with a special one-day exhibition in Rubenovitz's Jewish museum including "ceremonial objects, rare documents and illustrated works on Jewish art." That day, Rubenovitz gave an accompanying speech in the museum entitled, "American Jewry: The Custodian of Hebraic Culture," in which she discussed American Jews' unique positionality in a world threatening Jews and their objects in its every corner.¹⁴⁴ Like Roosevelt, she saw Americans as

¹⁴¹ "Mishkan Tefila Hold Services, Graduation," *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990); Boston, Mass.*, May 30, 1941.

¹⁴² "Will Entertain Jewish Librarians," *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990); Boston, Mass.*, June 13, 1941; "Sisterhood Temple Mishkan Tefila: Purim Meeting and Membership Tea," March 3, 1942. Congregation Mishkan Tefila [Chestnut Hill, MA] Records, Arc.2016.04, Box 13. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

¹⁴³ Rubenovitz and Rubenovitz, *The Waking Heart*, 236.

¹⁴⁴ "All Invited to Book Week Observance: Session at Boston Public Library Next Monday Evening," *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990); Boston, Mass.*, November 20, 1942.

the citizens to fend off the war's destruction of democratic values; she also saw American Jews as the protectors of Jewish cultural patrimony. She later reflected that the museum's "underlying purpose" during the war years was "salvaging... the symbols of Jewish values... at a time when millions of our innocent and unoffending co-religionists were grounded into the dust." She continued, "While the guns roared in Europe where our people, martyred, fed flames, we unceasingly pursued our peaceful task of succoring... the things they wrought."¹⁴⁵ Rubenovitz was an early pioneering advocate for Americans as guardians of Jewish objects under threat. At war's end and in the years following, America took a formal leadership role in the guardianship of heirless Jewish cultural property. In 1949 a newly created New York based corporation, Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, orchestrated the transfer of such objects found in the American occupied zone to museums and elsewhere. But Rubenovitz, writing of the American duty to save these objects from peril as early as 1942, founded a museum to work directly against the Nazi threat to destroy Jewish history and its material in 1940. Before America entered the war, Rubenovitz was advocating for its leadership in rescuing objects.¹⁴⁶

The museum was not just a repository for Jewish objects otherwise in danger of being destroyed or discarded, nor a mere custodian of European Jewry's vanishing civilization; it was a shape-shifting vessel for rotating exhibitions facilitating Jews' constant interaction with, and continual reshaping of, the past. By demonstrating how Jews throughout the ages had acculturated and maintained their culture at once, Rubenovitz gave Americans a model of how to

¹⁴⁵ "The Jewish Museum (1940 - 1945) and The Mignon L. Rubenovitz Library (1920 - 1945): Established and Maintained by The Sisterhood of Temple Mishkan Tefila; Celebrating Our Anniversaries on the Fourth Candle of Hanukah, 5706." Herman H. Rubenovitz Papers, Box 14, Folder 6. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

¹⁴⁶ Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962* (NYU Press, 2009); Elisabeth Gallas, "Locating the Jewish Future: The Restoration of Looted Cultural Property in Early Postwar Europe," *Naharaim* 9, no. 1-2 (January 1, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1515/naha-2015-0001>; Dana Herman, "Hashavat Avedah: A History of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc." (Ottawa, Canada, McGill University, 2008), <https://www.proquest.com/docview/762373830/abstract>.

do the same. Some visitors saw objects in the museum and formed new relationships their own, engaging with their family histories: “enamored of these lovely Jewish things, [they] bethink themselves of a treasure hidden away in some drawer, forgotten.” Some discovered the significance of their own objects by interfacing with the museum’s similar objects, and such visitors often donated their Judaica to the Jewish museum collection.¹⁴⁷

The museum was therefore a cultural instrument maintaining and remaking Jewish history, liberating Jewish objects from devastation, and exemplifying the flexibility and adaptability of Judaism for American Jews. As Rubenovitz would come to see by war’s end, the museum could also serve as an informal diplomatic tool for communicating Jewish heritage to a broader Christian America.

“Visitors of All Faiths”: The Jewish Museum as Informal Diplomacy

In 1946, Rubenovitz sent a copy of her recently published *Winecup and Book* to the President of the American Unitarian Association.¹⁴⁸ The book focused on an object in the Mishkan Tefila collection, a Passover prayer book (in Hebrew, a Haggadah) from Darmstadt, Germany, and explained its ritual usage. It foreshadowed similar writings and several books that would expand public knowledge of the museum’s objects and reach wider audiences, especially the Christian leaders that Rubenovitz befriended. *Winecup and Book* did not expressly discuss the notion of Judeo-Christian heritage, nor did it claim outwardly that Jewish objects had vital

¹⁴⁷ Mignon L. Rubenovitz, “Jewish Museum: A Visible Bond Uniting the Generations,” *Jewish Advocate* (1909-1990); *Boston, Mass.*, September 6, 1945.

¹⁴⁸ He responded, “I am deeply grateful to you for the gift of the lovely little book telling the story of the Darmstadter Haggadah... Apart from the intrinsic interest of the story itself, you have created a work of art in the format of the little volume which makes it a delight to read and a real treasure to add to ones library. I am deeply indebted to you for your gracious thought of me in this connection. One cannot help hoping that there may be many other volumes coming from the quiet seclusion of the intimate Jewish Museum.” Frederich M. Eliot, Letter to Mrs. Herman H. Rubenovitz. “American Unitarian Association, Boston, Massachusetts: Office of the President,” June 8, 1946. Herman H. Rubenovitz Papers, Box 14, Folder 4.

relevance to non-Jewish communities. The book was a small tribute to one particular ritual object, a Haggadah, and its journey through different environments – a rabbinic study hall, private homes of wealthy donors, a library, a national museum, and more. And yet, Rubenovitz sent this book to Christian friends and colleagues, from the wives of ministers to governmental leaders. Furthermore, over the long course of her career Rubenovitz wrote about her museum as welcoming “Visitors of All Faiths” in pamphlets of Sisterhood events and meetings, articles for the *Jewish Advocate*, and in her memoirs with her husband, *The Waking Heart*.¹⁴⁹ Her words announced to the public, repeatedly over the course of thirty-plus years, that the museum was successfully attracting Christian Americans and teaching them about Judaism.

Rubenovitz ensured that the museum attracted Christian attention early on by maintaining connections with outside organizations, some Jewish and some multifaith.¹⁵⁰ In 1942 Rubenovitz curated an exhibit at Interfaith Book Week in Boston’s new Mutual Life Insurance Building, showcasing the Jewish museum’s collection for Christian leaders. That same year the Mishkan Tefila Sisterhood noted with pride, “many Catholic and Protestant visitors had the meaning of these objects explained to them” at the event.¹⁵¹ In early 1943, the museum exhibited objects as part of the yearly Interfaith Conference of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews founded in 1927 in

¹⁴⁹ “The Jewish Museum (1940 - 1945) and The Mignon L. Rubenovitz Library (1920 - 1945): Established and Maintained by The Sisterhood of Temple Mishkan Tefila; Celebrating Our Anniversaries on the Fourth Candle of Hanukah, 5706,” December 2, 1945. Herman H. Rubenovitz Papers, Box 14, Folder 6. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Rubenovitz, Mrs. Herman H. “Museum Within a Temple.” *Jewish Advocate* (1909-1990); Boston, Mass. December 11, 1958.

¹⁵⁰ “Sisterhood Temple Mishkan Tefila: The Opening Meeting,” September 16, 1941. Congregation Mishkan Tefila [Chestnut Hill, MA] Records, Arc.2016.04, Box 13. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

¹⁵¹ “Sisterhood Temple Mishkan Tefila: Purim Meeting and Membership Tea.” Congregation Mishkan Tefila [Chestnut Hill, MA] Records, Arc.2016.04, Box 13, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

neighboring Cambridge.¹⁵² At Sisterhood meetings in the 1940s and 50s, women often discussed how to attract Christian female visitors to the museum.¹⁵³

The public visibility of the museum was enhanced greatly by Roosevelt's visit and subsequent news reporting as well as Roosevelt's own 1942 book, *This Is America*. Years after the First Lady sent a copy of the book to Mishkan Tefila, Rubenovitz wrote: "As I turned the pages, I noted every phase of American life was touched upon, including the religious. Catholic churches, and every denomination of the Protestant, were pictured, and there was also one Synagogue - to our amazement it was our own Temple Mishkan Tefila.... Here we felt was our real reward for all the travail and tension of that memorable event." [Roosevelt had attempted to cancel her Mishkan Tefila the day before, when she learned of the need to broadcast to South America directly after speaking at a college event in New Hampshire. Ultimately, synagogue leadership convinced her to come. They had sold out the synagogue auditorium months prior.] Included in the ranks of great religious architecture in America, Mishkan Tefila was the only synagogue mentioned in the book, and like all the other pictures of religious structures in the compilation, that of Mishkan Tefila was accompanied by "interpreting vignettes written by Mrs. Roosevelt." Roosevelt's label on this image included a biblical quotation chosen by Rabbi Herman Rubenovitz for the architectural exterior.¹⁵⁴

Postwar Years and the Move from Roxbury to Newton in 1955

¹⁵² "Hub Jewish Museum Guild Asks Support."

¹⁵³ "Sisterhood Temple Mishkan Tefila: Mothers-Daughters Day Meeting," May 5, 1942. Congregation Mishkan Tefila [Chestnut Hill, MA] Records, Arc.2016.04, Box 13. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

¹⁵⁴ Rubenovitz and Rubenovitz, *The Waking Heart*, 236-238; Eleanor Roosevelt and Frances Cooke Macgregor, *This Is America* (New York, New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1942).

In the later 1940s and early 1950s, the museum continued to thrive as a well-known cultural outpost of the Boston community and an important site for visual meaning-making in American Jewish life. The collection expanded only slightly with postwar acquisitions as most objects went to the Jewish museum in New York, which opened its doors in 1947 and quickly overshadowed Rubenovitz's smaller, synagogue-attached museum. Still, long before the Jewish museum in New York was founded, the Jewish museum of Boston sought to invigorate Jewish life through both cultural recovery and reawakening was brand new in America, and the museum remained a powerful force across Northeast Jewish communities through the early 1950s. In 1954, one visitor to the Jewish museum in Roxbury commented that its exhibitions and Rubenovitz's tours of them facilitated a "discovery of the Jewish self."¹⁵⁵

By the mid 1950s, many of Roxbury's Jews were leaving for larger homes in the suburbs farther from Boston, and in their places, black neighbors moved in.¹⁵⁶ In 1954 Mishkan Tefila sold its former space to Lubavitcher Hasidim (Chabad) who inaugurated a small yeshiva for children in the middle of their new mostly-black neighborhood. In 1955, Mishkan Tefila and its museum objects relocated to Newton to join its moving Jewish community. The museum took many of its objects with it, leaving only a few ritual pieces behind such as a Torah scroll and Ner Tamid to the group of Hasidic Jews who took it over. The museum space became an extended part of the Chabad yeshiva rather than a room for displaying. Furthermore, the Chabad occupants were disinterested in physical and aesthetic culture, and unfortunately, they did not care for the space nor use it often. Over the following decade, pigeons famously made their home on the

¹⁵⁵ Harmon Shohet, "The Editor's Mail: Museum's Value," *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990)*; Boston, Mass., April 29, 1954.

¹⁵⁶ Gerald H. Gamm, *Urban Exodus: Why the Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed* (Harvard University Press, 1999); Hillel Levine and Lawrence Harmon, *The Death of an American Jewish Community: A Tragedy of Good Intentions*, Reprint edition (New York; Toronto; New York: Touchstone, 1993).

Torah ark and the structure deteriorated rapidly until Chabad sold the space to the United Jewish Philanthropies.¹⁵⁷

Meanwhile, Mishkan Tefila was determined for its new home in Chestnut Hill, part of Newton, to mirror the majesty of the old one, so its congregation hired famed synagogue architect Percival Goodman to create a new structure which opened in 1955.¹⁵⁸ A few months before the move, Mignon Rubenovitz retired from her role as curator of the museum and did not push for it to have its own space in the new Chestnut Hill building. She retired alongside her husband, who stepped down as rabbi at that time. With nobody else to advocate for its existence, the museum was relegated to displaying many of the objects in its collection in the Temple lobby with wall labels from the prior space.

The Limits of Integrating Jewishness into a 1960s America

In reflecting upon her experiences in founding the Jewish museum, Rubenovitz wrote in 1956, “Perhaps the most rewarding results of our strivings in this field is the fact that many other congregations were inspired by our example to start similar collections.”¹⁵⁹ Indeed, Rubenovitz’s museum set precedent for synagogue communities to begin exhibiting their own objects more

¹⁵⁷ Gerald H. Gamm, *Urban Exodus: Why the Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed* (Harvard University Press, 1999); Hillel Levine and Lawrence Harmon, *The Death of an American Jewish Community: A Tragedy of Good Intentions*, Reprint edition (New York; Toronto; New York: Touchstone, 1993), 29, 286.

¹⁵⁸ Kaufman, David. “**Temples in the American Athens: A History of the Synagogues of Boston, by David Kaufman.**” In Sarna, Jonathan D, Ellen Smith, and Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston. *The Jews of Boston: Essays on the Occasion of the Centenary (1895-1995) of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston*. 1st ed. Boston: Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, 1995, 198.

¹⁵⁹ Mrs. Herman H. Rubenovitz, and Recipient: President of the Board of Mishkan Tefila. “Mrs. Herman H. Rubenovitz’s Statement to the Board of Mishkan Tefila in Regard to the Museum, and Her Retirement as Curator, May or June 1956,” June 1956. Herman H. Rubenovitz Papers, Box 14, Folder 6. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

formally and professionally, and to develop new collecting practices. It also started a trend of Jewish museums across the country: the Jewish Museum in New York opened in 1947 and was followed by the B'nai B'rith Klutznick Museum in Washington (1957) and the Judah Magnes Museum in Oakland, California (1962).

Yet, by the late 1960s, it seemed as if Jews were giving over the project of the identity museum to other culturally-specific groups. In April 1964, two years before Rabbi Rubenovitz's death and about a decade after his retirement as a rabbi, Mishkan Tefila leadership held a joint birthday party for Rabbi Herman and Rebbetzin Mignon Rubenovitz. Rebbetzin Bernice Kazis, who looked after the art collection upon Mrs. Rubenovitz's retirement as chief curator nearly a decade prior, gave a speech on the shared institutional histories of the Mignon L. Rubenovitz Library and the Jewish museum and explained the collection's breadth and depth. Letters to Mignon Rubenovitz following the event from people such as the Governor of Massachusetts called her museum a "symbol of progress, virtue, and integrity."¹⁶⁰ But they were talking about the past of the museum, not its future. At that time there was no independent gallery for the objects in Newton, and in Roxbury the museum's previous physical room was in shambles. Bernice Kazis did not write about Mishkan Tefila's art and objects collection like Mignon Rubenovitz did, nor did she give tours, invite visitors, or curate the collection into organized exhibitions. Instead, by comparison to Rubenovitz, she displayed them passively in the shared spaces of the lobbies, Hebrew school classrooms, party rooms, and sanctuaries.

¹⁶⁰ Endicott Peabody, Governor of Massachusetts. "The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Executive Department, State House, Boston," April 9, 1964. Congregation Mishkan Tefila [Chestnut Hill, MA] Records, Arc.2016.04, Box 4. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. "The Rubenovitzes at 80." *Jewish Advocate* (1909-1990); *Boston, Mass.* May 7, 1964.

After under-using and neglecting the former Mishkan Tefila museum space, Chabad finally decided it no longer wanted or needed it and gave it to the Combined Jewish Philanthropies, handing over the responsibility of maintaining and/or selling it. For years the C. J. P. loosely maintained the building until finally, just months before Rubenovitz's 1968 death, the C. J. P. famously sold the space valued at \$1,000,000 for \$1 to African American cultural activist Elma Lewis, who envisioned an African American performing arts space. It was a grand philanthropic gesture that both sides hoped might improve Black-Jewish relations.¹⁶¹ Lewis used it to found a National Center of Afro-American artists that Rubenovitz never saw and likely never could have envisioned. While Lewis had already instigated conversations within the Jewish community about a space for black culture, Martin Luther King's April 4, 1968 murder and rising threats from the Black Panthers (who threatened to burn down Mishkan Tefila unless it was given to Lewis) hurriedly galvanized the gift in mid-April.¹⁶² Unfortunately, the gift did not repair black-Jewish relations the way both sides had hoped, and Elma Lewis openly and famously harbored bitterness at the Jewish community's easy integration into the upper middle class suburbs while the African American community was left behind.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Gerald H. Gamm, *Urban Exodus: Why the Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed* (Harvard University Press, 1999); Kendra A McKinney, "Rereading Space: Elma Lewis, Temple Mishkan Tefila and the Quest for Unity" (Waltham, Massachusetts, The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Brandeis University, Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, 2013), <https://bir.brandeis.edu/bitstream/handle/10192/25133/McKinneyThesis2013.pdf?sequence=1>; Hillel Levine and Lawrence Harmon, *The Death of an American Jewish Community: A Tragedy of Good Intentions*, Reprint edition (New York; Toronto; New York: Touchstone, 1993), 29, 286.

¹⁶² Sonya White Hope, "Elma Lewis, Her School of Fine Arts, and Her Vision of Arts Education as Cultural Emancipation," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, no. 219 (2019): 47–60, <https://doi.org/10.5406/bulcouresmusedu.219.0047>; Labor, United States Congress House Committee on Education and Museum Services Act, *Hearings Before the Select Subcommittee on Education, May 17 and 18; May 20; and June 14, and 15, 1974*.

¹⁶³ Hillel Levine and Lawrence Harmon, *The Death of an American Jewish Community: A Tragedy of Good Intentions*, Reprint edition (New York; Toronto; New York: Touchstone, 1993), 128-131.

The identity museum movement that Mignon Rubenovitz helped inaugurate had quickly reverberated into other minority communities, including Elma Lewis's. Ironically, the Mishkan Tefila museum was one of the very first culturally-specific museums in the Boston area to be self-curated, and its existence made room for the NCAAA. The continuous changing of the guard in the identity museum movement precipitated by Elma Lewis's NCAAA was carried through by countless American and minority-philanthropic institutions. The Smithsonian founded the National Museum of American Jewish History in 1976, the National Museum of the American Indian in 1989 and the new National Museum of African American History and Culture in 2016. Charles Leslie and Fritz Lohman founded the Leslie Lohman Museum of Art in New York in 1969 to serve as a museum hub for the LGBTQ+ community. The NYC Italian American Museum was opened in 2001 in dialogue with the New York Historical Society, from which it expanded.¹⁶⁴

The Mishkan Tefila museum's complicated fate suggests the limits of its model of integrating Jewishness into the American urban landscape in the decades surrounding World War II. While Rubenovitz's vision for an American Jewish renaissance had a measurable impact on Jewish life in the United States, unfortunately, in the end, the very portability of Jewish identity that she presented did not succeed in the American landscape. Its foremost difficulty was that it did not treat religion as the main category of Jewish identity, and in the American context, its success was contingent upon presenting Judaism in this limited way – as a religion only. The

¹⁶⁴ Edward Rothstein, "The Problem with Jewish Museums," *Mosaic Magazine*, February 1, 2016, <https://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2016/02/the-problem-with-jewish-museums/>; Edward Rothstein, "To Each His Own Museum, as Identity Goes on Display," *The New York Times*, December 28, 2010, sec. Arts, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/29/arts/design/29identity.html>; Lovisa Brown et al., "Desegregating Conversations about Race and Identity in Culturally Specific Museums," *Journal of Museum Education* 42, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 120–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2017.1303602>.

museum and the synagogue also could not quite deal with race. So when racial conflict came to the fore, the museum, like the Jews of Boston, chose White Jewish mobility, and the museum itself could not quite be carried with them the way it once was before the war. Objects migrated, but ultimately, they would soon be lost – sold to support the upkeep of the synagogue and other imperatives having little to do with Jewish cultural renaissance and more to do with prayer books, pews, and architectural needs. The Jewish museum project in Boston would not survive in an American climate that moved from a broad definition of communities – religious, racial, etc. – to one that became more and more specific. The notion of pluralism was moving in a new direction.

A Victim of Its Own Success: The Jewish Community of Boston Versus New York

The Boston museum project ultimately became a victim of its own success as the obvious economic and racial privileges that bolstered it suddenly became liabilities. Geographical mobility, too, became a burden as an obvious marker of the advantage of being white. As Jews fled Roxbury, the midsize Boston Jewish community could not sustain the changing notion of Jewish public space for culture. Suburbia and middle-class stability are not the only Jewish stories of the postwar period: just as the Jews of Boston scattered across the Boston outskirts, in New York Jews remained centralized in the city. The postwar period saw the rise of the Jewish Museum of New York, a new national Jewish institution with a wider reach and a bigger local Jewish community. That Jewish museum an example of an organization that survived and thrived, and lives on today.

Ultimately, though the museum did not survive, its new models of leadership live on today. With her museum Rebbetzin Mignon Rubenovitz codified informal leadership, independent sisterhood, casualized labor, and alternative Jewish education. Rubenovitz also showed the Conservative Jewish world that new kinds of philanthropy and leadership were possible and sustainable. She pushed Conservative Judaism to think more expansively about culture and its meaning. Meanwhile, the Jewish Theological Seminary, Conservative Judaism's beating heart and the place that ordained her husband, expanded its philanthropic and leadership models. Frieda Schiff Warburg had begun serving on the JTS Board of Trustees in 1938 and donated her former home as a Jewish museum in 1947. And as other American Jewish women were presented with new opportunities and new challenges in the prewar and postwar period, new public professional identities became possible for them. Though an important Jewish public cultural space died in Boston in the 1950s, the notion of Jewish public culture lived on in the Jewish museum of New York thanks to the woman who built its sturdy foundations: Anna Kleban.

Chapter II:

The Secretary: Anna Kleban and the Institutional Backing of Jewish Public Art

Dear Mrs. Skwirsky:

Since you expressed a desire to help us preserve the medical book I showed you when you and your group visited the Manuscript Room on October 20th, I am taking the liberty of writing to you now. A case for the fifteenth-century medical manuscript would cost twenty-five dollars. Inserted in the book would be a bookplate like the specimen enclosed, giving the name of the donor and stating in whose memory the contribution was made.

It was a pleasure to address your group.

With kind regards and all good wishes.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Anna Kleban to Mrs. Joseph Skwirsky, October 23, 1959, American Academy of Jewish Research, ARCH 9, Box 5, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

- Anna Kleban, October 23, 1959

From Secretary to Public Scholar

On April 10, 1975, an animated, wide-eyed 76-year-old woman named Anna Kleban entered a large Chicago Jewish synagogue hall filled with potential donors. She wore bulbous, sparkly earrings and an appropriately tight pearl necklace that sat on her neck just-so.¹⁶⁶ For Kleban, clothing and accessories were often “tasteful” yet “colorful,” appropriate yet pushing the stylistic envelope, especially in her mid-century American Jewish context.¹⁶⁷ To all who saw her, she popped – on purpose. Back at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) Library & Museum, where she worked, Kleban maintained and outfitted herself while she maintained and outfitted countless pieces of Jewish ritual art over which she presided as curator and custodian.¹⁶⁸ In Chicago, Kleban was exhibiting the Seminary collection and presenting herself as an altogether new type of figure in American Jewish life: an institution-builder working across curation and fundraising.

Surprisingly, and perhaps unthinkably today, these spheres were perceived in Kleban’s time as entirely separate. Donor relations was a project for the highest-up leaders of institutions such as the Seminary, not for the heads of smaller undertakings in institutions such as the JTS Library & Museum. Ironically, unlike Mignon Rubenovitz, Anna Kleban never revealed much about her conceptions of the future of American Jewish culture. Yet her archives divulge the degree to which Kleban valued objects in Jewish education and Jewish life, and they explain how

¹⁶⁶ “Area Conservative Women Finish Torah Fund Drive.” *The Sentinel*, April 10, 1975.

¹⁶⁷ Ruth Schmelzer, Anna Kleban at the Jewish Theological Seminary, interview by Ariel Cohen, Oral Interview, November 5, 2019.

¹⁶⁸ “NW Sisterhood to Hear Librarian,” *The Detroit Jewish News Digital Archives*, February 9, 1951, <https://digital.bentley.umich.edu/djnews/djn.1951.02.09.001/9>.

she forged permanent ties between curation and fundraising to make these ideas about Jewish visual culture sustainable realities.

Kleban's talk at the Anshe Emet Congregation in Chicago marked the culmination of its Torah Fund campaign, the proceeds of which would be donated to the Seminary, Kleban's professional home of 58 years.¹⁶⁹ Entitled "Reading Between the Lines," her interactive session included projector slides that illuminated the *Judaica*, or Jewish ritual objects, in the collection as she shared what each revealed about Jewish history.¹⁷⁰ Though the *Detroit Jewish News* reported on Kleban as the woman with "personal jurisdiction over the largest collection of books of Jewish interest in the world," the headline missed the essence of her talk that day as well as her role at JTS: Kleban was not an archivist or a librarian, but a bridge figure between historical scholarship/visual Jewish education and donor/public engagement.

Kleban was first hired at JTS as a secretary for chief librarian Alexander Marx when she was recent immigrant from Russia in 1924 at age 25. Marx had been hired in 1903. Beginning in 1904, Marx began exhibiting several manuscripts in display cases, but in November 1931, a new JTS building and newly donated collections of a diversity of objects led to the announcement of a combined JTS Library & Museum including Jewish ritual objects. From then until her retirement in 1982 at age 83, Kleban focused on the *Judaica* and rare manuscripts in the collection. She was the first employee of an American Jewish institution to turn primarily to objects for teaching Jewish history. She was the inventor of her own role as a blended public historian: a donor relations expert, a marketing agent, a fundraiser, a curator, a tour guide, and a

¹⁶⁹ Tom Freudenheim, Interview by Ariel Cohen, E-mail, January 29, 2020. "Obituaries: United States," *The American Jewish Year Book* 92 (1992): 590–604; Herman Dicker, *Of Learning and Libraries: The Seminary Library at One Hundred* (Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1988), page 38.

¹⁷⁰ "NW Sisterhood to Hear Librarian," *The Detroit Jewish News Digital Archives*, February 9, 1951, <https://digital.bentley.umich.edu/djnews/djn.1951.02.09.001/9>.

collections manager facilitating incoming and outgoing loans. Further, whereas many women in the workforce served in secretarial roles confined to certain administrative projects, Kleban served in a multifaceted educational role she built for *herself*.¹⁷¹

Anna Kleban is representative of an overlooked trend: As New York became an epicenter of cultural objects salvaged from Europe during and after World War II, a significant minority of women emerged as history experts, object specialists, and crucial communicators across academic and lay Jewish communities. Such women were white-collar employees of major institutions, and they worked to democratize ivory-tower scholarship for an American public including but not limited to Jews. Alongside the likes of Chana Mlotek, Dina Abramowicz, Lucy Dawidowicz, Hannah Arendt, and others, Kleban gathered historical evidence to write stories about Jewish history for mass audiences, including potential patrons, making it more accessible and authentic.¹⁷²

Kleban was also at the center of a remarkable network of women within the JTS community. These women include long-time Harriet Catlin, head of Special Events; Florence Slobin, prominent Jewish Museum Inner Committee member, objects supervisor, and library assistant who never married or had children; Edith Levine, liaison for the Board of Trustees; Marjorie Wyler, in charge of JTS and Jewish Museum Public Relations and Press; and Jessica Feingold, Louis Finkelstein's longtime assistant, unrecognized co-author of his writings, and Executive Director of the Institute for Religious and Social Studies who never married or had

¹⁷¹ Ruth Schmelzer, Anna Kleban at the Jewish Theological Seminary, interview by Ariel Cohen, Oral Interview, November 5, 2019.

¹⁷² Nancy Sinkoff, *From Left to Right: Lucy S. Dawidowicz, the New York Intellectuals, and the Politics of Jewish History* (Wayne State University Press, 2020).

children.¹⁷³ Their stories, and that of Kleban, represent an overlooked dimension of culture and gender in this period.

Much of the scholarship in the field overlooks women who were boundary-crossers, bridges between spheres often perceived as separate such as home/work, male/female, public/private, and fundraising/curation. Irving Howe's iconic 1976 book, *World of Our Fathers*, claimed to portray the East European Jewish experience in New York but famously ignored the female experience almost completely.¹⁷⁴ In 1988, Sydney Stahl Weinberg responded with her paradigmatic book *The World of Our Mothers: The Lives of Jewish Immigrant Women*.¹⁷⁵ Yet Stahl asserted, "in this religious, patriarchal society, women had no accepted public role outside the home besides for collecting charity and caring for the sick." Her narrative framing adhered to the long-held binary of the family-centric versus working woman, ignoring women with careers and families.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Hector Guzman, interview by Ariel Cohen, In-Person Interview, June 25, 2018; email interview with Hector Guzman, November 21, 2019. On Feingold, see: Miller, Julie. "Jessica Feingold." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. 27 February 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. (Viewed on February 11, 2020) <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/feingold-jessica>; Miller, Julie. "Jessica Feingold." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. 27 February 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. (Viewed on February 11, 2020) <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/feingold-jessica>. Email interview with Naomi Steinberger, September 1, 2019. Email interview w/ Jonathan Sarna. November 20, 2019.

¹⁷⁴ For examples of Howe's blindness to gender and race in his literary historical work, see William Cain, "An Interview with Irving Howe," *American Literary History* 1, no. 3 (October 1, 1989): 554-555, 558, and 564. <https://doi.org/10.1093/alh/1.3.554>; Joyce R. Ladenson, "PROBLEMATIZING GENDER IN IRVING HOWE'S 'WORLD OF OUR FATHERS,'" *The Centennial Review* 41, no. 3 (1997): 577-83; SYDNEY STAHL WEINBERG, "The World of Our Fathers and the World of Our Mothers," *American Jewish History* 88, no. 4 (2000): 547-56; Pamela Susan Nadell and Jonathan D Sarna, *Women and American Judaism: Historical Perspectives*, Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life (Hanover: Brandeis University Press Published by University Press of New England, 2001); Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880*, vol. 2, *The Jewish People in America*, 1995; PAMELA S. NADELL, "'The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820-1870': An Historiographical Appreciation," *American Jewish History* 90, no. 1 (2002): 51-62.

¹⁷⁵ Sydney Stahl Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers: The Lives of Jewish Immigrant Women* (VNR AG, 1988), xix, 15.

¹⁷⁶ Nina Kaleska, Anna Kleban's niece who lived in Kleban's home as a dependent after the war, ironically called her aunt a "careerwoman" even while she was caring for her in her own domestic space. Nina Kaleska, *Nelli's Journey: From the Depths of Evil to Reconciliation and Beyond* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Dorrance Publishing Co., 2005), 91.

Both these books, then, together illustrate the exclusion of professional women whose family networks were intertwined with their careers. Forced to traverse domestic and public domains fluidly, women in the American Jewish world in the early- to mid- 20th century often became adroit communicators across communities with skillsets preparing them for public-facing roles.¹⁷⁷ Anna Kleban’s multivalent life is emblematic of the interconnectedness of different spheres, especially for working women. Family and friends were at the core of her life, and these people sanctioned and supported her career; without them she wouldn’t have been able to achieve what she did. Her close friends on the Upper West Side attended Seminary library events and helped Kleban bring her niece to America from Europe after the war.¹⁷⁸ She lived with her uncle and colleague Israel Davidson, who eyed a job for her at the Seminary before her arrival in America. When she was hired, Kleban was close with the families of JTS leaders like Alexander Marx and Louis Finkelstein, dining with their wives and spending time with their children. Like other women at the Seminary, her professional career hinged on her social life and family connections and her fluidity between different spheres.¹⁷⁹

This chapter explains how Anna Kleban blended donor relations, inter-institutional communications, object expertise, curatorial work, and visual-educational strategies to set precedent for a new kind of role. She was not only the maker of a new modality of public

¹⁷⁷ Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1995); Laura Levitt, “Engendering the Jewish Past: Towards a More Feminist Jewish Studies,” *Feminist Theology* 16, no. 3 (May 2008): 365–78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735008091399>; Riv-Ellen Prell, *Women Remaking American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007).

¹⁷⁸ When Nelli/Nina Kaleska, Anna Kleban’s niece, was still in Europe between 1945 and 1948, she worked at a typewriter firm in Prague and then spent time in London. In both places “My aunt... and her friends sent me wonderful packages of goodies that I always shared with the people in the office.” Nina Kaleska, *Nelli’s Journey: From the Depths of Evil to Reconciliation and Beyond* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Dorrance Publishing Co., 2005), 56.

¹⁷⁹ Cite Schmelzer interview and Sarna interviews. Eli Ginzberg, “The Seminary Family: A View from My Parents’ Home,” in *Perspectives on Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of Wolfe Kelman*, ed. Arthur Chiel (New York, New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 1978), 122

culture, but also the inventor of a new position that could fully support it blossoming. As such, when she became Secretary to Alexander Marx, she didn't fill a role; she began immediately creating one.

The History of the Seminary Library and Alexander Marx

In 1893, six men, Cyrus Adler, Mortimer Schiff, Felix Warburg, Louis Marshall, Elkan Adler, and Mayer Sulzberger, donated their outstanding private collections to JTS to begin a library. The Seminary was then a small and new institution and was recently incorporated and legally able to accept donations.¹⁸⁰ The objects these men donated included historical manuscripts and Jewish books. None of the donors expressed a desire for Judaica to form a large part of the library's holdings, nor did they envision exhibitions of manuscripts. They hoped to build a dedicated space in the Seminary for research and study. In 1902, Adler and Warburg reorganized the Seminary and Solomon Schechter was elected as President. Jacob Schiff donated a new building in 1903 to ensure a larger home for the burgeoning JTS Library.

In 1903, Alexander Marx came to America at the invitation of Solomon Schechter, whom he had met at Cambridge University in England.¹⁸¹ At JTS Marx became a professor of history and the Seminary's first formally titled librarian, and he catalogued the books, organized donations, and ensured the usability of the collections. In 1904, JTS Library began exhibiting manuscripts in its first display cases. In 1905, Israel Davidson, Anna Kleban's uncle who'd immigrated from Grodno in 1888, was hired at JTS as a professor of Hebrew literature and

¹⁸⁰ "Chapter 1, The First Years: 1886 – 1902." Menahem Schmelzer, pages 1-15. From Herman Dicker, *Of Learning and Libraries: The Seminary Library at One Hundred* (Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1988); Jewish Theological Seminary of America, *Register* (Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1919), 7.

¹⁸¹ A. S. Halkin, "Alexander Marx," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 23 (1954): xxxii.

rabbinics. Davidson and Marx quickly became longtime close friends and colleagues.¹⁸² In the decade following Davidson's arrival at JTS, countless mass-published and historical books were given to the small yet growing library, and by 1915 JTS possessed over 57,000 printed volumes and 1,800 manuscripts.¹⁸³ After Solomon Schechter's donation of his personal library to JTS in 1916, the Seminary confronted a new reality: it was suddenly over resourced and understaffed. Marx, who had up to that point been leading the efforts to reorganize the library on an ongoing basis, needed more administrative support and began interviewing librarians in 1904.¹⁸⁴ Further, donors were beginning to donate Jewish ritual objects of which Marx wanted nothing to do with. He was expressly a bibliophile, not an art historian. But it wasn't until 1921 that Marx would get the support he most needed and didn't know he needed at all: a public historian/donor engagement expert.

On his own, Marx curated several exhibitions on topics related to the evolution of Hebrew manuscripts and texts that excluded Jewish ritual objects, paintings, and sculptures. His 1914 exhibition entitled "Biblical Manuscripts and Rare Prints in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America" consisted only of manuscripts and prints in display cases. On exhibit were Genizah fragments from the 11th to the 18th centuries including several letters written by Maimonides,¹⁸⁵ deeds of manumissions of Jewish slaves in medieval Egypt, scrolls of the Pentateuch from 12th century China, Pentateuch parchments from 14th century Italy, biblical translations from Yemen in the 15th century, the Zohar from 16th century North Africa, and

¹⁸² Carrie Davidson, *Out of Endless Yearnings* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, Inc., 1946), page 151.

¹⁸³ Jewish Theological Seminary of America, *Register* (Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1919).

¹⁸⁴ Herman Dicker, *Of Learning and Libraries: The Seminary Library at One Hundred* (Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1988), 21.

¹⁸⁵ A Genizah is a receptacle designated for objects bearing the name of G-d so that they might later be discarded according to Jewish law.

several prayer books and Passover ritual instruction books (Haggadot).¹⁸⁶ His 1920 exhibit on the Vilna Gaon showcased the Seminary's holdings of the Gaon's writings and others' commentaries on them, which comprised the largest collection of its kind famously surpassing that of the British Museum.¹⁸⁷ Neither meaningfully included the Judaica already in the library's possession. It wasn't until Anna Kleban was hired in 1924 that the JTS Library began exhibiting such objects.

From Channa Klebansky to Anna Kleban

Kleban's mother Fruma and her uncle Israel Davidson were born in Kovno, Russia, in 1873 and 1870 respectively. Twelve other siblings died before Fruma and Israel were born.¹⁸⁸ At the tender ages of four and one, Israel and Fruma were orphaned and sent to their childless uncle and aunt, Rabbi Israel Klebansky and his wife, in the city of Grodno.¹⁸⁹ When Israel Klebansky was widowed less than two decades later, he married Fruma, whom he had raised.¹⁹⁰ Despite an age difference of nearly thirty years, Israel and Fruma Klebansky had three daughters together:

¹⁸⁶ *Biblical Manuscripts and Rare Prints in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (Mostly from the Sulzberger Collection)*. Exhibited at the Seminary at the Celebration of the Completion of the Bible Revision, 1914.

¹⁸⁷ Louis Ginzberg. "The Gaon, R. Elijah Wilna: Address Delivered in Commemoration of the Two Hundredth Anniversary of His Birth." Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, 1920.

¹⁸⁸ Fruma Kleban Declaration of Intention of Citizenship, No. 189538, United States Department of Labor. Ancestry.com. *New York, State and Federal Naturalization Records, 1794-1943* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013. Original source: *Naturalization Records*. National Archives at New York City, New York, New York. Louis Finkelstein, "Israel Davidson," *The American Jewish Year Book* 41 (1939): 36.

¹⁸⁹ Carrie Davidson, *Out of Endless Yearnings* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, Inc., 1946), 1; Nina Kaleska, *Nelli's Journey: From the Depths of Evil to Reconciliation and Beyond* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Dorrance Publishing Co., 2005), 78 – 90; Louis Finkelstein, "Israel Davidson," *The American Jewish Year Book* 41 (1939): 36.

¹⁹⁰ Carrie Davidson, *Out of Endless Yearnings* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, Inc., 1946), 99. Nina Kaleska wrote that they had a happy marriage despite the age difference. Nina Kaleska, *Nelli's Journey: From the Depths of Evil to Reconciliation and Beyond* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Dorrance Publishing Co., 2005), 80.

Rebeka, Rachel, and Anna (born last in 1899). Rebeka and Rachel both married and had three children each; one of their daughters survived the war while the rest perished in the Holocaust.¹⁹¹

In June 1921, many years after Israel Klebansky's passing and after Israel Davidson's immigration to America, Anna Kleban and her mother Fruma were still living together in Grodno, by then part of a nearly independent Poland, when their home was destroyed in a pogrom. They were ages 22 and 48. Kleban's sisters stayed behind with their children when Fruma and Anna left for the United States a few weeks later, aided by Fruma's brother, Israel Davidson, by then a JTS professor of Medieval Hebrew literature.¹⁹² Upon arrival and for several years thereafter, Fruma and Anna lived in Israel and Carrie Davidson's home on the Upper West Side with their young children, where they learned English and looked for work. By 1924, Fruma was a housekeeper and Kleban was hired as a secretary at the Seminary. Their early entrenchment in the JTS community is evidenced by the fact that Rabbi Michael Higger and Professor Boaz Cohen of JTS signed their naturalization documents in 1925.¹⁹³ In April 1928,

¹⁹¹ Rebeka had one surviving daughter, Sara Walfisz, who ultimately immigrated to Israel from Poland in 1958. Her descendants still live there. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Washington, DC; *Poland, Łódz Ghetto Register Books, 1939-1944*; Record Groups: RG-15.083M; File Name: rg-15_083m_0217-0000082. "Rebeka Gotkin," Geni.com entry managed by Private User, last updated November 28, 2014. Accessed June 22, 2021. <https://www.geni.com/people/Rebeka-Gotkin/6000000003581907016> and <https://www.geni.com/people/Sara-Walfisz/6000000003501576165>. One letter from the AJC to Anna Kleban notified her that she had a surviving relative in Europe – Sara Gotkin, newly Sara Walfisz upon marriage. William Bein, Director for Poland to Mrs. Anna Kleban, Library, Jew. Theological Seminary, "American Joint Distribution Committee, New York and Warsaw, Ref. No. 6728," October 1, 1946,

https://photos.geni.com/p6/7241/5913/53444836c7bb0a51/Anna_Kleban_1946_document2_original.jpg

¹⁹² Carrie Davidson, *Out of Endless Yearnings* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, Inc., 1946), 96. Fruma Kleban Naturalization Document. No. 189538, U. S. Department of Labor, United States of American Declaration of Intention. **December 8, 1925.** Ancestry.com. *New York, State and Federal Naturalization Records, 1794-1943* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013. "Obituaries: United States," *The American Jewish Year Book* 92 (1992): page 599. Rebeka Gotkin had her first child in 1913 in Grodno. Surviving relative Yoram Shoval maintains timelines for their lives on Geni.com. <https://www.geni.com/people/Rebeka-Gotkin/6000000003581907016?through=6000000003603609494#/tab/timeline> In 1923 Sala Kalecki was born to Racker Kalecki. Nina Kaleska, *Nelli's Journey: From the Depths of Evil to Reconciliation and Beyond* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Dorrance Publishing Co., 2005), 1.

¹⁹³ Fruma Kleban Naturalization Document. No. 189538, U. S. Department of Labor, United States of American Declaration of Intention. **December 8, 1925.** Anna Kleban Naturalization Document No. 515350. Both sources: Ancestry.com. *New York, New York, Extracted Death Index, 1862-1948* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014. Original data: Index to New York City Deaths 1862-1948. Indices prepared by

Fruma Kleban passed away at the age of 55.¹⁹⁴ Several months later Kleban moved out from Davidsons' home at 542 West 124th Street and into her own studio apartment at 531 West 123rd Street, where she lived for the rest of her life.¹⁹⁵

Years before Kleban's arrival to the United States, Marx, Davidson, and other JTS leaders began discussing the need for a secretary at the Library.¹⁹⁶ In the first decade of the 20th century there was a "considerable number of uncatalogued Judaica and an even larger number of such Hebraica."¹⁹⁷ Noticing a dearth of employees to fix the problem, Cyrus Adler, a close colleague and friend of Marx, advocated for a new position. In 1918, Adler requested funds from the JTS Board of Trustees to hire a secretary specifically for Marx. As Adler wrote, "Professor Marx is so entirely engrossed with the detail of the library that his bibliographical and scientific work in general perforce suffers... it seems almost a waste of energy for a man of his excellent

the Italian Genealogical Group and the German Genealogy Group, and used with permission of the New York City Department of Records/Municipal Archives.

¹⁹⁴ Ancestry.com. *New York, New York, Extracted Death Index, 1862-1948* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014. Original data: Index to New York City Deaths 1862-1948. Indices prepared by the Italian Genealogical Group and the German Genealogy Group, and used with permission of the New York City Department of Records/Municipal Archives.

¹⁹⁵ Israel Davidson's address was listed in a 1925. Jewish Yearbook report listing JPS annual membership. "REPORT OF THE THIRTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY OF AMERICA 1924-1925," *The American Jewish Year Book* 27 (1925): 561.. In their immigration documents and in later documents through 1928 Fruma and Anna are listed as residing at that address as well. U.S. Naturalization Record Indexes, 1791-1992 (Indexed in World Archives Project) - Ancestry.com. Original source: National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington, D.C.; *Index, 1917-1950 Declarations of Intention, U.S. District Court, Southern Dist. of New York, M1675*; Microfilm Serial: *M1675*; Microfilm Roll: *97*; Year: *1934*; Arrival: *New York, New York*; Microfilm Serial: *T715, 1897-1957*; Microfilm Roll: *Roll 5551*; Line: *15*; Page Number: *13*. Original data: *Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1820-1897*. Microfilm Publication M237, 675 rolls. NAI: [6256867](#). Records of the U.S. Customs Service, Record Group 36. National Archives at Washington, D.C.

¹⁹⁶ In 1919, the Library Committee of JTS, consisting of Judge Sulzberger, Dr. Cyrus Adler, and Dr. Alexander Marx, discussed Alexander Marx's need for a secretary. Though there was already an assistant, Mr. Alexander Abrahams, it was discussed that "with the help of a secretary the Librarian would be able to do his work much more rapidly and efficiently... the secretary... is to devote her leisure mainly to the cataloguing of Judaica." "Library Committee Meeting with Judge Sulzberger" (Judge Sulzberger's home: Library Committee of the Jewish Theological Seminary, February 1919), Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 45, Folder 9, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

¹⁹⁷ Menahem Schmelzer, "Building a Great Judaica Library—at What Price?," in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America*, ed. Jack Wertheimer, vol. 1 (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), page 700.

capacities to give so much of his time to ordinary routine.”¹⁹⁸ “Routine” for JTS leaders meant dealing with Jewish objects, communicating with outside organizations about them, putting on exhibitions, and teaching the lay public in the library space. At a 1919 gathering of the Library Committee, Mayer Sulzberger, Alexander Marx, and Cyrus Adler once again discussed the topic of an increase in Library staff. At that meeting the Committee noted that with the help of a full-time secretary, Marx would “be able to do his work much more rapidly and efficiently. He could e.g. get seriously started on preparing a short list of the MSS. of the Library the publication of which would be of great importance.”¹⁹⁹ The committee also discussed that the secretary would focus “mainly [on] the cataloguing of Judaica.” At the time Library staff and others noticed that JTS’s rare books and manuscripts were not being preserved properly. In February 1919, Mr. William Ivins, curator of prints at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, had visited the library and “expressed the opinion that many of our rarities which are in precarious condition have not been handled with proper care.”²⁰⁰ The position would require training on the job and devotion to the work, not necessarily an advanced degree.

Kleban’s Immigration to America and Living in Israel Davidson’s Home (1921 –1928)

¹⁹⁸ Menahem Schmelzer, “Building a Great Judaica Library—at What Price?,” in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America*, ed. Jack Wertheimer, vol. 1 (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), page 701.

¹⁹⁹ Library Committee Meeting with Judge Sulzberger” (Judge Sulzberger’s home: Library Committee of the Jewish Theological Seminary, February 1919), Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 45, Folder 9, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁰⁰ As an interesting aside, Ivins was a close family friend of the Warburgs and had helped Felix Warburg build up his collection of classics including Rembrandt etchings. Ivins was primarily a lawyer, but was also an art collector and a contemporary of the Warburgs and of Paul Sachs; Sachs had originally recommended Ivins for his position at the Met. “Library Committee Meeting with Judge Sulzberger” (Judge Sulzberger’s home: Library Committee of the Jewish Theological Seminary, February 1919), Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 45, Folder 9, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. FIX CITATION LATER Edward M. M. Warburg, *The Museum of Modern Art Oral History Program: An Interview with Edward M. M. Warburg*, interview by Sharon Zane, February 11, 1991, MoMA Archives. Nicholas Fox Weber, *Patron Saints: Five Rebels Who Opened America to a New Art 1928-1943*, 1st edition (New York: Knopf, 1992), 21.

When Kleban was hired as a “secretary” the profession was shifting from a leadership role to a more mechanical, deferential one as automation decreased responsibilities.²⁰¹

Secretaries in the United States were almost exclusively highly educated men up until the early 20th century.²⁰² But as new technologies mechanized secretarial responsibilities, institutions stopped expecting that applicants to secretarial positions be educated and started paying them less, and women slowly began entering the profession.²⁰³ Kleban fit this new model of secretarial profile in that she did not possess advanced formal education.

Yet Kleban quickly differentiated herself from others in the profession by beginning a career parallel to her boss’s. As demonstrated by her correspondence, Marx’s professional connections were Kleban’s gateways to Jewish and arts organizations and people at the beginning, but she quickly moved beyond his relationships and began forming her own, working directly with institutions and donors. Before Marx became president and Israel Davidson became vice president of the American Academy for Jewish Research, both in 1928, Kleban wrote hundreds of letters on Marx’s behalf to the organization, signing all her letters “Secretary to Alexander Marx.”²⁰⁴ Founded in 1919, the organization was designed to enhance the visibility of

²⁰¹ K. Turk, “Labor’s Pink-Collar Aristocracy: The National Secretaries Association’s Encounters with Feminism in the Age of Automation,” *Labor Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 11, no. 2 (June 1, 2014): page 85, <https://doi.org/10.1215/15476715-2410921>.

²⁰² Grace Cohen Grossman explained Cyrus Adler’s role of Assistant Secretary of the Museum as a “distinguished rank.” In this leadership position, Adler was in charge of the Smithsonian Library and exchanges of objects between institutions. Grace Cohen Grossman, *Jewish Art* (Fairfield, Connecticut: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, Inc., 1995), page 11. Bell, Alexander Graham, and Samuel P Langley. *Speech by Alexander Graham Bell, March 4*. March 4, 1907. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/magbell.37500101/>.

²⁰³ K. Turk, “Labor’s Pink-Collar Aristocracy: The National Secretaries Association’s Encounters with Feminism in the Age of Automation,” *Labor Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 11, no. 2 (June 1, 2014): 85, <https://doi.org/10.1215/15476715-2410921>.

²⁰⁴ A March 1929 report shows that Kleban wrote 213 letters that year (within three months), while three other women, all secretarial figures for the AAJR, typed 190, 90, and 69 letters respectively. By the end of March 1929, Kleban had written 260 letters to various people, including donors and patrons – all before Marx became AAJR President. American Academy for Jewish Research, “Expenses in Connection with Membership Letters,” Expenses Report (New York, NY: American Academy for Jewish Research, March 21, 1929, and April 30, 1929), American Academy of Jewish Research, ARCH 9, Box 4, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. Anna Kleban to Hannah Arendt, January 31, 1952, Kleban-Marx Collection, Arch. 68, Box 2, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; “Marx Heads Research Group,” *New York Times*, December 29, 1932, American Academy of Jewish

Jewish studies in American universities.²⁰⁵ Kleban would later become administrative secretary of the AAJR (1949), head of the finances in the organization (1960), and an archivist of objects for it. She stopped referencing Marx in her letters to the AAJR around 1940, signing the majority of them, “Anna Kleban, Administrative Secretary of the American Academy of Jewish Research,” or more simply, “Anna Kleban, American Academy of Jewish Research.”²⁰⁶

When the official Seminary museum opened as an appendage to the library in 1931, Kleban and Marx installed 18 showcases and Kleban maintained and tended to the space.²⁰⁷ Cyrus Adler and others had discussed appointing an additional person to take charge of the JTS Museum because Marx was so disinterested in the non-book objects that were flooding into Seminary hands.²⁰⁸ At this point Kleban took on more responsibility and became more visible to

Research Records, undated, 1928 - 1002, I 508, Box 1, Folder 10, Center for Jewish History; Alexander Marx and Shalom Spiegel, “Israel Davidson,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 9 (1938): 1–2.

²⁰⁵ In 1919, the Association of Jewish Scholars in America, later renamed the American Academy of Jewish Research, was born; Louis Ginzberg and several others led the effort. In December 1928, the small organization, consisting mostly of individuals hailing from four Jewish academies (HUC, JTS, the Rabbinical College of America [ancestor of Yeshiva University], and Dropsie College) expanded by holding its first public meeting at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Michael N. Dobkowski, ed., “American Academy for Jewish Research,” in *Jewish American Voluntary Organizations*, Ethnic American Voluntary Organizations (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 8 – 10.

²⁰⁶ Anna Kleban, Administrative Secretary to “Gentlemen”/N. V. Martinus Nijhoff, Boekhandel en Uitgevers Mij, The Hague, Netherland, August 30, 1949, Kleban-Marx Collection, Arch. 68, Box 2, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Anna Kleban for AAJR to Mr. Morris I. Jaffe, President, The Jewish Welfare Federation of Dallas, September 7, 1960, American Academy of Jewish Research, ARCH 9, Box 5, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives;

Anna Kleban to Dr. Marcus, October 19, 1939, American Academy of Jewish Research, ARCH 9, Box 4, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Anna Kleban, letter to Administrative Secretary to Mr. Michael Radolsky, “Mr. Michael Radolsky, Accurate Silver Company, 139 East 56th Street, New York, New York,” November 21, 1945, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 4, Folder 12: Objects - Repairs on Objects, 1940 - 6, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Anna Kleban to Israel Friedlander, July 14, 1947, Kleban-Marx Collection, Arch. 68, Box 1, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Anna Kleban to Dr. Stephen Kayser, July 21, 1948, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁰⁷ Rose Feitelson, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, “For Immediate Release: Seminary Begins Museum Reconversion; Mrs. Warburg’s Former Home To Be Opened As Museum, October 1, 1946,” December 26, 1945, JTS Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 2: Correspondences & Memoranda, 1945 - 1946, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁰⁸ Alexander Marx and Joseph B. Abrahams, “The Jewish Theological Seminary of America,” September 23, 1931, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Administration, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. In 1932 he was inviting people to come to the Museum. Alexander Marx, “Letters Mailed on January 21st, 1932,” January 21, 1932, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Administration, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. In 1943 he wrote accepting suggestions

JTS faculty, not only working with the objects in the Library and coordinating group visits, but also orchestrating visiting exhibitions and outgoing loans as well as traveling to fundraise for the Library and for JTS. By the late 1930s, Kleban had developed independent relationships with donors, American museums, and Jewish organizations in ways nobody else at the Seminary had.²⁰⁹

Objects and their Stories: Anna Kleban Becomes Object Expert in the 1930s

In the 1930s, when fellowships and academic posts for Jewish art historians were nonexistent and objects were afterthoughts in Jewish and even higher-education institutions, Kleban was already pursuing the art of display and the teaching of objects. As her role expanded, Kleban became increasingly well-known for her expertise with Jewish objects. Kleban relentlessly pursued not only objects and their proper care, but also their histories. She often turned to specialists for assistance. In July 1933, for instance, Kleban inquired of a specialist about the origin of the symbol of the Magen David in order to learn how to best make wall

for future exhibitions. Alexander Marx to Joseph L. Andrews, December 20, 1943, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Administration, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. By 1945, he was fielding such suggestions to a larger Museum Committee and letting them handle it. Alexander Marx to Rabbi Englander, February 5, 1945, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Administration, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. In 1946 Marx agreed to serve on the Jewish Museum's Inner Museum Committee but pointed to Kleban's expertise, claiming to Louis Finkelstein, "Your idea to ask Miss Kleban to attend the meetings of the Committee is a very good one." Alexander Marx to Dr. Louis Finkelstein, "The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America," October 15, 1946, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 2: Correspondences & Memoranda, 1945 - 1946, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. In 1947 Marx was still receiving gifts for the Jewish Museum. Professor Alexander Marx to Doctor Stephen Kayser, June 13, 1947, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. And yet, after the opening of the Jewish Museum in 1947 Marx seems to have lost interest in Jewish objects almost completely. His letters about the Museum at JTS and the Jewish Museum stop, and he moves toward retirement. By 1951, when Kleban's public appearances increase distinctively, she and Marx appear to have taken on more separate roles.

²⁰⁹ Letters in which she addresses herself as "Secretary to Alexander Marx" largely stop in 1940, though she'd spent most of the 1930s signing letters in this way. See the Jewish Museum papers, the AAJR papers and the Alexander Marx papers at JTS.

labels, plan exhibitions, and educate visitors.²¹⁰ Donors also frequently asked Kleban how best to care for their own historical objects and which specialists to turn to for expertise in maintenance.²¹¹

Well-regarded curators in the secular American community also looked to Kleban for her familiarity with Jewish objects. In 1931, a curator of Latin American objects in New York, Edith Igoe Sweeney, visited Kleban at JTS to ask about several objects externally on loan to the collection she managed. Sweeney was a renowned American curator later responsible for Latin American objects at the World's Fair of 1940.²¹² After Kleban earned her trust as a specialist, Sweeney looked to her for guidance on similar objects. Interactions like this became commonplace for Kleban in this decade.

Within JTS, Kleban garnered a reputation as the sole authority on Judaica at the Seminary while Marx was the expert on manuscripts. Through the 1930s, she hosted a wide variety of visitors including church groups, synagogue sisterhoods, broader synagogue groups, children, patrons, and curators from across the country.²¹³ These were the years in which she learned the collection and learned donor relations, making possible her later work at the Jewish Museum.

²¹⁰ Anna Kleban to Mrs. E. B. Kennedy, July 17, 1933, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Administration, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²¹¹ Anna Kleban to Secretary to Mrs. Felix M. Warburg, 1109 Fifth Avenue, New York City, September 16, 1940, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 49, Folder 1, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²¹² Pan American Union, *Bulletin of the Pan American Union* (The Union, 1940), page 584.

²¹³ Edith Igoe Sweeney to Anna Kleban, November 15, 1931, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Administration, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Mrs. Katherine Willard Eddy to Miss Kleban, "The Riverside Church, Riverside Drive at 122nd Street, New York," May 17, 1940, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 8, Folder 2, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; "Article 4 -- No Title," *The Jewish Exponent* (1887-1990); *Philadelphia, Penn.*, January 7, 1949; Mrs. Katherine Willard Eddy to Miss Kleban, "The Riverside Church, Riverside Drive at 122nd Street, New York," May 17, 1940, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 8, Folder 2, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

In March 1934 Finkelstein reached out to Kleban to ask for a list of prints to be displayed in an upcoming exhibition so that he could tell the potential funder for the exhibition catalogue.²¹⁴ Notably, he did not reach out to Marx. Indeed, in the Marx papers at JTS there appear to be no such letters to him asking about objects and their histories. As a professor and librarian, Marx constantly catalogued the book and manuscript collection and trained students to read and interpret complex texts. He was famously overextended with responsibilities in the 1920s through the mid 1930s. In 1938 the Seminary granted him his first leave of absence from teaching to spend the academic year devoting himself fully to “the difficult task of cataloguing the Seminary’s collection of manuscripts in Hebrew, Sumerian, Aramaic, and Judeo-German,” which then contained over 7,000 objects and today remains the largest collection of rare Jewish books in the world.²¹⁵ As Marx’s teaching slowed down and his other responsibilities with manuscripts increased, Kleban found herself with more autonomy to produce her own new systems for categorizing and understanding the objects, of which there were many.

As Kleban became an objects expert, she also poised herself as the person most capable of representing the collection to potential donors. In its early years, the Jewish Theological Seminary relied upon major bequests from individuals such as Jacob Schiff, Mayer Sulzberger, and others. In 1927 a major unexpected donation by Louis Brush allowed for renovations and expansions of the still-new Jacob Schiff memorial building on Broadway and 122nd street.²¹⁶ However, the 1929 stock market crash ushered in years of financial strain for Jewish communal

²¹⁴ Louis Finkelstein to Miss Anna Kleban, March 1, 1934, Unprocessed Files of JTS Library Exhibitions, 1924 - 1983, Box 3, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²¹⁵ William Walker Rockwell, Ph.D., D.Theol., Librarian at the Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York. “Alexander Marx at Sixty.” Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, January 1938, 9.

²¹⁶ Jenna Weissman Joselit, “By Design: Building the Campus of the Jewish Theological Seminary,” in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, vol. 1, The Making of an Institution of Higher Learning, 1997, 271–92, 279.

organizations across the country.²¹⁷ For at least three years after 1929 JTS did not have the capacity to purchase new objects.²¹⁸ In these years Kleban explained objects and their importance to visitors to JTS, laying the foundations of a broader fundraising strategy she would flesh out more fully in the 1940s with the opening of the Jewish Museum on 5th Avenue.

Building a Jewish Museum with an Independent Address, 1944-1947

In 1944, patron Frieda Schiff Warburg offered her home to the Seminary as a Jewish museum. As the question of a curator arose, JTS leadership ignored Anna Kleban's potential for the role completely. She was still merely the under-appreciated vital bridge between the worlds of curation and donors, and comprised the invisible backbone of the project of Jewish visual history at the Seminary. Her public talks and donor engagement were what kept the library and museum at JTS alive, but Seminary leaders appear to have been blinded to Kleban's achievements by her socioeconomic status, gender, or formal title of Secretary. JTS leaders were also seemingly ignorant of the most pressing needs of the new museum, and the ways in which such needs fell between the cracks of career paths. Kleban was an institution-builder who lay between these very cracks, but nobody saw her that way. It didn't know it, but the new museum would not need *just* a curator, nor *just* a director, nor *just* an arts practitioner, but rather someone who could work across fields to establish the groundwork for building an institution. Ultimately, they hired a husband-wife curatorial duo, Stephen and Louise Kayser, one trained in art historical

²¹⁷ Beth S. Wenger, "Chapter 6: Private Jewish Philanthropy in the Welfare State," in *New York Jews and the Great Depression: Uncertain Promise* (Yale University Press, 1996), 136–65.

²¹⁸ Alexander Marx to Mr. Sidney S. Anhalt, 600 West 111th Street, New York City, "The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York City," May 11, 1932, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 4, Folder 7: Objects - Museum Offers, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

scholarship, teaching, and curation and the other trained as an artist and skilled as a donor relations expert.

The profound irony of JTS's search for a new Jewish Museum leadership reveals itself in letters from Chancellor Louis Finkelstein. Several months after Schiff Warburg's announcement of her gift, Finkelstein wrote to her expressing a need for someone who "knows the collections" to help him organize the space into a museum:

I had a long talk with Professor Marx, who is somewhat disturbed about his own relationship to the future curator. Professor Marx realizes that his responsibilities at the Seminary itself will prevent him spending perhaps as much time as he would like in the new building. At the same time, he realizes that there is no one who knows about the present museum collections as himself. We shall have to have a number of long talks about this particular problem.²¹⁹

Even as Marx shirked from *Judaica* in his writings, teaching, and activities, and Kleban filled a void that she found to be exceedingly noticeable, Finkelstein perceived Marx as the person who knew the collections best – not Kleban. Marx was obviously the person who knew the *books* the best. But Finkelstein entirely disregarded Kleban as the person who knew the *Judaica* the best. Eventually, JTS leadership recognized Kleban's expertise when it realized it could not merely hire a curator and expect him and his wife to get to know the collections without help. Later that year, Schiff Warburg, Marx, and Finkelstein hired Stephen Kayser to be the head curator for the Jewish Museum on 5th Avenue. Schiff Warburg and Marx then quickly turned to Kleban, the only person who knew the collections well enough, to explain the objects, the way they were catalogued, and how they could best be exhibited. Essentially, though JTS didn't offer Kleban the position of head curator, the institution relied upon her to train the person it hired.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Louis Finkelstein to Frieda Schiff Warburg, April 5, 1944, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series B, Box 41, Folder 38, 1943 - 1944, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²²⁰ Anna Kleban to Stephen Kayser, November 4, 1948, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Anna Kleban to Dr. Stephen Kayser, July 21, 1948, Jewish Museum

In 1946, as wartime shortages and other issues led to delays in the opening of the Jewish Museum, an Inner Museum Committee was formed to accelerate the process and ensure its efficiency and feasibility. Kleban, Marx, Kayser, and several others served as the central figures on the Committee, which addressed several key issues in the lead-up to the museum opening including external loans, architectural and structural changes to the Warburg home, acquisitions, and exhibition practices.²²¹ Minutes of Committee meetings reveal that Kleban was involved in conversations about architectural and structural work in the museum building and helped to divide the space into separate rooms that were appropriately sized for different exhibitions.²²² Her familiarity with the collection enhanced the efficacy of the migration of Seminary objects to the Warburg home. She had organized the objects by type and date and knew which could be best grouped together in exhibitions.²²³

Many were unaware of the power of Kleban's presence on the Inner Museum Committee. Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jessica Feingold, and other key women to the Jewish Museum as an

Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²²¹ "Inner Museum Committee Meeting at JTS, 20 November 1947," n.d., Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; "Meeting of the Inner Museum Committee" (Dr. Simon Greenberg's Office: Jewish Theological Seminary, January 20, 1947), Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; "Meeting of the Inner Committee," January 9, 1947, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 21: Museum Committee, Inner Museum Committee, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Stephen S. Kayser, "Meeting of the Inner Museum Committee" (Dr. Simon Greenberg's office: Jewish Theological Seminary, February 19, 1947), JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 21: Museum, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²²² Present: Rabbi Moshe Davis, Miss Jessica Feingold, Miss Rose Feitelson, Doctor Simon Greenberg, Miss Anna Kleban, Doctor Alexander Marx, Doctor Greenberg, "Minutes of the Meeting Held on Museum Matters," November 21, 1946, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 3: Museum: Correspondences & Memoranda, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²²³ Present: Rabbi Moshe Davis, Miss Jessica Feingold, Miss Rose Feitelson, Doctor Simon Greenberg, Miss Anna Kleban, Doctor Alexander Marx, Doctor Greenberg, "Minutes of the Meeting Held on Museum Matters," November 21, 1946, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 3: Museum: Correspondences & Memoranda, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. "Meeting of the Inner Museum Committee" (Dr. Simon Greenberg's Office: Jewish Theological Seminary, January 20, 1947), Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

institution were purposely excluded while Kleban was not only included, but also exercised a real and impactful voice. She helped decide upon the simplest name for the new institution, The Jewish Museum, after debating with others over a lengthy list of longer, more complex names.²²⁴ Still, she was often forgotten as one of the only women in the room and one of the few with an ostensibly menial job based on her formal title. After some miscommunication issues in early 1947 in which new museum employees recorded donations and loans incorrectly and disagreed on which ones to accept, in March the Committee specified that only Kleban, and “not the [other] Library staff,” would monitor and catalogue new acquisitions for the Jewish Museum.²²⁵ In a letter to Stephen Kayser, Kleban asserted her authority in this regard several weeks before the Jewish Museum opened:

With regard to loan exhibits, it is my recollection, and also Doctor Marx's, that Doctor Greenberg suggested that I... inspect the new acquisitions periodically. Of course it will be interesting for the members of the Library staff to see the new acquisitions, but very important for me to know what has been added.²²⁶

In February 1947, at another Inner Museum Committee meeting, Finkelstein “expressed his appreciation for the help which Dr. Marx had from... Miss Anna Kleban” (along with several other minimally involved men).²²⁷ He went on, “With regard to loan exhibits as mentioned by Miss Kleban, it was decided that regular meetings of the library staff and the museum staff would have to take place in order to be informed of loan requests and alike. No independent

²²⁴ “Meeting of the Inner Museum Committee” (Dr. Simon Greenberg’s Office: Jewish Theological Seminary, January 20, 1947), Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²²⁵ Miss Anna Kleban to Doctor Stephen Kayser, March 5, 1947, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²²⁶ Miss Anna Kleban to Doctor Stephen Kayser, March 5, 1947, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²²⁷ Stephen S. Kayser, “Meeting of the Inner Museum Committee” (Dr. Simon Greenberg’s office: Jewish Theological Seminary, February 19, 1947), JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 21: Museum, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

commitments of the two institutions shall take place.”²²⁸ Kleban served here as the unnoticed yet essential conduit between the academic institution of JTS and the public institution of the museum. She explained to the Inner Committee that both institutions needed to be in constant communication about their acquisitions practices and inventories so that there was no overlap, confusion, or miscommunication about exhibits and objects.²²⁹ This sentiment, and the meetings that followed from it, would keep the institutions on similar paths, working closely with one another for over a decade.²³⁰

Some took note of the invisibility of Kleban’s work within the Inner Museum Committee and sought to recognize it. Perhaps prompted by his wife Louise Kayser, Stephen once asked, “please put on the agenda for the Inner Museum Committee Meeting the matter of the official recognition of the change taking place in answering requests for exhibits.”²³¹ He continued, “record... that Anna Kleban has taken care of everything very adequately and efficiently everything. Let us make sure the minutes properly acknowledge her.”²³²

Still, Kleban was often forgotten in the museum context, even by the Kayzers. In March 1947, Kleban wrote a letter to the Stephen Kayser: “This communication is from the ‘late’ Miss Kleban (see end of first paragraph of Minutes of the Museum Committee), and I want you to

²²⁸ Stephen S. Kayser, “Meeting of the Inner Museum Committee” (Dr. Simon Greenberg’s office: Jewish Theological Seminary, February 19, 1947), JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 21: Museum, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²²⁹ Stephen S. Kayser, “Meeting of the Inner Museum Committee” (Dr. Simon Greenberg’s office: Jewish Theological Seminary, February 19, 1947), JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 21: Museum, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²³⁰ Though JTS and the Jewish Museum famously went their own directions in the 1960s as the Jewish Museum became a home of avant-garde art, Jewish and not, through the late 1940s and early ‘50s the institutions were tightly knit, in part because of Kleban’s initiative, knowledge, and communication with leaders at both institutions.

²³¹ Doctor Kayser and Doctor Greenberg, September 19, 1947, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 4: Museum, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²³² Doctor Kayser and Doctor Greenberg, September 19, 1947, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 4: Museum, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

know that I am alive and kicking.”²³³ In her absence, it seems the Committee, Kayser included, had mistakenly presumed Kleban was dead! Her letter in response reveals the sense of humor that those who knew her remember fondly.²³⁴ In the broader context of her life, Kleban’s involvement in the Inner Museum Committee was a crucial piece of the development of her career. By playing an instrumental role behind-the-scenes, Kleban actually facilitated the creation of a new institution based entirely on Jewish objects, or Judaica, rather than Hebrew books and manuscripts.

In the postwar years, from 1945 to 1950, Anna Kleban also became an English language instructor for many of the refugee Jewish scholars to New York City. She taught Jewish Museum curators and researchers such as research assistant Guido Schoenberger.²³⁵ At the same time, Kleban was helping her surviving young niece immigrate to the United States and acclimate to America. After her two sisters, their husbands, and all of their children but one died in the Holocaust, she housed her surviving young niece for several months until she could find work.²³⁶

“I Wish to Report on my ‘Public Relations’ Activities”: A Hidden Donor Relations Role

²³³ Miss Anna Kleban to Doctor Stephen Kayser, March 5, 1947, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²³⁴ Menahem Schmelzer, Anna Kleban at the Jewish Theological Seminary, interview by Ariel Cohen, Oral Interview, November 5, 2019; Ruth Schmelzer, Anna Kleban at the Jewish Theological Seminary, interview by Ariel Cohen, Oral Interview, November 5, 2019; Menahem Schmelzer, JTS Library and its Objects, interview by Ariel Cohen, In-Person Interview, June 27, 2018; Hector Guzman, Women and the Jewish Museum: Anna Kleban and Others, interview by Ariel Cohen, In-Person Interview, June 25, 2018; Jonathan Sarna, Anna Kleban at the Jewish Theological Seminary, interview by Ariel Cohen, Oral Interview, June 1, 2019.

²³⁵ Guido Kisch recalls her influence upon his immigration to the United States and the fact that she taught English to many of the scholars who would later be employed at JTS. Source to be attained in the next several weeks from Dana Smith, Dana Smith, Interview by Ariel Cohen, E-mail, January 29, 2020. Jonathan Sarna, Interview by Ariel Cohen, E-mail, January 28, 2020.

²³⁶ Nina Kaleska, *Nelli's Journey: From the Depths of Evil to Reconciliation and Beyond* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Dorrance Publishing Co., 2005), <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/bib245565>, 76-78.

In April 1947, in the flurry of activities to open the Jewish Museum's doors as the Inner Museum Committee was in the process of being replaced by a hired team, Anna Kleban cheekily wrote a memorandum to Simon Greenberg: "I wish to report on my 'public relations' activities."²³⁷ As if "public relations" encompasses what I do, she implied with her tone and quotation marks. In reality, Kleban knew her direct relationships with donors formed the backbone of her career and differentiated her from other JTS secretaries who really did work in public relations. In July 1939, Kleban wrote to Frieda Schiff Warburg: "I wish to acknowledge with many thanks the receipt of a pair of Headpieces for the Torah which you were good enough to send to the Seminary museum as a loan from Mr. Max M. Warburg."²³⁸ The letter is emblematic of dozens of 1930s letters to donors, curators, and community leaders.²³⁹ When she first arrived at JTS, Kleban began to cultivate independent relationships with the individuals involved in a network of Jewish and cultural philanthropy around the country. Friedman often expressed the importance of his relationship with Kleban to Marx, especially in the years in which she transferred objects from the Museum of Ceremonial Objects to the Jewish Museum.²⁴⁰

As donors came to trust Kleban early in her career, many deepened their relationships with her into the 1940s and 1950s as she proved her capabilities and object expertise. Kleban was becoming a necessary intermediary between the world of scholars, academia, and

²³⁷ Anna Kleban to Doctor Simon Greenberg, April 8, 1947, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 24, Folder 3, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²³⁸ Anna Kleban to Mrs. Felix Warburg, July 19, 1939, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 49, Folder 1, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²³⁹ For just a few examples, see: Anna Kleban to Mrs. Felix Warburg, July 19, 1939, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 49, Folder 1, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Anna Kleban to Secretary to Mrs. Felix M. Warburg, 1109 Fifth Avenue, New York City, September 16, 1940, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 49, Folder 1, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Anna Kleban, Secretary to Professor Marx to Mr. Ralph Greenbaum, 1040 Anderson Avenue, Bronx, N. Y., July 19, 1940, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 4, Folder 5: Objects: Museum & Library Donations, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁴⁰ Menahem Schmelzer, JTS Library and its Objects, interview by Ariel Cohen, In-Person Interview, June 27, 2018. Schmelzer points to his own research in the AAJR archives

institutional leaders on the one hand, and the world of donors and laypeople on the other. In the 1940s she began writing thorough reports of the museum's attendance, happenings, exhibitions, donations, and more for JTS leadership to ensure it knew of the museum's significance to the broader public and effectiveness.²⁴¹ Patrons came to rely on Kleban to keep track of and care for their objects from donation to curation. Memorandums for Finkelstein's office gave exact counts of the numbers and types of objects, and from which collections they came.²⁴² Reports to Simon Greenberg and the JTS Publicity Department let him know which objects were lent out to which organizations, which groups were coming to the Seminary and when, and what sorts of objects were donated to JTS.²⁴³ In 1947 Greenberg and Marx reaffirmed that Kleban alone was to examine new acquisitions periodically and report them to the rest of the JTS and Inner Museum Committee team.²⁴⁴

Kleban also accepted objects on behalf of the Jewish Museum on 5th Avenue after its opening and often wrote about them to Stephen Kayser, head curator, and Guido Schoenberger,

²⁴¹ At JTS, there are scarce records, lists, and informative documents compiled about objects by Alexander Marx or even Paul Romanoff, hired in 1930 with the formal title of curator of the Museum of Ceremonial Objects. Romanoff, Paul. "Books In Miniature: Tiny Scrolls and Manuscripts, Including Incunabula, Will Be on View in New York Beginning June 15." *The American Hebrew*, June 10, 1938. Unprocessed Files of JTS Library Exhibitions, 1924 - 1983, Box 2. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁴² This memorandum offers a corrective to the Accession Book, written by someone else, which listed 200 blank numbers (an error in overestimating objects). Anna Kleban, "Memorandum for Miss Feingold," November 6, 1941, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 4, Folder 10: Objects - Objects & Exhibition Information, 1941, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁴³ Anna Kleban to Simon Greenberg, December 23, 1946, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 24, Folder 3, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. Anna Kleban to Doctor Simon Greenberg, "Memorandum," February 5, 1947, JTS Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 3: Museum: Correspondences & Memoranda, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Anna Kleban to Doctor Simon Greenberg, April 8, 1947, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 24, Folder 3, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Anna Kleban to Doctor Simon Greenberg, "Publicity," February 17, 1947, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 24, Folder 3, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Anna Kleban to Doctor Simon Greenberg, "Publicity," February 17, 1947, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 24, Folder 3, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁴⁴ Miss Anna Kleban to Doctor Stephen Kayser, March 5, 1947, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

research fellow.²⁴⁵ In her letters thanking donors for donations to the JM she signed her name simply “Anna Kleban” with no title, as she had created her own independent role, serving multiple institutions and types of groups.²⁴⁶ She was a direct intermediary between donors and the Seminary, museum, and library:

Thank you very much for your letter of December 6th. We would be pleased to get the wedding certificate of your friend's grandparents and any other items she has that would be of interest to our Library. I should be very glad to discuss it with her, if a meeting could be arranged. I am very grateful to you for your interest.²⁴⁷

She often followed up with object donors who wanted to know the fate of their objects. In February 1940, Samuel Friedenborg wrote to Kleban explaining that one of the wall labels for an object in a JTS exhibit on Jewish medals was “wrongly designated.”²⁴⁸ He asked her to fix it by switching the plaque to correctly honor the appropriate donors.²⁴⁹ Kleban also corresponded extensively with Harry G. Friedman, keeping a record of all the objects he had donated to the Seminary, and wrote to him with several lists of these over time as he requested them.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁵ Anna Kleban to Stephen Kayser, November 4, 1948, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Doctor Stephen Kayser to Miss Anna Kleban, February 13, 1947, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Anna Kleban to Doctor Schoenberger, June 4, 1947, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁴⁶ See, for example: Anna Kleban to Mr. Mosco Galimir, August 3, 1951, Kleban-Marx Collection, Arch. 68, Box 1, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁴⁷ Anna Kleban to Mr. Alexander J. Schmerling, December 6, 1959, American Academy of Jewish Research, ARCH 9, Box 5, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁴⁸ Samuel Friedenborg to Anna Kleban, “John-Platt Realty Corp., 90 John Street, New York City,” February 26, 1940, Unprocessed Files of JTS Library Exhibitions, 1924 - 1983, Box 2, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁴⁹ Samuel Friedenborg to Anna Kleban, “John-Platt Realty Corp., 90 John Street, New York City,” February 26, 1940, Unprocessed Files of JTS Library Exhibitions, 1924 - 1983, Box 2, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁵⁰ In March 1953, Kleban wrote to Harry G. Friedman with list of objects he had donated to JTS between 1932 and 1939. Anna Kleban to Doctor H. G. Friedman, March 6, 1953, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 89, Folder 2, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

Toward the end of her career, Kleban often publicly reminisced on her donor relations activities as chance happenings in the museum space. In 1974, Kleban visited a temple in Rhode Island and relayed an experience she had years prior with a Maimonides letter.²⁵¹ While Kleban was explaining this object to a crowd at JTS, the letter had fallen to the ground and the woman who picked it up was “so excited that she ran home and called, on the next day, with a generous gift for the Museum.”²⁵² The informality of Kleban’s relationships and her dexterity in communicating with different kinds of donors were the defining features of her long, self-curated career.

External Loans in the Extended 1947 Moment: Anna Kleban’s Leadership

Kleban often worked with other arts and Jewish institutions to loan objects, promoting the JTS collection’s public identity. In 1947, the Jewish Museum on 5th Avenue inherited most of the Seminary museum’s Judaica collections which Kleban had organized.²⁵³ Jewish Museum papers recording outside loans in the first five years of the Museum’s existence bear Kleban’s name, not Kayser’s, Schoenberger’s, Marx’s, Finkelstein’s, or anybody else’s; she was thus responsible for external loans even when the objects moved locations.²⁵⁴ On January 8th, 1947, Dr. Alexander Marx, Jessica Feingold, Rose Feitelson, Guido Schoenberger, Meyer Schapiro, Rabbi Moshe Davis, and Stephen Kayser gathered for an Inner Museum Committee meeting. Stephen Kayser’s report of this event reads: "Loan exhibits going outside: Miss Kleban remains

²⁵¹ Beryl Segal, “From Friday to Friday: Rare Books and Rare Music,” *The Rhode Island Herald*, December 6, 1974, page 4.

²⁵² Beryl Segal, “From Friday to Friday: Rare Books and Rare Music,” *The Rhode Island Herald*, December 6, 1974, page 4.

²⁵³ Dr. Alfred Werner, “A Shrine of Jewish Art,” *The Jewish Criterion*, October 1, 1948; Julie Miller, “Planning the Jewish Museum,” *Conservative Judaism* 48, no. 48 (Fall 1994): 60–73.

²⁵⁴ For some of these papers see especially Box 1 of the JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, located in the Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

in charge of their handling as before but shall remain in contact with me in order to know what pieces for the opening show are needed at the present time."²⁵⁵ At this same meeting, the committee reported that a museum in Honolulu reached out asking to borrow items.²⁵⁶ Several months later, Kleban wrote that she had sent an exhibit consisting of 24 objects and 5 books to the American United Service Organization Club in Honolulu.²⁵⁷ In the letter, Kleban explains that the Jewish community of Honolulu and the National Welfare Board would pay for the packing and shipping of objects and their insurance and that she would be the point of contact mediating between JTS/the Jewish Museum and the Jewish Club in Honolulu.²⁵⁸

In April 1947 Kleban wrote to Simon Greenberg listing the places to which the museum had loaned or was planning to loan ceremonial objects within the year.²⁵⁹ In this specific report, her mention of an exhibition in the Bronx illuminates Kleban's responsibility to secure a public image of the Seminary through exhibition loans, likely for fundraising purposes. Her letter to Simon Greenberg reads, "An exhibit of ceremonial objects and manuscripts will be opened at the Bronx Court House... the same exhibit is to be shown at the Bronx Seminary Dinner at the Concourse Plaza Hotel."²⁶⁰ Kleban also fielded requests for loans to other organizations and

²⁵⁵ "Meeting of the Inner Committee," January 9, 1947, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 21: Museum Committee, Inner Museum Committee, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁵⁶ "Meeting of the Inner Committee," January 9, 1947, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 21: Museum Committee, Inner Museum Committee, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁵⁷ The United Service Organization Club, or USO, was born of President Roosevelt's desire to unite the American public behind the American military – in particular, its involvement in World War II. It united the Salvation Army, Young Men's Christian Association, Young Women's Christian Association, National Catholic Community Services, National Travelers Aid Association and the National Jewish Welfare Board into one organization, and still exists today.

²⁵⁸ Anna Kleban to Doctor Simon Greenberg, April 8, 1947, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 24, Folder 3, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Anna Kleban to Doctor Schoenberger, "List of Museum Objects On Exhibition in Honolulu," June 4, 1947, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁵⁹ Kleban listed the Hillside-Hollis Hebrew Center in Jamaica, Long Island, the YMHA on 92nd Street, the YM and YWHA in Baltimore, the Bronx Court House, the Concourse Plaza Hotel, and more

²⁶⁰ Anna Kleban to Doctor Simon Greenberg, April 8, 1947, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 24, Folder 3, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

people, such as Temple Emanuel on the Upper East Side, Rabbi Bohnen in Buffalo, New York for his synagogue's exhibition space, and the YMHA in Baltimore.²⁶¹ She summarized these requests for Greenberg and others in memoranda every few months.²⁶²

Kleban also curated shows specifically for various communities and organizations to keep JTS on the map of local arts-based organizations. A few months before the Jewish Museum opened, JTS leadership invited the Music Library Association and the Hymn Society to have their monthly dinner meeting at JTS. For the occasion, Kleban and the JTS Library staff exhibited "a selection of Jewish books and music."²⁶³ In promoting a public image of the Seminary as an arts organization amongst others, Kleban was creating a solid foundation for the fundraising campaigns that would support the JTS Judaica collection's maintenance and growth and help it remain in the public eye.

National Travel and Institutional Fundraising for JTS After the Jewish Museum Opening

As current JTS chancellor Shuly Rubin Schwartz remembers, Kleban was responsible for fundraising for JTS's Torah Fund campaign for student scholarships beginning in the late 1940s and spoke at synagogues and community centers about the importance of these scholarships.²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Anna Kleban to Doctor Simon Greenberg, "Memorandum," February 5, 1947, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 3: Museum: Correspondences & Memoranda, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁶² Anna Kleban to Doctor Simon Greenberg, "Memorandum," February 5, 1947, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 3: Museum: Correspondences & Memoranda, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁶³ Anna Kleban to Doctor Greenberg and Publicity Department, "Memorandum," December 6, 1946, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 24, Folder 3, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁶⁴ Shuly Rubin-Schwartz, Oral interview at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Shuly's office, January 2018. "Sisterhood Hears Talk on Literature," April 17, 1953; "Beth-El Group Maps Events," April 13, 1953; "Untitled Article," *The Jewish Exponent (1887-1990)*; *Philadelphia, Penn.*, December 7, 1951; "Temple Luncheon," *Asbury Park Sunday Press*, May 9, 1954, sec. Social News. Also cite Baila Shargel's husband e-mail interview. He remembers that Anna Kleban was in charge of Torah Fund fundraisers, and that he used to meet Kleban in her office; she would give him "various assignments to speak at congregations in the New York area about supporting the Torah Fund"; "Sisterhood Temple Gates of Prayer, 38-20 Parsons Boulevard, Flushing, New York 11354," Sponsorship Letter, August 2018, https://images.shulcloud.com/13592/uploads/uploaded_files/Newsletter/SISTERHOOD%20Torah%20Fund%20lett

Kleban also curated exhibitions for a more general audience into the 1950s to fundraise for other Jewish ventures headed by JTS leadership. She presented her first such exhibition as part of an evening in 1947 at the Hotel St. George in Brooklyn. The goal of the evening was to showcase and explain the potential diversity of Jewish learning teaching, and the importance of establishing and supporting ventures that could continue to enhance this diversity. The goal for that evening was to raise \$15,000,000 to expand the offerings of the United Synagogue and the Rabbinical Assembly of North America, both housed at JTS. Kleban's exhibition of rare books, manuscripts, Judaica, and fine arts underscored that JTS was at the cutting-edge of fostering innovative Jewish content and encouraged viewers to consider donating to JTS.²⁶⁵

Kleban spoke at many other events at synagogues and community centers that year on behalf of JTS. A month after this event, Kleban spoke to "a group of seventy men of the Forest Hills Jewish Center on some 20 manuscripts and books I had with me."²⁶⁶ She also gave many talks at JTS to potential donors, and when she wrote to Simon Greenberg she even listed events by fundraising campaigns:

Several Sisterhoods are expected to visit the Seminary during this month and I have been asked to show them of our treasures. About 100 women of the Anshe Chesed Sisterhood will be here on April 16th (Torah scholarship), about 50 - 75 women of the Bronx Sisterhood on April 23rd (Torah scholarship), members of the Ocean Parkway Jewish Center will visit the Seminary on Sunday, April 27th ([general JTS] campaign), and 100 ladies of the B'nai Jeshurun Sisterhood on April 30th (Torah scholarship).²⁶⁷

In the 1950s Kleban spoke at synagogue Sisterhood events in Detroit, all over New Jersey, and in Philadelphia and Montgomery, Pennsylvania, most of which were Torah Fund lunches or general

[er%202018%20new%20pin.pdf](#); "Torah Fund, IntraContinental Region, Women's League for Conservative Judaism," accessed March 6, 2020, <http://www.wlcjregion.org/intra/torah-fund/>.

²⁶⁵ "Lehman to Speak in Jewish Drive," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, February 16, 1947, Brooklyn Public Library.

²⁶⁶ Anna Kleban to Doctor Simon Greenberg, April 8, 1947, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 24, Folder 3, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁶⁷ Anna Kleban to Doctor Simon Greenberg, April 8, 1947, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 24, Folder 3, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

fundraisers.²⁶⁸ In memoranda to Greenberg, Kleban indicated that she had about 50 or 60 visitors per day to the Seminary's museum, most of whom were Torah Fund donors.²⁶⁹

In 1947, Kleban altered the physical structure of the JTS Library & Museum to make it possible for larger groups to tour the exhibitions. When she noticed that large groups couldn't fit into the Manuscript Room anymore since it had filled with more objects in recent years, she spoke to Dr. Greenberg suggesting a move of some of the items into a different room when groups came to visit.²⁷⁰ She herself then moved an Italian Ark from the Manuscript Room to the museum to make room, and replaced it with a smaller statue of "Hillel and Shammai" by a Jules Butansky (a recent gift of Mrs. Irving Lehman, wife of former Governor of New York).²⁷¹ She wrote:

Since the statue is rather small, a table with the objects can be placed in the same platform and the visitors could gather in the center of the room. Now the Manuscript Room can accommodate many more visitors than was formerly possible, say 70 - 80... I shall report to you how this experiment will work out.²⁷²

In 1949, with increased confidence and credibility in the Jewish and arts communities, Kleban began to speak publicly about the unique place of women in the movement for Jewish

²⁶⁸ "NW Sisterhood to Hear Librarian," *The Detroit Jewish News Digital Archives*, February 9, 1951, <https://digital.bentley.umich.edu/djnews/djn.1951.02.09.001/9>; "Untitled Article," *The Jewish Exponent (1887-1990)*; Philadelphia, Penn., December 7, 1951; "Temple Sisterhood to Hear Librarian," *Plainfield Courier-News*, April 10, 1953; "Beth-El Group Maps Events," April 13, 1953; "Sisterhood Speaker," April 14, 1953; "Sisterhood Hears Talk on Literature," *Plainfield Courier-News*, April 17, 1953, Volume 69 edition; "Temple Luncheon," *Asbury Park Sunday Press*, May 9, 1954, sec. Social News; "Beth-El Sisterhood's Fall Luncheon Planned," *The Hartford Courant (1923-1994)*; Hartford, Conn., October 3, 1954; "Anna Kleban to Be Speaker," *The Daily Home News*, October 3, 1958.

²⁶⁹ Anna Kleban to Doctor Simon Greenberg, "Memorandum," February 5, 1947, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 3: Museum: Correspondences & Memoranda, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁷⁰ Anna Kleban to Doctor Simon Greenberg, April 8, 1947, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 24, Folder 3, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁷¹ Anna Kleban to Doctor Simon Greenberg, April 8, 1947, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 24, Folder 3, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁷² Anna Kleban to Doctor Simon Greenberg, April 8, 1947, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 24, Folder 3, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

objects in education. That year she spoke on “The Place Women Should Take in Jewish Cultural and Educational Life Outside the Home” for a sisterhood in Philadelphia.²⁷³ Kleban herself embodied the teachings within this talk as a woman leading multiple fundraising campaigns for different kinds of Jewish learning, and she preached that other women, too, could help shape the American Jewish future by becoming patrons of Jewish education.

The year 1949 also marked a major turning point in Kleban’s career as she looked beyond the Northeast for fiscal support for JTS. In 1949 she visited Brookline, Massachusetts and West Hartford, Connecticut to fundraise at two synagogue sisterhoods.²⁷⁴ Also in 1949, Kleban visited Windham Memorial Hospital in Windham, Connecticut to run a fundraiser aimed at the Women’s Auxiliary of the institution. Kleban loaned several rare books and manuscripts to be exhibited in patient wings as part of rare book month to enhance JTS’s visibility in this secular space.²⁷⁵

In a way, Kleban talks were a kind of public performance. In 1951 Kleban spoke in Washington, D.C. and in Plainfield, New Jersey at synagogue sisterhoods to showcase the collection and ask for financial support for JTS.²⁷⁶ In 1953, Kleban began giving talks on broader subjects such as Jewish literature and Hannukah rituals that weren’t necessarily rooted in JTS objects to campaign for JTS’s Torah Fund. Between 1954 and 1966 Kleban spoke across the

²⁷³ “Sisterhood Will Hear Discussion By Miss Kleban,” *The Jewish Exponent (1887-1990); Philadelphia, Penn.*, January 14, 1949.

²⁷⁴ Leo Shapiro, “Local Lines: Americans Ask for D.P.’s, Official Tells HIAS Unit,” *Daily Boston Globe (1928-1960); Boston, Mass.*, April 3, 1949, sec. A. “Jewish Librarian To Show Sisterhood Book Collection,” *The Hartford Courant (1923-1994); Hartford, Conn.*, October 30, 1949.

²⁷⁵ “Musical Revue To Be Held In Willimantic,” *The Hartford Courant (1923-1994); Hartford, Conn.*, November 7, 1949.

²⁷⁶ “NW Sisterhood to Hear Librarian,” *The Detroit Jewish News Digital Archives*, February 9, 1951, <https://digital.bentley.umich.edu/djnews/djn.1951.02.09.001/9>; “Temple Sisterhood to Hear Librarian,” *Plainfield Courier-News*, April 10, 1953.

country in cities such as Chicago, Boston, Baltimore, and Philadelphia.²⁷⁷ By using art and objects to point to the creativity of the Seminary, Kleban was explaining the institution's imagination and vision for the future of Jewish life.

In 1958 she spoke at the Highland Park Temple Sisterhood luncheon about the history of the JTS Library and Museum.²⁷⁸ In 1960 she gave a similar talk to the Sisterhood of Temple Emanuel in Newton, Massachusetts, and also a Torah Fund luncheon entitled "Behind the Parchment Curtain" to illuminate some of JTS's manuscript treasures and the art within them.²⁷⁹ Like her other talks, in this one she provided an art historical analysis of manuscript illumination and Jewish ritual objects.²⁸⁰

From Marx's death in 1953 until 1958, Kleban was still listed as a "general secretary" for the Library while she gave public talks, organized groups of visitors to the museum, and travelled across the country to fundraise. In these years she kept patrons abreast of the usage of their donated objects.²⁸¹ She also dealt with membership at the AAJR and with distributing objects to its supporters.²⁸² By 1958, Kleban's expanded activity garnered enough attention to merit a new formal title. Louis Finkelstein finally changed her title from "secretary" to "coordinator of field activities." Very little changed as Kleban continued to use her teaching as

²⁷⁷ "Temple Luncheon," *Asbury Park Sunday Press*, May 9, 1954, sec. Social News; "Emanuel Women in Torah Fund Luncheon," *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990)*; *Boston, Mass.*, February 25, 1960; "News Briefs," *Newsday (1940-1991)*, *Nassau Ed.*; *Long Island, N.Y.*, December 29, 1960; "Women's League Torah Fund Drive," *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990)*; *Boston, Mass.*, September 15, 1966; IDA NEWMAN GLASSER, "South Shore-Lines," *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990)*; *Boston, Mass.*, November 17, 1966.

²⁷⁸ "150 Attend Luncheon," *The Daily Home News*, October 9, 1958.

²⁷⁹ "Emanuel Women in Torah Fund Luncheon," *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990)*; *Boston, Mass.*, February 25, 1960.

²⁸⁰ "Photo Standalone 35 -- No Title," *Jewish Advocate (1909-1990)*; *Boston, Mass.*, March 17, 1960.

²⁸¹ Anna Kleban to Doctor H. G. Friedman, March 6, 1953, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 89, Folder 2, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Anna Kleban to Edgar Frank, May 4, 1954, Kleban-Marx Collection, Arch. 68, Box 1, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁸² Anna Kleban to Miss Dina Abramowitz, "Yiddish Scientific Institute - YIVO," March 2, 1954, Kleban-Marx Collection, Arch. 68, Box 1, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Meyer J. Goldman, Jewish Chaplain to Anna Kleban, "State of New York Department of Mental Hygiene, Pilgrim State Hospital, West Brentwood, Long Island, N. Y.," August 1, 1958, American Academy of Jewish Research, ARCH 9, Box 5, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

fundraising, showcasing artworks to explain the creativity of her institution and explain its expansion needs.²⁸³

Over the course of the 1960s and 70s, Kleban continued to travel and advocate for the JTS Library project as well as fundraise for the institution as a whole. In these years Kleban also began training Jewish Museum curators and Conservative rabbis on how to fundraise for JTS. Curator Tom Freudenheim recalls that Kleban was his point of contact for pitching potential donors on the Torah Fund, whose mission had expanded to include funding the Jewish Museum.²⁸⁴

From Recognition to Retirement

Perhaps it is fitting that in 1970, the yearly JTS Founder's Day ceremony sponsored by the National Women's League was held at a museum in Philadelphia and featured Kleban as the keynote speaker.²⁸⁵ The Founder's Day tradition had begun with one woman's determination to pay tribute to JTS donors: in 1947, Frieda Schiff Warburg acknowledged her father and her husband as founding men of the institution. At the event of 1970, for the first time, Anna Kleban was publicly recognized alongside the founding men of JTS – perhaps in ways that Frieda Schiff

²⁸³ Herman Dicker, *Of Learning and Libraries: The Seminary Library at One Hundred* (Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1988), 67; Anna Kleban to Mrs. Joseph Skwinsky, October 23, 1959, American Academy of Jewish Research, ARCH 9, Box 5, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Anna Kleban to Mrs. Joseph Skwinsky, October 23, 1959, American Academy of Jewish Research, ARCH 9, Box 5, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

²⁸⁴ Tom Freudenheim, Interview by Ariel Cohen, E-mail, January 29, 2020. "Obituaries: United States," *The American Jewish Year Book* 92 (1992): 590–604; Herman Dicker, *Of Learning and Libraries: The Seminary Library at One Hundred* (Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1988), page 38.

²⁸⁵ From 1947 until the 1970s, the Jewish Theological Seminary held a yearly Founder's Day ceremony for students, professors, rabbis, and Jewish communal organizations in its courtyard. The tradition began at Frieda Schiff Warburg's approval as the JTS Executive Committee's tribute to Jacob Schiff and the Warburgs as two important founding families of the institution. Louis Finkelstein. Letter to Mrs. Felix M. Warburg, January 10, 1947. JTS Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 3: Museum: Correspondences & Memoranda. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. "Dean of Seminary to Be Founder's Day Speaker," *The Jewish Exponent* (1887-1990); *Philadelphia, Penn.*, November 27, 1970.

Warburg never could be as a woman in 1947. On that historic day, Kleban explained and showcased the importance of JTS objects as she always did, but she also did something new: she narrated the Library & Museum's history and explained it as integral to the evolution of JTS.

Over the course of the 1970s, Kleban continued to walk the halls of JTS as a student representative fundraising for the Torah Fund, an objects specialist and librarian, and an employee staple of the institution. She continued to give talks around the country about JTS until she began to slow down in 1980 as she herself turned 80. In 1983, the age of 83 and after an almost 50-year career, Kleban finally left the Seminary.²⁸⁶ She passed away seven years later in 1990 at age 91.²⁸⁷ Notably, though Marx, Davidson, and Louis Ginzberg collectively asked for salary increases beginning in 1924, no such record exists for Kleban over the long arc of her career, and her salary was largely stable over the course of her lifetime.²⁸⁸ In fact, her long and humble career is characterized by unrecognized trailblazing and trendsetting. Kleban single-handedly cultivated her own access to the scholars, leaders, synagogues, curators, sisterhoods, and philanthropists who could invest in the Seminary and fund a new kind of public Jewish history. Her creativity and fluidity between these communities allowed her to invent a new role for herself and to fashion an unprecedented role for Judaica as an educational and fundraising tool – one that would greatly enhance, and indeed prove essential to, American Jewish institutions and life.

While Anna Kleban formed the foundations for physical Jewish museum spaces, she was an institution-builder and a bridge between worlds – not quite a visionary of the physical spaces

²⁸⁶ Ruth Schmelzer, Anna Kleban at the Jewish Theological Seminary, interview by Ariel Cohen, Oral Interview, November 5, 2019; Herman Dicker, *Of Learning and Libraries: The Seminary Library at One Hundred* (Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1988), page 38; “Obituaries: United States,” *The American Jewish Year Book 92* (1992): 590–604.

²⁸⁷ “Obituaries: United States,” *The American Jewish Year Book 92* (1992): 590–604.

²⁸⁸ Cyrus Adler and Ira Robinson, *Selected Letters*, 1st ed, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985), page 92.

of Judaica. She came to *symbolize* the physical spaces that would hold Jewish objects and formed the foundations that would make them sustainable. Patron Frieda Schiff Warburg was the woman who *materialized* those spaces. Her donation of the Warburg family mansion to JTS as a Jewish Museum offered physical space that could utilize the financial infrastructure, public relations foundation, and communal network that Anna Kleban had spent her career building. With Kleban's groundwork, Frieda Schiff Warburg would alter the landscape of Jewish art in America irrevocably.

Chapter III

The Cultural Philanthropist: Frieda Schiff Warburg and the Jewish Museum Mansion

This one last time I will indulge myself in the feeling that I am still hostess here and as in the years gone by [I] am welcoming my guests with pleasure. I will leave it to others tonight to paint the picture and the hopes of what this new Jewish Museum will eventually mean to New York and the nation.²⁸⁹

Signed, Frieda Schiff Warburg: The Letter that Launched a Museum

On January 14, 1944, Frieda Schiff Warburg wrote a letter to Dr. Louis Finkelstein, Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTSA), in which she announced: “I am now ready and glad to offer my former home at 1109 Fifth Avenue... to the Jewish Seminary of America to be used as a Museum.” In her words, the gift was:

My affirmation of my faith in the fundamental principles of our Jewish Traditions, which can be helpful and constructive in the problems of our World Today... It gives me great happiness to think that the house... which for so many years harbored our harmonious family life and was always open to Community interests, should now continue to live on to further the ideals of our family traditions.²⁹⁰

This gift initiated one of the most important episodes in American Jewish history: the birth of the flagship cultural institution, the Jewish Museum.

Before 1109 Fifth Avenue, there had been some national experiments in public displays of Jewish art. In 1904, Judge Mayer Sulzberger inaugurated the Museum of Ceremonial Objects at

²⁸⁹ Mrs. Felix M. Warburg, “Speech by Mrs. Felix M. Warburg at the Dedication of the Jewish Museum, May 7, 1947,” (May 7, 1947).

²⁹⁰ Letter from Frieda Schiff Warburg to Louis Finkelstein, January 14, 1944, Felix M. and Frieda Schiff Warburg Scrapbooks, ARC.1000.167, 1937-1951, Box 2, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

JTS when he donated the 26 Jewish objects that filled two small display cases in the hallway of the library.²⁹¹ He formally announced his gift in a letter to his cousin Cyrus Adler, then chancellor of the seminary.²⁹² As curator of Oriental Antiquities at the Smithsonian Museum and Semitics curator at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, Adler presented a public-facing narrative of Judaism as foundational to American values.²⁹³ At both the Smithsonian and JTS, where he arrived in 1902, Adler worked within a network of patrons, curators, scholars, and Jewish communal leaders to present Jewish history through art exhibitions.²⁹⁴

Yet the Jewish Museum was the first to achieve an independent address for Jewish public culture, and it outlived these early efforts. This pioneering institution was deeply linked to one female patron. When philanthropic activist Frieda Schiff Warburg donated her former mansion on Fifth Avenue, she claimed a particular form of informal power – the arts – as a feminine philanthropic realm. The Jewish Museum stands on Fifth Avenue today as a symbol of a woman who accrued cultural capital in spite of her own social and political marginalization. Barred from the rabbinic study halls, synagogue pulpits, court rooms, and investment banks in which Jewish men architected the American community, Schiff Warburg remained an outsider to conventional leadership. Yet she harnessed her wealth, social status, and family ties to become a new kind of female philanthropist. Born into a family of bankers and communal leaders, Schiff Warburg re-

²⁹¹ Alexander Marx, "Chapter 8: The Library," in *The Jewish Theological Seminary of America: Semi-Centennial Volume*, ed. Cyrus Adler (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1939): 90; Julie Miller, "Planning the Jewish Museum," *Conservative Judaism* 48, no. 48 (Fall 1994): 60.

²⁹² Brad Sabin Hill, "A Century of Hebraica at the Library of Congress," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 106, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 125; Rachel Hallote, "Jacob H. Schiff and the Beginning of Biblical Archaeology in the United States," *American Jewish History* 95, no. 3 (2009): 234.

²⁹³ For the 1893 Columbian Exposition Adler travelled across North Africa and the Middle East to gather objects of "Oriental Jews" from Morocco, Turkey, Tunisia, etc. He displayed them to point to Judaism's diversity, ancient and modern, and importance to world history. Alma Rachel Heckman and Frances Malino, "Packed in Twelve Cases: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the 1893 Chicago World's Fair," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 19, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 56.

²⁹⁴ Grace Cohen Grossman, *Judaica at the Smithsonian: Cultural Politics as Cultural Model*, Smithsonian Studies in History and Technology (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997): 1-3; Sabin Hill, "A Century of Hebraica at the Library of Congress," 125.

envisioned her own domestic space as a public one for Jewish culture. While she carefully leveraged her own educational and financial capital and personal connections, she expanded beyond the types of leadership and philanthropy models previously available to women of her standing. Schiff Warburg did not eradicate the gender barrier in American philanthropy or religious leadership; she was the only woman to serve on the JTS Board of Trustees over the course of her lifetime, and Jewish women were not ordained as rabbis at JTS until 1983.²⁹⁵ However, by asserting her voice in the creative arts, she demonstrated a novel leadership style commencing in a new kind of institution – one that would transform the landscapes of American and Jewish cultural philanthropy.

Much of the scholarship on Jewish philanthropy overlooks women and/or cultural philanthropy. Beth Wenger has “sexed” Jewish philanthropy, especially Jewish federations, explaining how and why they became masculinized at the turn of the twentieth century, so as to exclude women from the highest echelons of Jewish communal philanthropic leadership. Other studies, such as those by Marjorie Feld, Idana Goldberg, and Lila Corwin Berman, gendered philanthropy but without respect to cultural activities. Furthermore, the history of Jewish art and museum curation in America is typically related as a male creation myth involving the union of two sides of Manhattan: an Upper East Side mansion, the Schiff Warburg home, and an Upper West Side institution, the Jewish Theological Seminary.²⁹⁶ It centers on rabbis, scholars, and business leaders with prominent public profiles, like Schiff Warburg’s dear friends Sulzberger and Adler, Finkelstein, and her father, Jacob Schiff, who revived JTS and ensured its continuance,

²⁹⁵ Julie Miller, “Feingold, Jessica (b. 1910),” in *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia (2 Volume Set)* (Routledge, 1997), 401.

²⁹⁶ See, for instance, Vivian B. Mann. Interview by Ariel Cohen. June 29, 2018 and Julie Miller and Richard Cohen, “A Collision of Cultures: The Jewish Museum and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1904 - 1971,” in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, vol. 2 (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997).

helped found the Semitic Museum at Harvard, donated objects to Temple Emanu-El, and remains one of the most prominent American Jewish philanthropists ever to live.²⁹⁷ The patriarchal practice of burying women's papers inside the archival collections of their husbands has left many female legacies invisible. Schiff Warburg and her buried archives are emblematic of the women that navigated complex webs of marginalization while dexterously leveraging their social capital, ultimately insisting on female participation in the making of American Jewish society.²⁹⁸

The same day Schiff Warburg wrote to Finkelstein announcing the gift of her home to JTS, he wrote back: "Your letter itself has become one of the Seminary's treasured documents not only because of the welcome news it contains, but because it expresses your own personality so forcefully and so well... your notable action... shall undoubtedly serve as a fitting and lasting tribute, not only to your Mr. Warburg, but to yourself."²⁹⁹ Schiff Warburg's story is not emblematic of the average female American Jewish experience; she had exceptional resources and networks at her disposal, ones that other women lacked. Nor was she a social trendsetter. But when understood in its nuances, her story reveals how Jewish public culture was institutionalized at the end of World War II, and how female Jewish cultural philanthropists, taking their places alongside male Jewish diplomats, rabbis, lawyers and patrons, began to insist upon a Jewish place in the making of America. By giving voice to the storytellers of Jewish identity in her home, Schiff Warburg reclaimed and reshaped her own feminine power as the leader of her domestic space, one

²⁹⁷ For example, Grace Cohen Grossman and Rachel Hallote have written on Cyrus Adler and Jacob Schiff as prominent pioneering figures in the creation of Jewish museum spaces. Julie Miller and Richard Cohen's seminal article on the Jewish museum barely mentions Frieda Schiff Warburg, rightfully centering such donors as Ephraim Benguiat and Mayer Sulzberger but ignoring the donor of the museum space itself that housed their collections. Scholarship mirrors contemporaneous sources that ignored Schiff Warburg's influence as a cultural philanthropist, instead amplifying male contributions.

²⁹⁸ Beth S. Wenger, "Federation Men: The Masculine World of New York Jewish Philanthropy, 1880-1945," *American Jewish History* 101, no. 3 (2017): 377-99, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ajh.2017.0050>.

²⁹⁹ Letter from L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, January 14, 1944, Felix M. and Frieda Schiff Warburg Scrapbooks, ARC.1000.167, 1937-1951, Box 2, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

of vulnerability and childrearing as well as significant political, religious and cultural gatherings and conversations. She lies at the heart of the story of the Jewish Museum and also of American Jewish history because she achieved something profoundly innovative: a new model that transformed and democratized private, exclusive cultural content and inquiry into public culture.

The Schiff Family: Museums and Jewish Traditions

In his 1928 biography of his father Jacob Schiff, Frieda Schiff Warburg's brother Mortimer Schiff (1877-1931) wrote that Jacob, who lived in New York City for over 50 years, did not like "personal publicity" for fear of stirring antisemitic sentiment in his new country of America.³⁰⁰ Jacob Schiff insisted upon living in austere homes and was famously horrified at the 5th Avenue exterior of Frieda and Felix Warburg's sumptuous Gothic mansion. While he preferred to traverse American spheres of influence judiciously, Schiff was still one of the most influential financiers in the city as well as one of the most visible representatives of American Jews in Zionism, philanthropy, and education.³⁰¹ Born in 1847 in Frankfurt, Schiff immigrated to America at age 18. After the dissolution of his family bank, Budge, Schiff, and Co., he returned to Germany for several years until he was invited to join Kuhn Loeb & Co., his soon-to-be wife Therese Loeb's family firm. He went on to become a director of Wells Fargo & Company, the National City Bank of New York, and the Union Pacific Railroad. He dedicated his philanthropic endeavors to quietly combating antisemitism through education and foreign aid. His informal diplomatic efforts in hard power politics included offering generous loans to Japan during the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905) against antisemitic Tsarist Russia and easing immigration regulations through political

³⁰⁰ Mortimer Schiff. *Jacob H. Schiff: His Life and Letters*, introduction. Vol. 1. Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1928, v.

³⁰¹ Naomi W. Cohen, *Jacob H. Schiff: A Study in American Jewish Leadership* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1999).

activism. In 1882 Schiff became Commissioner of the New York City Board of Education and he and Therese began to shift their attention to libraries, museums and other academic institutions.³⁰²

During what historians later dubbed the “Schiff Era” in Jewish America, Schiff defined the landscape of Jewish economics, politics, and, above all, communal giving. In 1903 he funded the main Seminary building still standing today on 123rd street.³⁰³ As Schiff became close with James Loeb, Therese’s brother, he learned of the importance of the classics and Near East studies in universities. James had studied classics at Harvard with Assyriologist David Lyon. In 1889, he worked with Lyon to fund the first-ever American archaeological excavation to Palestine through Harvard University’s burgeoning Semitic Museum.³⁰⁴ In 1895 the Schiffs and Betty Loeb (Therese’s mother) purchased and facilitated the renovation of a new structure for nurse Lillian Wald’s Henry Street Settlement House, which educated and treated indigent children and families on the Lower East Side.³⁰⁵

During her marriage Therese Loeb was also an activist for health, education, and the arts. Through the Temple Emanu-El Sisterhood of Personal Service she provided aid for impoverished Jewish immigrants living in lower Manhattan, dressing and clothing them as well as teaching them about the arts. In the late 19th century she founded her own literary series for women.³⁰⁶ After her husband’s death in 1920, she continued to flourish as an independent philanthropist supporting the Emanuel Sisterhood of Personal Service, Boy Scouts of America, the YMHA, the Montefiore Hospital for Chronic Diseases, and much more.³⁰⁷ Loeb’s own interest in philanthropy and the arts

³⁰² Cyrus Adler, Jacob Schiff, and Mortimer Schiff, Eds. *Jacob H. Schiff: His Life and Letters*. Vol. 1. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1928, 11.

³⁰³ Jewish Theological Seminary of America, *Register* (Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1919).

³⁰⁴ Rachel Hallote, “Jacob H. Schiff and the Beginning of Biblical Archaeology in the United States,” *American Jewish History* 95, no. 3 (2009): 226.

³⁰⁵ *Reminiscences*, 63-65; Marjorie N. Feld, *Lillian Wald: A Biography* (UNC Press, 2012).

³⁰⁶ Idana Goldberg, “Therese Loeb Schiff, 1854 - 1933,” *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, Jewish Women’s Archive, March 1, 2009, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/Schiff-Therese-Loeb>.

³⁰⁷ Warburg, *Reminiscences*, 71.

began with her parents. Therese's father, Solomon Loeb, often drew pencil sketches, many of which Frieda kept hanging in her summer home in Meadow Farm. Solomon also maintained a sundry collection of paintings of the Barbizon school and French Classicism.³⁰⁸ When Therese was a child, her mother Betty Loeb invited many visitors to their home, including "singers, composers, dancers, and musicians," and organized for piano, dancing, and art classes for her children.³⁰⁹ From when Therese and Jacob were married in 1875 until the deaths of Therese's parents in 1902 and 1903, the Schiff family often visited the Loeb house. Schiff Warburg remembers these visits fondly in her memoirs, writing that her grandparents' home was "a magnet for all our family and a small circle of friends, all of German birth." She continues, "the family life had a spiritual and distinctly cultural influence. The conversation was stimulating, with emphasis on music, literature, travel and politics."³¹⁰ Frieda Schiff Warburg's uncle and Therese Loeb's brother, James Loeb, was a philanthropist of the arts and founded and endowed the Loeb Classical Library and the Julliard School of Music.

Born in 1876, Frieda was raised with tutors, governesses, and art collections in a home environment that resembled her mother's childhood.³¹¹ Therese always kept a stunning portrait of her birthmother, Fanny Kuhn, in the sewing room of their austere Fifth Avenue estate. Fanny died a few years after Therese was born and Betty Gallenberg, Solomon Loeb's second wife, raised the five Loeb children. Therese only revealed the identity of the mysterious "young woman with a Victorian lace collar, a brooch and dark hair" to Frieda years later so as not to confuse her or disrespect Betty, whom Frieda called Oma Loeb.³¹²

³⁰⁸ Warburg, *Reminiscences*, 16.

³⁰⁹ Andrea Olmstead, "The Toll of Idealism: James Loeb—Musician, Classicist, Philanthropist," *The Journal of Musicology* 14, no. 2 (1996): 239, <https://doi.org/10.2307/763924>.

³¹⁰ Note that Fanny Kuhn was Therese's birth mother, but she died soon after Therese was born. Solomon soon remarried Betty, who raised Therese as her own. Frieda Warburg, *Reminiscences*, 48.

³¹¹ For Schiff Warburg's recollection of her tutors see Warburg, *Reminiscences*, 45.

³¹² Warburg, *Reminiscences*, 43.

Like Therese's parents, Jacob and Therese Schiff also kept paintings and other Jewish ritual objects on display all over the house. They designated time on Shabbats to enjoy their art with one another. Schiff Warburg writes:

My father collected paintings, chiefly of the nineteenth-century French school, Oriental jades and crystals, and he gave commissions to several artists, including Harrington Mann and Eduard Veith, who did portraits of himself and my mother. On Saturdays, which he and my mother kept as a day apart, they would often spend a few hours after lunch enjoying their collections. They derived a great deal of pleasure from the beautiful things they had brought together in their home.

She also recalls that in their drawing room at 965 Fifth Avenue, there were cabinets "filled with lovely old porcelain" pieces, gifts of family friend Sir Ernest Cassel. When she was young, Therese and Jacob commissioned bas-relief bronze sculptures of herself and her brother Morti by famed sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens. In her memoirs she recounts how her mother Therese interrupted the artist at work to correct her daughter's engraved name from "Frederika" to "Frieda." At the time that Schiff Warburg wrote her recollections, in 1956, a copy of the sculpture in marble was being shown at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.³¹³

Cyrus Adler often marveled at the exceptionally close relationship between Frieda Schiff Warburg and her father. While Adler observed that both of Schiff's children were the "objects of his constant thought," he added that "his daughter's health, happiness, and education were always in his mind... As she grew, he recognized a likeness between her and himself, both intellectual and temperamental. Not infrequently the child would express opinions during the day which would be identical with those of her father when he came home in the evening."³¹⁴ Though Schiff was quite religiously observant and his ritual practices stood in stark contrast to those of his daughter,

³¹³ Saint-Gaudens is among the most well-known American artists of this period. His golden sculpture "Diana," holding a bow and arrow, is permanently and prominently displayed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. On the commission see Warburg, *Reminiscences*, 42-46.

³¹⁴ Preface by Cyrus Adler, *Jacob H. Schiff*, vol. 1, 9.

the two were very close until he passed away and shared a mutual interest in collecting Jewish ceremonial objects.³¹⁵ They also both collected art pieces that museums considered to be crucial for illustrating the timeline of art history. That timeline, also known as the art historical canon, comprised such paintings and sculptures as Baroque and Renaissance Christian art. It was continuously created and perpetuated by galleries, curators, and scholars around the world who chose which aspects of culture were crucial enough to be exhibited.³¹⁶

Like Jacob and Therese Schiff, Frieda and her husband Felix surrounded their children with a spectacular art collection in their home and gifted many of their objects to museums when they were grown. When Frieda moved out of 1109 in 1941 several years after Felix had passed, she donated several collections and thirty stand-alone artworks, the majority of which had Christian themes.³¹⁷ The bulk of their collection consisted of Christian-themed North German and Dutch woodcuts and etchings as well as Renaissance paintings which famously shocked Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann when he visited their home.³¹⁸ Their array of objects reflected the art historical canon of the time aside from its inclusion of functional and historical Jewish objects. Its breadth

³¹⁵ In an interview in 1991, one of Frieda's four sons, Edward Warburg, discusses his mother's own desire to pass down Jacob Schiff's philanthropic values to her children at home. Warburg, Edward. Interview with Sharon Zane. *The Museum of Modern Art Oral History Program, MoMA Archives*. February 11, 1991. Living descendant Frederick Warburg Peters also discussed how Jacob Schiff played an outsized role in the lives of Frieda's children at home until his death. Warburg Peters, Frederick. Interview by Ariel Cohen. Personal Interview. June 18, 2019.

³¹⁶ G. Langfeld, "The Canon in Art History: Concepts and Approaches," *Journal of Art Historiography* 19, no. GL1 (December 2018), <https://dare.uva.nl/search?identifier=005cd12c-075f-491e-99d7-22fe3ff74d61>; Hubert Locher, *The Idea of the Canon and Canon Formation in Art History, Art History and Visual Studies in Europe* (Brill, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004231702_004. Some scholars, such as Asher Biemann, have explored Jewish encounters with pieces of the art historical canon such as Michelangelo's sculptures. Asher Biemann, *Dreaming of Michelangelo: Jewish Variations on a Modern Theme* (Stanford University Press, 2012).

³¹⁷ Of these, twenty-one had Christian themes and nine had Greco-Roman themes. Warburg, *Reminiscences*, 185-187.

³¹⁸ Edward Warburg. Interview with Sharon Zane. *The Museum of Modern Art Oral History Program, MoMA Archives*. February 11, 1991; Warburg, Edward. Interview with Ellen M. Scholle. *The William E. Wiener Oral History Library at the American Jewish Committee at New York Public Library*. October 16, 1989. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/a93bc1d0-02df-0131-ddde-58d385a7b928#/?uuiid=a988e8c0-02df-0131-3d72-58d385a7b928>, 7.

and keen attunement to the trends of the broader cultural landscape of America indicated her interest in cross-pollinating the long Western art tradition with her Jewish traditions.

1895-1930: Emerging Paradigms of Feminine Leadership

In 1895 Bella Unterberg, director of the Montefiore Hospital, contacted the newly-married Frieda Schiff Warburg and asked her to become the director of the Brightside Day Nursery.³¹⁹ Her involvement in the nursery ushered in the first year of her marriage with a philanthropic ethos that did not fit the Progressive Era's expectation that women remain benevolent aid workers, education workers, leaders of women's group auxiliaries to Jewish organizations, and settlement house volunteers.³²⁰ Like other Progressive women, Schiff Warburg was an unpaid volunteer at a nursery; yet her *directorship* of such a venture was audacious, for women typically served in lesser volunteer roles with males as figureheads. The Brightside Day Nursery That same year, Schiff Warburg began supporting the new Young Women's Hebrew Association, hosting "reading hour" in her mansion's backyard for Jewish women and children.

The YWHA was a 1902 innovation of the YMHA founded in the 1850s and was founded by Bella Unterberg, married to manufacturer and philanthropist Israel Unterberg.³²¹ At its founding meeting in her home, Unterberg and several other women decided that unlike the YMHA, the YWHA would include "religious and spiritualizing tendencies."³²² New models of female

³¹⁹ Warburg, *Reminiscences*, 120.

³²⁰ Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935*. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1991), Chapter 1: Hull House, 1890 – 1910; For details and dates on Schiff Warburg's Y. W. H. A. involvement see: Julie Miller, "Frieda Schiff Warburg, 1876 - 1958," in *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. Jewish Women's Archive*, accessed December 14, 2018, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/Warburg-Frieda-Schiff>. For charities and the "cult of true womanhood" of the early 20th century see: Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform*, 9.

³²¹ "Rites Held for Mrs. Unterberg, Dead at 67," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (blog), December 12, 1935, <https://www.jta.org/1935/12/12/archive/rites-held-for-mrs-unterberg-dead-at-67>.

³²² Warburg, *Reminiscences*, 120; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ed., *Writing a Modern Jewish History: Essays in Honor of Salo W. Baron* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006), 36; Kaufman, David E.. "Young

leadership were emerging slowly in the Jewish community, and Bella Unterberg, one of Schiff Warburg's closest friends, was key amongst them. In 1911, Schiff Warburg further shifted the paradigm of acceptability for women in the Jewish leadership sphere by becoming the first female director of the combined organization, YMHA and YWHA; in 1929 she ascended to acting President, a role she served until 1942.³²³ As she interfaced with organizations and individuals over the course of 1920s and 30s, Schiff Warburg formed and maintained connections with lay leaders whom began to seek her out for new ventures.³²⁴

In 1930 Schiff Warburg headed the women's division of the New York Allied Jewish Campaign. According to the New York Times article about her nomination, Schiff Warburg became single-handedly in charge of appointing leaders in all five boroughs to join her in raising nearly three million dollars of a 6 million dollar campaign for the American Joint Distribution Committee and Jewish Agency. To more effectively serve this effort, she organized the committee's first communal tea fundraiser in her home at 1109 Fifth Avenue. The event marked the beginning of using her home to mobilize fiscal and ideological support.³²⁵

Blurring the Lines between the Male Public Space and Female Private Domain

Women's Hebrew Association." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. 20 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. (Viewed on April 19, 2021) <<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/young-womens-hebrew-association>>.

³²³ Warburg, *Reminiscences*, 120; Julie Miller, "Frieda Schiff Warburg, 1876 - 1958," in *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. Jewish Women's Archive*, accessed December 14, 2018, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/Warburg-Frieda-Schiff>; "WARBURG - Frieda Schiff," *New York Times*, September 15, 1958, page 21.

³²⁴ Frieda Schiff Warburg to Dr. Adler, "Young Women's Hebrew Association," December 24, 1935, Jewish Museum Papers, RG2 (Board of Directors), Box 1, Folder 32, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Dr. Adler to Frieda Schiff Warburg, May 24, 1935, Jewish Museum Papers, RG2 (Board of Directors), Box 1, Folder 32, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Frieda Schiff Warburg to Cyrus Adler, Jewish Museum Papers, RG2 (Board of Directors), January 3 1938, Box 1, Folder 30, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³²⁵ "MRS. FELIX WARBURG TO LEAD CHARITY DRIVE; Will Direct Women in Campaign Here to Raise \$2,500,000 of \$6,000,000 for Palestine.," *New York Times*, April 30, 1930, sec. Social News.

In the 1930s Schiff Warburg's philanthropic work began to transcend women's spaces. In the early 1930s she hosted all-male board meetings at the Jewish Theological Seminary.³²⁶ In 1938 Schiff Warburg became the first woman to join the Board of Directors of the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Library Corporation. In 1939, she joined the Board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. She was the first and only woman invited that year.³²⁷ Her practice of hosting JTS board meetings at her home continued as she began serving on the board itself. Instead of hosting silently from the next room and directing her Irish maid Annie Kenny, and her 25-year housekeeper Sarah Ralph, to serve tea and biscuits, she now sat in the room with all of the men.³²⁸ It was an early indication of her slowly and methodically blurring the boundaries between public male space and the private female domain.³²⁹

Still, even as Schiff Warburg's philanthropy diversified from female-oriented arenas to male boards and causes, an old image of her – as a woman-philanthropist for female-sanctified causes – lingered. In the 1938 issue of *Who's Who in American Jewry*, authors described Schiff Warburg primarily in terms of her roles in women's groups: chairman of the women's community for the 1937 semi-centennial fund, honorary chairman of the women's division of the JDC, acting president of the YWHA, fundraiser and philanthropist of the women's fund for the Rothschild-

³²⁶ Joseph B. Abrams to Doctor Friedenwald, November 25, 1931, Jewish Museum Papers, RG2 (Board of Directors), Box 1, Folder 6, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³²⁷ Cyrus Adler to Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Museum Papers, RG2 (Board of Directors), March 1 1939, Box 1, Folder 30, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³²⁸ Schiff Warburg writes that Sarah Ralph was "always much put out when we invited large groups of people to the house, especially committees of the organizations with which Felix was associated. When she heard that there was going to be another meeting, she became more sour than ever, firm in the conviction that our visitors would burn holes in the rugs." The maid complained throughout her years at the house, but Frieda Schiff Warburg never served tea and biscuits to the communities she invited into her home. Frieda Schiff Warburg, *Reminiscences*, 133.

³²⁹ Many men felt threatened by her leadership and were not only openly dismissive of her, but also hostile toward her. Solomon Lowenstein, the executive director of the New York Federation of Philanthropies from 1920 to 1935 and an HUC-ordained Reform rabbi, used to liaise with Schiff Warburg, the president of the Y.W.H.A., to discuss professional matters. She wrote, "he had a warm and vibrant personality but nevertheless, when we had professional contact with him, he could be firm and rather severe. When I was active with the Y.W.H.A. and had to go down each year to present every item of our budget, I used to be frightened to death." Schiff Warburg, *Reminiscences*, 147.

Hadassah-University Hospital of Jerusalem, and more.³³⁰ In their interactions with her, men such as Louis Finkelstein projected this perception onto Schiff Warburg and also shaped her involvement in JTS endeavors accordingly. In January 1938 Finkelstein wrote asking her to help establish a “Woman Hour” for the Seminary on station WHN, one of the first radio stations in New York City:

It seems to me that this women’s division [radio show] should seek to strengthen the seminary as an institution, and also to serve as a means for spreading its ideals throughout the country. I think you will agree that there is a crying need for higher standards of cultural and religious life among our people, and that such standards can be established only through wider education... a women’s division of the Seminary could do much to further this end, and I am attaching a memorandum which I prepared some time ago with regard to what I think its functions might be.³³¹

Finkelstein had envisioned a series of educational talks for this radio show, and saw a women’s division as a potential added dimension. He wrote to Schiff Warburg, “it had occurred to us to ask you, as the only woman director of the Seminary, to open this course of talks.”³³² She agreed.

When Louis Finkelstein, Cyrus Adler and others invited her as the only woman in their meetings, she observed most initiatives as an outsider.³³³ And yet, as JTS leaders upheld Schiff Warburg as a “women’s leader” within male-dominated conversations, Schiff Warburg used her proximity to leadership to find creative ways of exercising it herself. Her road into cultural philanthropy was not only about fundraising or board leadership; rather, it was about creating a new kind of role for material culture.

³³⁰ John Simons, ed., *Who’s Who in American Jewry: A Biographical Dictionary of Living Jews of the United States and Canada*, vol. 3 (New York, New York: National News Association, Inc., 1938), 4.

³³¹ L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, January 24, 1938, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series A, Box 27, Folder 44: to 1942: Warburg Family, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³³² L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, January 24, 1938, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series A, Box 27, Folder 44: to 1942: Warburg Family, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³³³ L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, October 14, 1938, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series A, Box 27, Folder 43: to 1942: Warburg Family, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Bernard Semel to Mrs. Warburg, “Bernard Semel, 364 Broadway, New York,” February 15, 1944, Felix M. and Frieda Schiff Warburg Scrapbooks, ARC.1000.167, 1937-1951, Box 2, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

The Birth of an Activist for Objects

In October 1930, Schiff Warburg watched from the audience as her brother shook hands on stage with Sol Stroock, chairman of JTS's executive committee. Mortimer was publicly handing over the keys to the new Jacob Schiff Memorial Library that he and his sister had recently donated to the Seminary in honor of their father.³³⁴ With this donation, Frieda and Mortimer Warburg enabled JTS leaders to establish a Museum of Ceremonial Objects within the library and hire the first full-time JTS curator-scholar, Dr. Paul Romanoff.³³⁵ Until 1930, the Jewish Theological Seminary's Library Museum consisted of several display cases in the Lexington Avenue building of JTS. As Schiff Warburg sat in her chair in this formal ceremony below as her brother and the JTS faculty and staff that took turns at the podium above, she watched her invisible philanthropic hand at work in more ways than one. In 1925, she and her husband had purchased the Benguiat collection of art for the Museum of Ceremonial Objects in JTS's Library that would serve as the basis for this burgeoning museum.³³⁶ The collection they bought and gifted to JTS spanned four centuries and included objects as diverse as a Torah ark from Istanbul and a Passover pillowcase from Bulgaria.³³⁷ Mordecai and his father Hadji Benguiat, the colorful descendants of a long line of Jewish antique art dealers that traced their ancestry to Spain in the 1100s, were world travelers based in Turkey who dressed dramatically in robes and turbans to emphasize their Sephardic Turkish heritage. The two immigrated to the United States in 1882 with their objects and loaned

³³⁴ "Jacob Schiff Memorial Library Will Be Dedicated Sunday," *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, October 16, 1930, 3.

³³⁵ Miller, Julie, and Richard Cohen. "A Collision of Cultures: The Jewish Museum and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1904 - 1971." In *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, Vol. 2. New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997.

³³⁶ Julie Miller and Richard Cohen, "A Collision of Cultures: The Jewish Museum and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1904 - 1971," ed. Jack Wertheimer *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary* (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), vol. 2, 316.

³³⁷ Vivian Mann, "The Recovery of a Known Work," *Jewish Art* 12, no. 13 (1986-87): 269-78.

many of them to the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904, and the Smithsonian Institution, where they worked directly with Cyrus Adler. Their 1925 sale to the Warburgs purchase widened the scope and quantity of JTS's small, preexisting Judaica collection.³³⁸ It also helped shape the collecting practices of the Seminary and planted seeds for the expansion of a physical space in which to exhibit Jewish art.

As early as the 1920s and into the 1930s, Schiff Warburg inherited and donated many of her parents' pieces – most of them to JTS. In November 1933, thirteen years after her father's death and a few months after her mother's, Schiff Warburg donated her father's phylacteries, or *tefillin*, to the Seminary to be displayed in its Library Museum.³³⁹ Chief Librarian Alexander Marx thanked Schiff Warburg and indicated that the phylacteries would be prominently exhibited alongside other objects of the Schiffs that were already on display.³⁴⁰ Donating her parents' objects for public display, she wrote later, was her way to honor their religious and aesthetic values.³⁴¹ As she offered the objects that held so much meaning for her family, ones that held rituals and family life cycle moments and events, for public display, she also invited the Seminary's visitors into Jewish customs and practices.

By the early 1930s Jewish scholars and institution-builders, all exclusively men, widely recognized Schiff Warburg's distinctive support of and philanthropic proclivity toward Jewish

³³⁸ Julie Miller and Richard Cohen, "A Collision of Cultures: The Jewish Museum and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1904 - 1971," ed. Jack Wertheimer, in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, vol. 2 (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), 316; Vivian Mann, "The Recovery of a Known Work," *Jewish Art* 12, no. 13 (1986-87): 269.

³³⁹ Alexander Marx, Librarian to Mrs. Felix M. Warburg, November 6, 1933, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 4, Folder 12: Objects - Repairs on Objects, 1940 - 6, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. For the dates of Therese's life and death see: Idana Goldberg, "Therese Loeb Schiff, 1854 - 1933," in *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, Jewish Women's Archive, March 1, 2009, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/Schiff-Therese-Loeb>.

³⁴⁰ Alexander Marx, Librarian to Mrs. Felix M. Warburg, November 6, 1933, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 4, Folder 12: Objects - Repairs on Objects, 1940 - 6, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁴¹ Warburg, *Reminiscences*, 198-199.

objects and pursued her support in this realm more vigorously. This work became imperative after the stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing loss of economic capital in charitable organizations. In April 1931, for example, Cyrus Adler inquired whether she would “be interested in the purchase of a Gilbert Stuart painting of Abraham Touro?”³⁴² In May 1931, after speaking with Adler, Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach sent Schiff Warburg his own plea:

This picture has been offered to many people in the last six months. It is a very important picture from the Jewish standpoint as Touro was one of the best known Jews in the country in the early part of the 19th century. It would be a fine thing if some Jewish institution possessed it, particularly the American Jewish Historical Society... I will try and stop in to see you sometime about it.³⁴³

Later on Rosenbach negotiated down the price and she bought it. In 1938 she also, at Rosenbach’s request, donated several other objects to the American Jewish Historical Society.³⁴⁴ She also occasionally funded repairs of objects in existing collections at Jewish institutions. In 1933, JTS librarian Alexander Marx asked Schiff Warburg to support the overhaul of several objects. She agreed.³⁴⁵

She was also involved in the care and maintenance of JTS objects in other ways. For example, Finkelstein and Schiff Warburg frequently discussed JTS’s acquisitions and their placement in the Seminary. In October 1940 Finkelstein wrote to Schiff Warburg to ask for her approval to move one of the Schiff family’s gifted objects within JTS:

Your father [note that Therese was likely involved in the decision] was good enough to present to the Seminary a plaque containing the Gettysburg address, and it now hangs in the synagogue of the building on 123rd street. Unfortunately, the plaque is obscured by the Ark. I would very much like to have the plaque moved to one of the new buildings, where

³⁴² (Seonore?) Adler to Mrs. Felix Warburg, April 23, 1931, Series I, Box 178, Folder 02: Warburg, Felix M., Correspondence, lists, photoprints, 1928 - 1942, The Rosenbach Collection.

³⁴³ Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach to Frieda Schiff Warburg, May 28th, 1931, Series I, Box 178, Folder 02: Warburg, Felix M., Correspondence, lists, photoprints, 1928 - 1942, The Rosenbach Collection.

³⁴⁴ Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach? to Mrs. Felix M. Warburg, April 27, 1938, Series I, Box 178, Folder 4: Frieda Schiff Correspondence, The Rosenbach Collection.

³⁴⁵ Alexander Marx, Librarian to Mrs. Felix M. Warburg, November 6, 1933, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 4, Folder 12: Objects - Repairs on Objects, 1940 - 6, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

it could be seen, but hesitate to do so unless you are willing. I wonder whether it would be satisfactory to you to make this change.³⁴⁶

As Schiff Warburg established herself as the expert on Jewish objects in the JTS Board of Trustees, Finkelstein began requesting that she come early to board meetings so that the two of them could work toward creating the visual culture of the Seminary.³⁴⁷ In April 1940 he asked that she come a half hour before the upcoming board meeting so that he could show her the Danzig Collection from the Jewish Museum in Poland that she had recently helped the Seminary finance.³⁴⁸ The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee had arranged for American donors to purchase these objects, using the proceeds to pay the Polish government for the escape of Danzig's Jews from Poland. In this agreement, if there were no Jews left to care for the collection in Danzig 15 years after the war, then all the objects would stay in the United States. Because of donors like Frieda Schiff Warburg who contributed to purchasing this collection, ten crates of Jewish cultural property arrived in New York City from Danzig's local synagogues, cemeteries, and private owners in late 1939. As Schiff Warburg continued to transact with objects and their displays at the Seminary, she developed her authority within the Board of Trustees as the de facto

³⁴⁶ L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, October 6, 1940, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series A, Box 27, Folder 43: to 1942: Warburg Family, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.3

³⁴⁷ On many occasions, Louis Finkelstein requested to meet with Frieda Schiff Warburg before JTS board meetings to consult her in private on JTS matters. In June 1941 Finkelstein sent Schiff Warburg private reports before the JTS Board Meeting so she might come prepared with foreknowledge of the inner workings of the institution. There no such reports to other, male board members. December 1946: Louis Finkelstein "usually" discussed plans and ideas privately with Frieda before then discussing it with the Board of Directors. This he wrote in December 1946 in a letter. See L. Finkelstein to Mrs. Warburg, December 12, 1946, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. For more examples see: Finkelstein to Frieda Schiff Warburg, April 22, 1940, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series A, Box 27, Folder 44: to 1942: Warburg Family, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, June 9, 1941, Jewish Museum Papers, RG2 (Board of Directors), Box 1, Folder 32, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, September 10, 1944, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series B, Box 41, Folder 38, 1943 - 1944, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁴⁸ L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, April 22, 1940, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series A, Box 27, Folder 44: to 1942: Warburg Family, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. See also: Julie Miller, "Planning the Jewish Museum," *Conservative Judaism* 48, no. 48 (Fall 1994): 62; Cohen Grossman, *Jewish Art*, 13-14.

culture expert. She became both the sole female on the Board and its only representative for Jewish visual culture.

American Art Museums and Scholarship Activism

At the same time as she cultivated Jewish libraries and exhibition spaces, Schiff Warburg also helped fashion American museums and libraries without Jewish affiliations. In 1941 she donated objects to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in the memory of her husband including German Gothic sculptures of Christian scenes and Italian Renaissance paintings of saints. In 1941 she was listed in the MFA yearly bulletin as one of the museum's most prominent donors.³⁴⁹ That same year she made a donation of art works and rare books to the New York Public Library, including "the medieval illuminated Books of Hours as well as miscellaneous volumes of a general character with the hope that they will find a place in this institution." She explained to the NYPL that her gift was "in commemoration" of her husband in honor of what would have been his 70th birthday and demanded that this be named on the wall label and in the museum records.³⁵⁰ In emphasizing that her gifts honored her husband, father or brother, she dexterously leveraged the reputations of the men in her family. This allowed her to leave a permanent cultural footprint and make male patrons and museum professionals feel continuously protected within established gender dynamics at the same time. By adding her art to preexisting collections as public gestures toward the men of her family, she ensured that her cultural power would be audible to an audience culturally conditioned around gender roles. In the process, she encoded her values into the public

³⁴⁹ "Acquisitions, June 6 through October 9, 1941," *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts* 39, no. 236 (1941): 99-101. <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/59586>, <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/32802> accessed 1 August 2020.

³⁵⁰ Mrs. Felix M. Warburg to Frank L. Polk, Esq., President, Board of Trustees, The New York Public Library, June 10, 1941, Series I, Box 178, Folder 4: Frieda Schiff Correspondence, The Rosenbach Collection.

sphere and asserted her own voice within existing conversations about art, Americans, and cultural democracy.

Her influential patronage of art and objects in the American cultural sphere laid the groundwork for philanthropy on an even grander scale. The most important moment of her lifetime would happen in 1944: her donation of the Warburg mansion to JTS as a Jewish museum.

From an “Institute for Religious Studies” to a Jewish Museum

In 1941, for the first time, she faced a larger-scale opportunity for her first public philanthropic gesture toward Jewish objects. A few years after the death of her husband in 1937, and several years after the last of her children were married, Warburg formally moved out of her home at 1109 Fifth Avenue, where she was only spending a few weeks per year.³⁵¹ In the following months she contemplated how to use her former home, fearing it would be rebuilt into a series of apartments like many of the other buildings on the block. In 1944, three years later, she finally decided to offer it as a home to Jewish art in America, and she discussed the logistics and finances of the decision with her personal lawyer Alan Stroock and JTS chancellor Louis Finkelstein.³⁵²

³⁵¹ Schiff Warburg maintained multiple homes, including one in the 500-acre Woodlands Estate she shared with her extended family which they called Meadow Farm. She spent “most of my year” there in the last decade of her marriage. *Reminiscences*, 126. She also had a home in Palm Beach, her children celebrated her in a party for her seventieth birthday in 1946, and where she escaped on many other occasions in her first few years of widowhood. Schiff Warburg, *Reminiscences*, 142.

³⁵² Her personal lawyer Alan Stroock guided her through her taxes, finances, and the legal logistics of her philanthropy after the death of her husband. She did not, and probably could not, train herself with the business acumen to know of the tax benefits nor legal issues on the donation of her own home. A man named Sol Stroock was the longtime lawyer of Kuhn, Loeb & Company which Schiff Warburg’s grandfather founded, father helped lead, and husband Felix Warburg also helped lead. John Wilkie was the Warburg family lawyer. When Wilkie died, “I decided to have a personal lawyer and Felix suggested Sol Stroock, because he already knew a great deal about the family’s finances. I have never regretted that choice, for he was a rare man, kindly and sympathetic. When Felix died, he could not have been more helpful to me. He devoted any amount of time to my affairs, and I think I am unique in being able to say that I have never been inside a lawyer’s office. Sol sent Alan to me a few times to explain some tax matters.” Eventually, Sol suggested Alan become Schiff Warburg’s lawyer. When Sol died 2 years after Felix Warburg, Schiff Warburg decided on Alan as his successor. She wrote, “I think that, next to my own sons, he has given me the greatest help of anyone, and I feel that the years of my widowhood would have been much more complicated if I had not always had this kindly, brilliant and willing man at my side.” *Reminiscences*, 146.

She moved from donating objects and finances to existing arts institutions to building one institution herself. She dedicated it to democratizing access to Jewish art and serve a broader American community across faiths and genders. On January 4, 1944, 10 days before she announced her gift, Finkelstein wrote of his excitement about Schiff Warburg's potential gift of her home to the Seminary:

Alan Stroock has told me of your conversations with him, and of the fact that you are giving consideration to presenting your home on Fifth Avenue and 92nd Street to the Seminary as a building to house its Museum. I was deeply moved by this news, for I believe that if you and your children can see your way clear to doing this, you will make a contribution of inestimable value to the preservation of rare cultural treasures, to the educational system of this whole community, and because of the part this city is destined to play in America and the world, to civilization at large.

Well aware of the immense value of the house in both economic and symbolic terms, Finkelstein wanted to use the space to JTS's advantage, but not for an independent museum or a repository for Jewish art, exhibitions, and laypeople visitors. Rather, he saw it as a home for the growing Institute of Religious Studies that Schiff Warburg had financially supported since its foundation in 1938:

The building would... prove of the greatest value in building up the Institute for Religious Studies as an effective instrument, making for national solidarity and for increased good will among men across differences of creed. The Institute for Religious Studies is, as you know, now in its sixth year. It is the only school in the world which has for its purpose bringing together the leaders of the different faiths in an effort to learn from one another, and to give one another information about the relationship of the various faiths to one another and to the democratic way of life...

He continued to lay out his vision of how the building could serve both practical and symbolic roles:

The Institute, which is now attended by more than one hundred and fifty students, would be greatly aided in its work by a more central location, and by a building where it could expand... We need research rooms for the scholars who are to engage in the study of the relations among the religious faiths. We need a building suitable for a summer session and summer conferences of clergymen from other cities, who would like to benefit from courses similar to those given in New York, and now projected for Chicago and Boston.

The Institute would benefit greatly from connection with the Museum building, for the Museum and Library exhibits should be important elements in the work of the Institute.³⁵³

Early on, especially in the early 1940s, Schiff Warburg had been the only member of the board to take an active interest in the Institute and to involve herself financially.³⁵⁴ Given her fiscal and ideological support, Finkelstein hoped she might make the Museum and Institute into synonymous dual entities.³⁵⁵

Ultimately, Frieda Schiff Warburg's vision for a Jewish museum won out over Finkelstein's for several reasons. Established in 1938, Finkelstein designed the Institute of Religious Studies as a forum for "clergymen and lay leaders, Christian and Jewish."³⁵⁶ In essence, it was intended to spark and sustain interreligious conversations about belief, the world, politics, and more – but only amongst intellectual and religious elites. Frieda Schiff Warburg aimed to democratize knowledge rather than cloister it. Finkelstein's Institute remained successful for years after the Jewish museum was founded, and it remained in JTS's walls where it belonged as an academic program for religious and political leaders.³⁵⁷ The museum, on the other hand, succeeded as a home for learners of all levels with varying familiarity with Judaism and its practices.³⁵⁸ Schiff

³⁵³ L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, January 6, 1944, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series B, Box 41, Folder 37, 1943 - 1944, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁵⁴ L. Finkelstein to Mrs. Felix M. Warburg, October 30, 1946, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁵⁵ Guzman, Hector. Interview by Ariel Cohen. Personal Interview. June 25, 2018; and "Jessica Feingold | Jewish Women's Archive," accessed April 6, 2019, <https://jwa.org/people/feingold-jessica>.

³⁵⁶ "A Trumpet for All Israel," *Time: The Weekly Magazine*, October 15, 1951, page 59.

³⁵⁷ "A Trumpet for All Israel," *Time: The Weekly Magazine*, October 15, 1951, page 59.

³⁵⁸ This does not mean the museum was established without contention; on the contrary, the tension of the museum's identity was, and always has been, the fact that it's both a Jewish museum and a lively art museum attempting to compete with the other fine arts museums on New York City's museum mile. The main exhibitions at the museum in 1949 demonstrate this; artist Isaac Lichtenstein, an oil painter of images from rabbis to shofars to secular scenes, were described in the New York Times as expressionist with elements of "cubism," though aesthetically, the works did not integrate any elements of cubism as a movement. Furthermore, painter Louise Kayser's exhibition included both Judaica, paintings of synagogues, and secular portraits and landscapes. H. D., "2 NEW EXHIBITIONS AT JEWISH MUSEUM; Oils by Isaac Lichtenstein and Paintings by Louise Kayser Are Placed on Display," *The New York Times*, April 28, 1949, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1949/04/28/archives/2-new-exhibitions-at-jewish-museum-oils-by-isaac-lichtenstein-and.html>.

Warburg secured relative autonomy for it by giving it an independent address. Further, Frieda Schiff Warburg's patronage was the commencement of multiple generations of personalities in her family who helped shape JTS as an institution. Her family relationships gave her some leeway in crafting an out-of-the-box vision for an institution that could alter the course of JTS as her father, brother, and husband had. Alan Stroock, though not a relative, was close to the Warburg family and had developed a reputation as a Jewish philanthropic leader alongside Felix Warburg before his death in 1938. He may have played a role in advocating for Frieda Schiff Warburg's JTS Board position, and he likely helped convince Finkelstein and other JTS board members of the viability of a Jewish museum. Lastly, Frieda Schiff Warburg's long philanthropic history implied that this initial gift would be followed by more. Perhaps this unspoken promise led JTS leadership to consider Schiff Warburg's idea for a museum more heavily even than Finkelstein's, and Finkelstein conceded to her quickly.

When he did, he immediately involved himself in the Jewish museum's plans. In the months following the announcement of her gift in 1944, Schiff Warburg and Finkelstein corresponded extensively about object donations that would comprise the exhibits of a future museum.³⁵⁹ Behind the discussions lay the larger question of whose vision for the building would prevail. From January 1944 to the end of 1945, JTS leadership wavered on whether to seek the funding, manpower, and marketing required to convert the space into a public museum.³⁶⁰ Schiff

³⁵⁹ In early 1944, in the months following her donation, Finkelstein wrote to Schiff Warburg when donors gave objects to JTS; he indicated that after the public announcement, they were excited to contribute to a growing Museum. For example, he wrote in February 1944: "I am sure you will be interested to know" that we just received a "note from Professor [Alexander] Marx" indicating that a Megillah was donated by a woman, who had learned of Schiff Warburg's donation. L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, February 10, 1944, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series B, Box 41, Folder 38, 1943 - 1944, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁶⁰ L. Finkelstein to J. W. Schwab, Esq., December 3, 1945, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 2: Correspondences & Memoranda, 1945 - 1946, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; L. Finkelstein and F. S. Warburg, September 21, 1945, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives..

Warburg quickly grew frustrated that her own vision could not be more swiftly realized. She involved herself in the building's reconstruction yet remained an outsider to the Seminary leadership that drove it. Seeking to assuage her, Finkelstein wrote in September 1945:

I share the disappointment you undoubtedly feel because the building is not yet in use. However, I realize that we may have learned a very great deal during the past year and that, all in all, the delay has proved extremely beneficial to our long range plans. the incalculable assistance which you yourself have given regarding the reconstruction arrangements.³⁶¹

Yet archives indicate that she was barred from many of the most important conversations and much of the high-level decision-making. In these early months, Schiff Warburg visited 1109 often, both announced and unannounced, to evaluate its progress. In response to her inquiries about the plans and pace of construction, Finkelstein often deflected and dodged her questions. He wrote:

Your letter of September 1st was a source of great distress to me. I am sure you realize that I feel a deep sense of gratitude and obligation to you... Consequently any thought on your part that we may have been derelict in regard to your gift, disturbs me profoundly... I am afraid you perhaps do not understand just how much has been done in connection with the Fifth Avenue house and why more could not have been accomplished until now.

Finkelstein went on to explain that finding someone to head the building of the museum was imperative, and that progress could not be made until the museum committee chose someone.³⁶²

Throughout 1944 and 1945, Finkelstein and his colleagues ignored most of Schiff Warburg's requests and attempts to intervene.

In September 1945, when JTS was on the precipice of fully committing to opening a museum, Finkelstein finally nominated Schiff Warburg to be chairman of the building

³⁶¹ L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, January 14, 1945, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁶² Finkelstein went on to explain that finding someone to head the building of the museum was imperative, and that progress could not be made until the museum committee chose someone. L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, January 14, 1945, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, September 10, 1944, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series B, Box 41, Folder 38, 1943 - 1944, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; F. S. Warburg to L. Finkelstein, January 15, 1945, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

committee.³⁶³ The December 1945 public announcement of her appointment as the sole chairman, above the names of Finkelstein, Percival Goodman, Alan Stroock and others who were involved in the effort, represented a stepwise function increase in her recognition in the Jewish world as a force alongside men. That change also set the stage for her enhanced role in the lead-up to the museum's opening.³⁶⁴

At the beginning of 1946, Schiff Warburg and Finkelstein finally began to correspond about tangible plans for the museum – its structure, function, and opening. In May 1946, Finkelstein began sending her blueprints of the museum with a request for her comments.³⁶⁵ In December 1946, a few months before the opening of the museum, Schiff Warburg donated a new tapestry in the space.³⁶⁶ That same month she approved “colors and wall samples for most rooms on 3 exhibition floors at 1109.”³⁶⁷ Schiff Warburg also corresponded with Louise and Stephen Kayser, the two first curators of the Museum.³⁶⁸ Jessica Feingold, initially secretary to Louis

³⁶³ Finkelstein wrote, “We all feel that if we proceed with the adjustment of 1109 Fifth Avenue and the establishment of a museum there, we should look to you to be the effective chairman of the Building Committee Louis Finkelstein and Frieda Schiff Warburg, September 21, 1945, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. For a more public announcement of Frieda Schiff Warburg's role as chairman of the committee see also Rose Feitelson, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, “For Immediate Release: Seminary Begins Museum Reconversion; Mrs. Warburg's Former Home To Be Opened As Museum, October 1, 1946,” December 26, 1945, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 2: Correspondences & Memoranda, 1945 - 1946, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁶⁴ Rose Feitelson, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, “For Immediate Release: Seminary Begins Museum Reconversion; Mrs. Warburg's Former Home To Be Opened As Museum, October 1, 1946,” December 26, 1945, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 2: Correspondences & Memoranda, 1945 - 1946, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁶⁵ L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, May 31, 1946, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁶⁶ L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, April 27, 1947, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series D, 1947, Box 63, Folder 15, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁶⁷ Jessica Feingold, initially secretary to Louis Finkelstein and later (by 1936) assistant to the president of JTS, reported to Dr. Simon Greenberg on her many activities in the museum. See “Jessica Feingold | Jewish Women's Archive,” accessed April 6, 2019, <https://jwa.org/people/feingold-jessica>. For specific correspondence see jf (Jessica Feingold), “Memo for Professor Greenberg,” December 2, 1946, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 2: Correspondences & Memoranda, 1945 - 1946, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁶⁸ Stephen Kayser officially appointed as curator of the Jewish Museum. Though Louise was not publicly credited, correspondences demonstrate the depth and breadth of her work for the institution. More on this can be found in the chapter of this dissertation about Louise and Stephen Kayser.

Finkelstein and later assistant to the president of JTS from 1936 onward, served as a liaison between Schiff Warburg and others as she communicated her decisions for the Museum's furniture, design, office space, and more.³⁶⁹ Correspondences such as these continued over the course of 1946 and early 1947, until finally, in May, the museum opened to the public.

May 6th and 7th, 1947: The Museum Openings

On May 6th, 1947, the Jewish Museum held a private evening opening for donors, curators, Jewish political leaders, and Seminary academics. The night began at the Seminary and ended at 1109 Fifth Avenue.³⁷⁰ The proceedings commenced at 5 PM at 3080 Broadway, with a joint business meeting that comprised the Board of Directors (including Schiff Warburg), Board of Overseers, and Faculties of the Jewish Theological Seminary.³⁷¹ It ended at the Jewish Museum a few hours later, where the group was joined by “a number of those connected with the Seminary in other capacities.”³⁷² The evening included a minority of women, mostly donors and female secretaries who made the event happen; all speakers that night were men, including Alexander Marx who gave the keynote speech.³⁷³ The Jewish Museum's public opening was held the following night, May 7th, in the museum lobby. Schiff Warburg insisted on sitting in a public, visible space rather than merely be seated as another spectator.³⁷⁴ Finkelstein had previously

³⁶⁹ jf (Jessica Feingold), “Memo for Professor Greenberg,” December 2, 1946, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 2: Correspondences & Memoranda, 1945 - 1946, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁷⁰ L. Finkelstein to Edward M. M. Warburg, March 3, 1947, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series D, 1947, Box 63, Folder 14: Walter, Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁷¹ L. Finkelstein to Edward M. M. Warburg, March 3, 1947, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series D, 1947, Box 63, Folder 14: Walter, Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁷² Finkelstein wrote, “we will have a chair on the platform for you on Tuesday, the 6th, but you would prefer to sit in the front row on Wednesday, the 7th.” L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, December 18, 1946, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁷³ Alexander Marx, “Address Delivered by Doctor Alexander Marx at the Preview of the Jewish Museum, May 6, 1947,” 1947.

³⁷⁴ L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, December 18, 1946, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

arranged for her to observe the ceremony in her home from the audience rather than on stage before correcting his error. He eventually wrote her, “I am sorry that we were confused about your sitting on the platform... we will make the necessary changes which are slight indeed... As I now understand, we will have a chair on the platform for you.”³⁷⁵ He also made sure to privately ask her, and only her, to approve the invitation list for the group of roughly one hundred who attended.³⁷⁶

At the opening of May 7th, Finkelstein had planned for Schiff Warburg to give only what he described as “a brief talk,” writing to her, “we are of course expecting that you will say your *little piece* on the 7th.”³⁷⁷ The few words Schiff Warburg chose reflected her unique place as a donor, mother, and the maker of her home, a wife, philanthropist, and custodian of Jewish objects all at once. She reminisced on the warm memories her family shared within her home’s walls and related them to the Museum’s future:

This one last time I will indulge myself in the feeling that I am still hostess here and as in the years gone by [I] am welcoming my guests with pleasure. I will leave it to others tonight to paint the picture and the hopes of what this new Jewish Museum will eventually mean to New York and the nation and turn to the past to tell you, who are gathered here for this dedication, the saga of this house.

My husband, who was a great admirer of Gothic, chose C. P. Gilbert as architect [the famed Gothic designer]... This room in which we are assembled tonight has seen many similar gatherings; to enjoy good music, fine lectures and lively dances, and to me it is especially hallowed, as here where I am standing my son Gerald was confirmed by Dr. Judah Magnes and he also, on this spot, performed the wedding ceremony for my daughter and Walter Rothschild... holiest of all it was my beloved husband's last resting place...

³⁷⁵ Finkelstein wrote, “we will have a chair on the platform for you on Tuesday, the 6th, but you would prefer to sit in the front row on Wednesday, the 7th.” L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, December 18, 1946, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁷⁶ L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, December 18, 1946, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁷⁷ L. Finkelstein to Edward M. M. Warburg, March 3, 1947, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series D, 1947, Box 63, Folder 14: Walter, Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, 26 September 1947, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series D, 1947, Box 63, Folder 17, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

It was his many sided personality and ideals that made 1109 not only a home in which to bring up our children, but somewhat of a small civic contour as well as a background for his varied artistic tastes.

In the room directly below this one, the walls of which were covered by a fine collection of Rembrandt and Durer prints, in the early days of the Federation and the J. D. C. he [Felix Warburg] presided over their lengthy meetings and no matter how late the hour and the cigar smoked atmosphere, he would come up to me and smilingly tell me that he had finally gotten unanimous approval of his proposals, without much rapping of his gavel.

When I decided to leave this house after my husband's death, I was much worried about its future for I did not want it to share the fate of so many similar houses, to be torn down to make way for an ugly apartment building and on this occasion I gladly once more thank my dear young friend Alan Stroock for his suggestion to give it to the Jewish Theological Seminary, in whose development my husband, my father and my brother took such a decisive part, to house the many fine collections of Judaic culture which were being sent out of war ravaged Europe.

We have had to wait over three years for this day of Dedication and now that it has finally come I will try to remember that this is no longer 1109, but The Jewish Museum, and pray that with Dr. Finkelstein's vision and Dr. Kayser's erudition it will through the years become a specialized center of culture to which many of all creeds and races will come for increased knowledge and mental refreshment.³⁷⁸

Schiff Warburg's narration of her own story evinced a self-conscious performance of gender in conversation with the preexisting structures of influence. She elaborated on her husband's meetings and philanthropic work. She spoke of her son's confirmation, for which she invited the Temple community into her home, as well as her daughter's wedding. She alluded to co-curating the art that hung on the walls with her husband and indicated her role in filling the space with high-class visitors – politicians, artists, Jewish leaders.³⁷⁹ And yet, she credited her husband and Stroock with much of her own invisible labor. Furthermore, she ceded control over her former home and

³⁷⁸ Mrs. Felix M. Warburg, "Speech by Mrs. Felix M. Warburg at the Dedication of the Jewish Museum, May 7, 1947," (May 7, 1947).

³⁷⁹ Edward Warburg. Interview with Ellen M. Scholle. *The William E. Wiener Oral History Library at the American Jewish Committee at New York Public Library*. October 16, 1989. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/a93bc1d0-02df-0131-ddde-58d385a7b928#/?uuiid=a988e8c0-02df-0131-3d72-58d385a7b928>, 7.

the newest house of American Jewish art to curators, JTS leadership, and the guests of the museum. It was as though, as she did in her hostess days, she filled her home with guests, music, and food, curated the experience, and then let it unfold. Unfortunately, Frieda Schiff Warburg's willingness to take such a backseat relative to the men involved in Jewish cultural philanthropy and its orchestration was a survivalist need. She was a woman after all, and openly having power, control, and influence over an institution such as hers would have been scandalizing. The speech connotes the very factors that led to her ultimate exclusion from the museum's course.

Other than Schiff Warburg's speech, the May 7th opening of the Jewish Museum did not feature any female voices. Finkelstein and his team made the decisions about who to include and exclude.³⁸⁰ He insisted upon Schiff Warburg's son delivering a lengthy half-hour speech where her speech, included in its entirety above, was no more than three minutes.³⁸¹ Other speakers included the decorated businessmen Nelson Rockefeller and Lewis L. Strauss, New York Governor Herbert Lehman (a Board member at JTS), and curator Stephen S. Kayser, "who will be making his initial speech as curator of the museum."³⁸² Finkelstein invited Edward Warburg's brother, Gerald, a "noted cellist and patron of music," to play music.³⁸³ Finkelstein made Governor Lehman the steward and Alan Stroock the chairman of the evening. He decorated Stroock as the creator of the Museum, though he was merely the first person to hear of Schiff Warburg's idea for it.³⁸⁴

³⁸⁰ L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, December 18, 1946, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁸¹ L. Finkelstein to Edward M. M. Warburg, May 8, 1947, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series D, 1947, Box 63, Folder 14: Walter, Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁸² L. Finkelstein to Edward M. M. Warburg, March 3, 1947, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series D, 1947, Box 63, Folder 14: Walter, Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁸³ "Gerald F. Warburg, 69, Is Dead; Celist and a Patron of the Arts - The New York Times," February 15, 1971.

³⁸⁴ In actuality, the correspondences in the archives reveal that he did not play a role in the development of the idea of a Museum. Rather, he helped her with logistics and listened to her idea, thereby validating it, as a man with power who agreed, but not creating it.

The day after the museum opening, Finkelstein wrote not to Schiff Warburg, but rather to her son Edward to thank him for his presence and leadership in the evening prior:

It is quite impossible to thank you for your own help all the way through, but I did feel that this morning I ought to express my appreciation - no matter how inadequately... This morning I had a long conversation with Mrs. Adler [Cyrus Adler's wife Rachel] who... seemed genuinely thrilled. She raved about the building and the exhibits, saying that she had never realized that so much could be done with the collections. Like the rest of your audience, she was much touched by your own speech and full of admiration for your courage.³⁸⁵

The (In)visible Feminine Hand: The Reception of a Gift and the Narration of a Life

By the time the museum opened to the public, Frieda Schiff Warburg's leadership was effaced and her public image was erased. In the months leading up to the museum opening, JTS formed an Inner Museum Committee and excluded Frieda Schiff Warburg from meetings. The Kayzers halted writing letters consulting her for museum operations and started curating more on their own, in conjunction with JTS professors rather than with her. Exhibition catalogues discussed the "Warburg family mansion" more than Frieda Schiff Warburg's role in choosing to donate it. Though the Museum was an instant success and garnered attention across the city, its image did not include Frieda Schiff Warburg anywhere that the public could see or understand.

The museum's exhibitions, though, mirrored her vision for an institution that democratized knowledge and learning for a wide audience. Its inaugural exhibition, entitled *The Giving of the Law and the Ten Commandments*, attracted over one thousand visitors over the course of its opening day.³⁸⁶ In the exhibition catalogue's introduction, curator Stephen Kayser quoted Cyrus

³⁸⁵ L. Finkelstein to Edward M. M. Warburg, May 8, 1947, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series D, 1947, Box 63, Folder 14: Walter, Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁸⁶ Unknown, "Inaugural Exhibition: The Giving of the Law and The Ten Commandments (Jewish Art of Late Antiquity, Works of Contemporary Artists, The Torah In Synagogue Art)," n.d., JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 4: Museum, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. For number of visitors, see: Doctor

Adler: “a finished museum is a dead museum.”³⁸⁷ The exhibit drew parallels between Jewish law and American law, and explained how both embodied democracy, fairness, and good values. Frieda Schiff Warburg’s hope that the museum could be “helpful and constructive” in international problems worked in parallel to Finkelstein’s institute as well as other institutions which addressed latent and overt antisemitism through interreligious dialogue. Yet her museum presented a novel type of setting in which the objects of one important minority could help Americans understand one way to express and uphold democratic values: through displaying and understanding Jewish art as physical pieces of a bigger, shared national and international heritage. As some museums in New York furthered and propagated the avant-garde art movements begun at the turn of the century, and as others focused on realism, classicism, and historical art, Schiff Warburg’s institution became a cross between an academy of Jewish leadership, a secular university educating on Jews, and a think tank on the place of minorities in American life. The opening exhibition, relating the Ten Commandments to contemporaneous American laws and ethics, is exemplary of exhibits that invited visitors into legal, political, and social inquiry about American identity outside an academic or religious institution, literally democratizing the examination of democracy.

It is telling that in December 1945, JTS public relations secretary Rose Feitelson accidentally listed Felix Warburg as chairman of the building committee of the Jewish Museum. He had died in 1937 and Schiff Warburg had assumed this role three months prior.³⁸⁸ Immediately following the Museum’s opening and its first exhibition, she was also excluded from the Museum’s

Stephen S. Kayser to Doctor Simon Greenberg, “Memorandum,” May 19, 1947, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 3: Museum Correspondence & Memoranda, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁸⁷ Unknown. “Inaugural Exhibition: The Giving of the Law and The Ten Commandments (Jewish Art of Late Antiquity, Works of Contemporary Artists, The Torah In Synagogue Art),” n.d. JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 4: Museum. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁸⁸ Rose Feitelson, Jewish Theological Seminary of America. “For Immediate Release: Seminary Begins Museum Reconversion; Mrs. Warburg’s Former Home To Be Opened As Museum, October 1, 1946,” December 26, 1945. JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 2: Correspondences & Memoranda, 1945 - 1946. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

Inner Committee.³⁸⁹ She was in good health and would be for another decade, and she was living in White Plains, New York on her Meadow Farm home.³⁹⁰ Her lack of involvement in the museum's proceedings wasn't for any lack of wanting trying; in fact, for many years after the museum opened, she asked Jessica Feingold at JTS and other family members to keep her updated on the museum's progress behind the scenes, though it was clear in these letters that Frieda Schiff Warburg had no sway or ability to involve herself in the institution's affairs.³⁹¹ Until her death in 1958, Frieda Schiff Warburg was contributing to many philanthropic causes; she was a member of the Board of Trustees of the Jewish Theological seminary and countless other Jewish and secular organizations. Upon her death she donated a third of her nine-million-dollar estate to charitable causes including Negro Education Welfare, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, Joint Distribution Committee, United Hospital Fund, Visiting Nurse Service of New York. She did not donate a penny of her estate to the museum or its upkeep. It went on without her influence. On September 12, 1947, Simon Greenberg wrote her to update her on the committee meeting that day as well as the programs and music festivals scheduled for the fall, offering her no opportunity to express her opinion or help shape programming.³⁹² Throughout

³⁸⁹ "Meeting of the Inner Museum Committee" (Dr. Simon Greenberg's Office: Jewish Theological Seminary, January 20, 1947), Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Stephen S. Kayser, "Meeting of the Inner Museum Committee" (Dr. Simon Greenberg's office: Jewish Theological Seminary, February 19, 1947), JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 21: Museum, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; "Inner Museum Committee Meeting at JTS, 20 November 1947," n.d., Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁹⁰ "\$3,000,000 Left to Charity by Mrs. Warburg; Last Will Made Public," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, September 23, 1958, sec. Archive, <https://www.jta.org/1958/09/23/archive/3000000-left-to-charity-by-mrs-warburg-last-will-made-public>.

³⁹¹ Unknown to Aunt Frieda, December 1, 1954, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Box 161, Folder 28: 1954, Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Unknown to Aunt Frieda, December 28, 1955, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Box 142, Folder 46: 1955, Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Unknown to Aunt Frieda, December 1, 1954, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Box 122, Unnumbered Folder, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁹² Simon Greenberg to Frieda Schiff Warburg, 12 September 1947, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Box 63, Folder 17, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

1947, the Inner Museum Committee met and discussed plans for the museum's future, and Schiff Warburg was seldom present.³⁹³ That pattern of exclusion persisted – and persists to this day in the narratives of this house that live on in collective memory and in publications.

The organization of the archives continue to perpetuate a sense of anonymity inherited from the years after the museum's founding. This trickles down even into institutional memory today at JTS and at the Jewish Museum. Scholars continue to shroud the history of Schiff Warburg's life and cultural philanthropy in mystery that stretches far beyond her persistent exclusion in real time.³⁹⁴ Her life and her work are largely lost, and they not only comprise a compelling story in their own right, but also change the story of American Jewish cultural history more broadly.

Yet Schiff Warburg's complicated fate also reflected her deep ties to her husband's reputation and the power of gender. The last few sentences of Frieda Schiff Warburg's 1944 letter of dedication, republished in the opening exhibition catalogue, read: "I would like my gift to be entered under date of January 14, 1944, my husband's seventy-third birthday... [it is] my tribute to the men of my family, my father, my husband and my brother Mortimer, who each in his own

³⁹³ "Meeting of the Inner Museum Committee" (Dr. Simon Greenberg's Office: Jewish Theological Seminary, January 20, 1947), Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Stephen S. Kayser, "Meeting of the Inner Museum Committee" (Dr. Simon Greenberg's office: Jewish Theological Seminary, February 19, 1947), JTS Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 21: Museum, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; "Inner Museum Committee Meeting at JTS, 20 November 1947," n.d., Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁹⁴ In their chapter about the history of the Jewish Museum in a tome of JTS History, Julie Miller and Richard Cohen barely mention Frieda Warburg. When they finally do toward the end of the article, they emphasize that Frieda Schiff Warburg credited her lawyer, Alan Stroock, with her donation. In reality, as is clear from Frieda's own letter announcing her gift, this was not entirely the case, but their read of this story reflects not just Frieda's letter but rather the plethora of media output about her gift. Institutional memory at JTS also likely plays a role. Miller, Julie, and Richard Cohen. "A Collision of Cultures: The Jewish Museum and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1904 - 1971," 324. In *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, Vol. 2. New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997.

way has done so much to build up the Seminary.”³⁹⁵ Though many women explained their connections with family members when they offered donations, it should be noted that men rarely did the same.³⁹⁶ Gifts from men to the Jewish Theological Seminary, financial and aesthetic both, rarely included mentions of family members or home environments.³⁹⁷ In fact, most donations by men to the JTS Library, Museum of Ceremonial Objects, and the Jewish Museum, and the thank-you letters they received, did not mention family connections.³⁹⁸ Certainly, women were deeply entrenched in interfamilial networks and viewed their roles as wives, sisters, and mothers as core to their identities in ways men did not. However, by naming her loved ones in her donation, Schiff Warburg was not only explaining her personal identity; she was strategically leveraging resources to ensure her philanthropic voice would be heard. Ironically, she was leveraging male authority to assert her own agency. It was a double edged sword. She saw that the community might embrace her gifts more completely if she presented them as part of a continuum of family philanthropy,

³⁹⁵ Letter from F. S. Warburg to L. Finkelstein, January 14, 1944, Felix M. and Frieda Schiff Warburg Scrapbooks, ARC.1000.167, 1937-1951, Box 2, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁹⁶ As a counterpoint to this, it is apparent that men occasionally donated objects in honor of other people in their families. In December 1937 Marx thanked Mr. Herman Elsberg for a medal commemorating 250 years of Jewish settlement in America presented in honor of his brother, another man. See Alexander Marx to Herman A. Elsberg, Esq., December 14, 1937, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 4, Folder 2: Objects: Museum Donations, 1935 - 1937, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. In January 1932 Marx also thanked a Mr. Isaac Grossman for a copper vase gifted by Grossman's son-in-law (which he exhibited soon after at the JTS Library Museum). See Alexander Marx to Mr. Isaac Grossman, January 4, 1932, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 4, Folder 1: Objects: Museum Donations, 1926 - 1934, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives. Still, even in these instances, their donations are stand-alone and not necessarily expressed within the bounds of marriage or partnership. The language of both these letters does not overly emphasize the men's' roles in their families, nor do they point to their roles as fathers or as sons, but rather as people presenting gifts in honor of others.

³⁹⁷ Alexander Marx? to Dr. Louis Epstein, September 19, 1938, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 4, Folder 3: Objects: Museum Donations, 1926 - 1934, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

³⁹⁸ Solomon Grayzel to Alexander Marx, April 30, 1945, Alexander Marx Papers, ARC.80, 1880s-1960s, Box 28, Folder 2, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Alexander Marx, Librarian to Mr. J. B. Abrahams, Jewish Theological Seminary, March 8, 1933, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 4, Folder 5: Objects: Museum & Library Donations, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Alexander Marx and Mr. Nathan Cohen, Hotel Maroy, April 9, 1941, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 4, Folder 3: Objects: Museum Donations, 1926 - 1934, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Cyrus Gordon, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey and Professor Alexander Marx, March 20, 1940, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 4, Folder 3: Objects: Museum Donations, 1926 - 1934, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Murray B. Gordon, M.D. to Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary, "Murray B. Gordon, M.D., 465 Ocean Avenue, Brooklyn, New York," March 31, 1941, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 4, Folder 3: Objects: Museum Donations, 1926 - 1934, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

existing alongside those of her husband, father and brother – the three men who changed the course of the Seminary more than any other family trio. Still, this diminished her own gift and its nature as a stand-alone, independent institution. As Finkelstein wrote, Schiff Warburg’s museum “would be a fitting climax to the benefactions which your family has made to the Seminary.”³⁹⁹

In 1944, a JTS supporter named Kate Frank wrote to Schiff Warburg from Orlando, Florida: “During World War I, I was invited to attend meetings in your home, being chairman of the Red Cross of Temple Israel Sisterhood, 91st Street and Broadway. I think you have done the most beautiful thing in giving your home as a shrine for the art collections of the museum, also as a place of study for all faiths. I hope your children and grandchildren will feel a deep pride.”⁴⁰⁰ Her letter is emblematic of a wave of letters from both women and men that Schiff Warburg received after the public announcement of her gift which highlighted her gendered social standing. Nearly all of the letters elaborated on her father’s, brother’s, and husband’s philanthropy. Many referenced her children and grandchildren. Many mentioned her salons and the home environment she cultivated. Many also discussed the Museum’s mission to promote cross-cultural understanding in a shaky American democracy. All pointed to the ways in which Schiff Warburg herself was a bridge between communities much like the museum itself, which sought a multireligious and multicultural visitorship.

By nature of their roles as wives and mothers as well as secretaries and rebbetzins, Jewish women were the often-invisible bridges that built communities and upheld the interconnections between the individuals within them. Some were openers of unknown gates of knowledge for the masses, democratizing information and sparking conversations outside of institutional walls.

³⁹⁹ L. Finkelstein to F. S. Warburg, January 6, 1944. JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series B, Box 41, Folder 37, 1943 - 1944. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁰⁰ Kate Frank to Mrs. Warburg, “332 Agnes St., Orlando. Fla.,” March 28, 1944, Felix M. and Frieda Schiff Warburg Scrapbooks, ARC.1000.167, 1937-1951, Box 2, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

While traversing private and public spaces, different family homes, and varying intellectual, religious and socioeconomic worlds, mid-20th-century Jewish women created networks and became adept at translating for each audience and network node. In the end, Schiff Warburg's learned dexterity as a woman betwixt worlds was what enabled her to pursue a new, creative kind of leadership and communicate this new style of philanthropy to the establishments of which she was a part. She communicated with formidable male leaders at the Seminary as the representative woman, with non-Jews on museum boards as the representative Jew, and lastly, with the broader American public as the representative advocate of Jewish public culture in American life.

Like other such women, Frieda Schiff Warburg was variably visible and invisible throughout the story of the Jewish Museum, and her faltering relationship with the institution's trajectory after 1944 is illustrative of the Seminary's reluctance to cast a woman as the figurehead of an institution. Her lasting legacy was the establishment Jewish public culture in an independent, material Jewish home of the arts that challenged the hegemonies of men in the world of philanthropy, Christians in the world of American art and culture, and elitist, less accessible academic environments. At the end of the Museum's opening week, Stephen Kayser wrote her: "I will always try my best to shape the museum in the spirit of the beauty which... reflects only what had been beauty too while you lived here for so many happy years."⁴⁰¹

Through the early 1960s, Schiff Warburg's vision of an accessible, warm, and lasting home for Jewish art prevailed under the auspices of a leadership team that upheld her desires – primarily, the Jewish Museum's first curators, artist Louise and art historian Stephen Kayser whom she helped choose. They, too, were committed to presenting accessible displays that displayed Jewish

⁴⁰¹ Stephen S. Kayser, and Mrs. Felix M. Warburg, Letter to Doctor L. Finkelstein, May 9, 1947. JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 16: Museum, Stephen Kayser, 1947 - 1948. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

culture as deeply American.⁴⁰² The Kayzers remained close with Schiff Warburg until her death in 1958.⁴⁰³ Louise Kayser would become the artist-curator and the creative eye who painted on the blank canvas that Frieda Schiff Warburg offered to JTS as a Museum.

Thus, Frieda Schiff Warburg passed the baton to her curators as custodians of her vision for Jewish art and of her own legacy. Even while JTS boxed her out of her place in the museum's story, the first Jewish museum curators remained connected to Frieda Schiff Warburg until her death and attempted to keep her place in its narrative, including her donation letter in exhibition catalogues and in public talks.⁴⁰⁴ Stephen and Louise Kayser were the only two people ever to live inside the Warburg family mansion after the Warburgs left it. Living inside the museum as a couple perhaps connected them more deeply to the family and to Frieda Schiff Warburg's hopes and dreams for the institution. Furthermore, the very professionalization of Jewish culture that Frieda Schiff Warburg was seeking is embodied ironically in the Kayzers' move into the museum home. This couple, two professionals of the curation of Jewish objects, literally professionalized a domestic space. From philanthropist to curators, the Jewish museum vision would survive to today as a symbol of how an institutional vision can survive when history-bearers take over.

⁴⁰² L. Finkelstein to Frieda Schiff Warburg, August 30, 1946. JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁰³ Unknown. Letter to Aunt Frieda, December 15, 1955. JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Box 142, Folder 46: 1955, Frieda Schiff Warburg. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁰⁴ Stephen Kayser and Guido Schoenberger, eds., *Jewish Ceremonial Art* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955).

Chapter IV

The Artist: Louise Kayser and the Invention of Judaica

“A new life began as we established our living quarters in the museum building in the midst of many sacred objects such as I had painted in years gone by.”⁴⁰⁵

A Room of Her Own: The Woman Inside the Jewish Museum

Louise Darmstädter Kayser was the woman behind the Jewish Museum’s closed doors each evening. As the last staff members trickled out, Kayser would rush downstairs to work with the objects in basement storage, integrating some into current exhibitions and reorganizing the rest.⁴⁰⁶ The evening hours were her favorite of the day not just because she got to brainstorm for display cases without anybody watching, but also because she was able to be completely alone with the objects that inspired both her exhibitions and her art practice.



Indeed, she wasn’t just a curator when she arrived at the Jewish Museum on Fifth Avenue in 1946. She was a long-practicing painter of portraits and landscapes, an architect, a newly minted industrial engineer, and an interior designer. And while Louise and her husband Stephen Kayser had little desire to move from California to New York in the mid-1940s to curate art in a new institution, they were ultimately convinced by an empty former laundry-kitchenette room in

⁴⁰⁵ Louise D. Kayser, New York, 1958, “A Biographical Note from the Artist,” in *Light from Our Past: A Spiritual History of the Jewish People Expressed in 12 Stained Glass Windows Designed by Louise D. Kayser for Har Zion Temple, Philadelphia* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1959).

⁴⁰⁶ Marcia Josephy. Phone Interview by Ariel Cohen, April 13, 2021. Tom Freudenheim. In-Person Interview by Ariel Cohen, January 29, 2020. Email Interview April 10, 2020. Grace Cohen Grossman. Email Interview by Ariel Cohen, April 6, 2020

the Jewish museum mansion which they realized could be Louise's art studio. It would be her first in America.⁴⁰⁷

As an émigré fine arts professor and renowned artist in Germany, Kayser wrote of America as the place where “I had to begin all over again.”⁴⁰⁸ Kayser arrived at Ellis Island in 1938 with impressive educational and professional credentials that were left untranslated in the American context. Immigration papers listed her occupation as “housewife” and her husband's as “art historian,” testifying to her entry into an American society that perceived individuals and their work through the obscuring prism of gender.⁴⁰⁹ Furthermore, when the Kaysers moved to Cincinnati to spend their first year in the U.S. at the Hebrew Union College, they found themselves in a Jewish academic environment ill-equipped to receive art historians or artists as professionals. Louise Kayser's story of reinvention in America is defined by the ghosts of these limited perceptions and the tension between her inclusion and exclusion. She was known and respected in some communal contexts and not others, and she was entitled to a voice in only select environments. She was at once sought after as a foremost Judaica artist in synagogue communities yet forgotten in formal exhibitions of Jewish art. JTS flew her across the country alongside her husband and provided them an apartment inside the Jewish Museum, yet she was not offered her own income nor a formal title. For her first few years at the museum, she developed the identity of the institution quietly and without recognition, soliciting donations, maintaining contact with patrons, drafting and creating exhibitions, and beginning to publicly

⁴⁰⁷ Grace Cohen Grossman, “Dr. Stephen S. Kayser: A Personal Testimonial” (Berkeley, California: Judah L. Magnes Museum, 2000), 4.

⁴⁰⁸ Louise D. Kayser, New York, 1958, “A Biographical Note From the Artist,” in *Light From Our Past: A Spiritual History of the Jewish People Expressed in 12 Stained Glass Windows Designed by Louise D. Kayser for Har Zion Temple, Philadelphia* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1959).

⁴⁰⁹ Ancestry.com. *New York, Passenger and Crew Lists (including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820-1957* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=7488&h=23521394&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=pDk109&_phstart=successSource Accessed

display her own art both inside and outside the museum's walls. In spite of her success, she is now barely remembered as a minor artist and the wife of an important Jewish art historian, while her curatorial work is entirely forgotten.

In America, Kayser's multiple acts of self-reinvention still left her invisible to the curators, JTS male leaders, professors, and artists blinded by normative gender roles *and* by the seeming cultural limitations and boundaries of what could constitute American Jewish life. Because she was a woman, she was barred from the public, academic role of her husband. Because she was an artist, she was largely unrecognized by Jewish organizations, which viewed Judaica as peripheral, not central, to Jewish life. And because she was an expressly Jewish artist, a creator of Jewish objects as well as secular ones, she was not considered integral to the arts scene of midcentury New York.

Yet Kayser dramatically altered the trajectories of Jewish ceremonial art and artistic culture in postwar American society. Occupying a unique position at the intersection between the art market, artists, and exhibitions, she built bridges between these worlds that nobody else at the Jewish Museum could even fathom until she constructed them. Between 1946 and 1961, she laid the intellectual and practical groundwork for Judaica as an endeavor of the past *and* the immediate present of the postwar moment while within the walls of Frieda Schiff Warburg's former mansion. This ultimately resulted in the birth of the Tobe Pascher workshop in the Jewish Museum's basement in 1956 and the commoditization and proliferation of American Judaica. She also helped create a sound marketing department by hiring the museum's first official photographer for catalogues, scholarly publications, and marketing: her brother Franz Darmstadter, a postwar migrant from Switzerland. Though critical to the direction of this cultural organization, Louise Kayser was unsalaried and unrecognized institutionally, and her name and

presence are left out of the records most easily accessible to researchers. Ghost writing or assisting her husband's lectures and academic articles seldom meant her name was printed on the finished product.

These logistical constraints have led Kayser's career and legacy to be overlooked by historians charting the emergence of Jewish art culture in postwar American society. Scholars have focused narrowly on politically minded social realists like Ben Shahn or Raphael Soyer, or modernist icons like Marc Chagall and Mark Rothko. Studies on Jewish female artists focus on abstract expressionists like Lee Krasner and Helen Frankenthaler, hunting for Jewish traces in their work. In spite of major new scholarship on gendering American Jewish history, the ties between gender, Judaica, and the art market have been left unexamined. As a result, Kayser's life and work lack a ready interpretive frame in which to situate her unique impact on postwar Jewish American culture. In this chapter, I examine her art practice, curation, and art market acumen not just simultaneously, but also as interconnected dimensions. By viewing one artist's conception and commoditization of Judaica in America, I aim to sketch a new interdisciplinary framework for evaluating art practice and the emergence of art markets, exhibitions, and workshops as inextricably linked. This framework can illuminate new, unknown dimensions of the conception and commoditization of bodies of art, including that of Judaica in America.

From Mannheim to Munich: Childhood, University, and Teaching

Louise "Lulu" Darmstädter was born in Mannheim, Germany in 1894 in a Gothic villa resembling the Jewish museum mansion.⁴¹⁰ As a young child Louise often sketched her siblings, and she later recalled that even before she could read and write, color and shapes fascinated her

⁴¹⁰ Image included in Maria Krehbiel-Darmstadter. Selg, Peter. *From Gurs to Auschwitz*. SteinerBooks, 2013.

more than words.⁴¹¹ Her father, whom Louise described as an “American living in Europe,” was born in Germany and spent his childhood and early adulthood in America, where he was granted citizenship, for before returning in the late 1880s. Upon settling in Germany he managed his family wheat distribution business, became chairman of the Mannheim stock exchange, served in public office, and married. He maintained American citizenship throughout his life, yet refused citizenship offers for his three children.⁴¹² Louise’s mother derived from another well-known, successful wheat-trading family. His wife, who remains nameless in historical records, was not an American citizen. Louise was the second of three children.

The eldest Darmstädter child was Maria, who became Louise’s first portraiture model. She was often ill as a child and married a painter, Emil Krehbiel, who died of the flu after fighting in World War I. She never recovered from her ensuing personal crisis and lived at home with her parents in a dark depression for two decades.

As a teenager in 1915, Louise Kayser wanted to go to the Munich Academy to study art, but her father refused to pay for her degree unless she studied economics so she might manage the family bank and wheat business.⁴¹³ He was not interested in supporting her budding art career.⁴¹⁴ By then, she had already exhibited at least six of her paintings locally at the

⁴¹¹ Louise D. Kayser, New York, 1958, “A Biographical Note From the Artist,” in *Light From Our Past: A Spiritual History of the Jewish People Expressed in 12 Stained Glass Windows Designed by Louise D. Kayser for Har Zion Temple, Philadelphia* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1959).

⁴¹² Helga Schreckenberger, “‘Light from Our Past’: Rückbesinnung auf jüdische Traditionen im amerikanischen Exil am Beispiel der Künstlerin Lulu Kayser-Darmstädter,” in *Ästhetiken des Exils/The Aesthetics of Exile*, trans. Armin Mattes (Rodopi, 2003), 187–208. Louise Kayser-Darmstädter, *Light from Our Past* (New York, 1958).

⁴¹³ Helga Schreckenberger, “‘Light from Our Past’: Rückbesinnung auf jüdische Traditionen im amerikanischen Exil am Beispiel der Künstlerin Lulu Kayser-Darmstädter,” in *Ästhetiken des Exils/The Aesthetics of Exile*, trans. Armin Mattes (Rodopi, 2003), 187–208, <https://books.google.com/books?id=MJ4WEP9-JAC&pg=PA187&lpg=PA187&dq=franz+darmstadter+mannheim&source=bl&ots=pRSzabPLp7&sig=ACfU3U26ltFQ7B6PRwW9bYglTCK3-PV-Rg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjvpyvmS5uDpAhUsUt8KHRVaBHgQ6AEwBXoECAsQAQ#v=onepage&q=franz%20darmstadter%20mannheim&f=false>.

⁴¹⁴ Louise D. Kayser, New York, 1958, “A Biographical Note From the Artist,” in *Light From Our Past: A Spiritual History of the Jewish People Expressed in 12 Stained Glass Windows Designed by Louise D. Kayser for Har Zion Temple, Philadelphia* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1959).

Mannheim Art Association (Kunstverein) and the Gallery of Art (Kunsthalle) of Mannheim.⁴¹⁵

After one semester of economics courses she changed her major to fine arts and married her first husband, the famed landscape, still-life, and portrait painter Karl Stohner, in 1916. They had a child in 1918, the same year that Louise Kayser began teaching her own courses in portraiture and composition. Soon after, Stohner and Kayser divorced and she married another painter, Max Wolf. She continued teaching and painting and won the Munich Academy prize for several of her artworks.⁴¹⁶ In 1930, a few years after a second divorce, she finally married art historian Stephen Kayser. He immediately adopted Charles Stohner-Kayser and raised him as his own son. Meanwhile, her younger brother, Franz, managed the family bank and wheat business in Mannheim from 1923 until fleeing to Switzerland with his wife and sister-in-law in 1930, the same years as Louise's marriage to Stephen Kayser.

During her time at the Munich Academy, she met an important character who would become her best friend: the art historian Wilhelm Fraenger. When they met, he was the young manager of the Mannheim palace library, and by the 1930s he was a prolific scholar of German Renaissance painting and Netherlandish art of the 16th century. A German Protestant, Fraenger maintained a special interest in religious art of all kinds. Kayser's correspondence through the end of his life in 1964 indicates their loving attachment to and emotional intimacy with one another. Kayser's brother-in-law Emil Krehbiel described him as her lifelong "best friend."⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ See Listenbestand Kunstverein Mannheim, City Archive Mannheim. Helga Schreckenberger, "'Light from Our Past': Rückbesinnung auf jüdische Traditionen im amerikanischen Exil am Beispiel der Künstlerin Lulu Kayser-Darmstädter," in *Ästhetiken des Exils/The Aesthetics of Exile*, trans. Armin Mattes (Rodopi, 2003), 187–208. Louise Kayser-Darmstädter, *Light from Our Past* (New York, 1958).

⁴¹⁶ See *ibid* and *Who Is Who in American Art* (1953).

⁴¹⁷ Walter Schmitthener's protocol of a visit of Karl Krehbiel, Kuppenheim, 15.11.1947, City Archive Mannheim, Accession 17/1987. Source found from Helga Schreckenberger, "'Light from Our Past': Rückbesinnung auf jüdische Traditionen im amerikanischen Exil am Beispiel der Künstlerin Lulu Kayser-Darmstädter," in *Ästhetiken des Exils/The Aesthetics of Exile*, trans. Armin Mattes (Rodopi, 2003), 187–208. Louise Kayser-Darmstädter, *Light from Our Past* (New York, 1958).

She wrote him more than anyone else, from California to New York. Fraenger founded the Mannheim Bibliophile Society in the 1920s, and the year before it was banned by the Nazis in 1933, he planned to dedicate its yearly volume to Louise Kayser. In 1930, Stephen Kayser published an article about Fraenger in the *Neuen Mannheimer Zeitung* which Louise Kayser complemented with a portrait painting.⁴¹⁸ Though Fraenger was German Protestant and Stephen Kayser was a deeply secular Jew, the two connected on their interest in religious art.⁴¹⁹

Louise Kayser writes that she became acquainted to her own Judaism through Fraenger, who maintained a demonstrated interest in Jewish art and culture throughout his teaching career. In 1933 he delivered a lecture entitled “Synagogue and Orient” on Jewish influences on Rembrandt.⁴²⁰ He gave the hand-written manuscript for it to Louise Kayser, who once remarked that this document marked her first serious exploration of Judaism in art history.⁴²¹ She also wrote him in 1948 from New York to thank Fraenger for being the first person to give her a “lasting impression” of her own faith, recalling when they visited an Early Modern synagogue in Worms and he taught her about *mikvaot*.⁴²² Kayser wrote: “I will never forget the image of the old synagogue of Worms, which you showed me for the first time – and how we descended the steps to the bath – you touched the step with your lips and moistened your mouth with the water that darkly and dimly reflected our mirror image. You said: ‘How proud you should be that your ancestors cleansed themselves here... thousands of years it [Jewish tradition] persevered and it

⁴¹⁸ Louise Kayser-Darmstädter to Wilhelm Fraenger, 1.8.1948, Wilhelm-Fraenger-Archive, Potsdam. Source found from Helga Schreckenberger, “‘Light from Our Past’: Rückbesinnung auf jüdische Traditionen im amerikanischen Exil am Beispiel der Künstlerin Lulu Kayser-Darmstädter,” in *Ästhetiken des Exils/The Aesthetics of Exile*, trans. Armin Mattes (Rodopi, 2003), 187–208. Louise Kayser-Darmstädter, *Light from Our Past* (New York, 1958).

⁴¹⁹ In the Western art historical canon of the time, paintings of scenes of the Bible dominated narratives of early modern art. Both men had written and spoken publicly about biblical art, and Fraenger had also studied Jewish ritual spaces.

⁴²⁰ Published in Wilhelm Fraenger, *Von Bosch bis Beckmann* (Amsterdam, 1996), 124-51.

⁴²¹ Louise Kayser-Darmstädter to Gustel Fraenger, 1.11.1970, Wilhelm-Fraenger-Archive, Potsdam.

⁴²² *Mikvaot* are Jewish ritual baths.

will live on.”⁴²³ Though in Germany she never created art with Jewish themes, perhaps Fraenger sparked Kayser’s interest in Jewish aesthetics as markers of identity. When they fled from Germany to Czechoslovakia in 1933, she and her husband began to feel invested in the growing project of Jewish art and culture and Kayser’s continuing correspondence with Fraenger reveals her evolution as an artist and curator of Jewish art.

Refugees in Czechoslovakia, Cincinnati, and New York: Louise Kayser’s Quiet Chapters

After two years in Czechoslovakia, Stephen Kayser finally got a teaching job at a university in Brno teaching art history.⁴²⁴ From 1935 to 1938 he taught while Louise corresponded with her family and watched her childhood home be forcibly overtaken and sold by the Nazis. She does not appear to have attained formal work in Czechoslovakia, nor are there records of her painting or exhibiting in these years. It appears to have been an interim period for her in which she did not paint or draw, yet surrounded herself with artists and intellectuals in her husband’s scholarly community. Her son Charles was then a teenager and moved with them.

Their few years in Czechoslovakia were filled with despair even alongside Kayser’s teaching. Louise Kayser’s extended family was decimated across Germany as the Nazis gained power and continued stewing anti-Semitic hatred and violence. Mr. and Mrs. Darmstädter died at home in 1936 within a few months of one another of unclear, perhaps health-related causes, and their other daughter Maria was forced to leave when their home was forcibly auctioned by the Nazis that year. Louise, who was then living in Brno, Czechoslovakia with Stephen, endeavored

⁴²³ Louise Kayser-Darmstädter to Wilhelm Fraenger, 1.8.1948, Wilhelm-Fraenger-Archive, Potsdam. Source found from Helga Schreckenberger, “‘Light from Our Past’: Rückbesinnung auf jüdische Traditionen im amerikanischen Exil am Beispiel der Künstlerin Lulu Kayser-Darmstädter,” in *Ästhetiken des Exils/The Aesthetics of Exile*, trans. Armin Mattes (Rodopi, 2003), 187–208. Louise Kayser-Darmstädter, *Light from Our Past* (New York, 1958).

⁴²⁴ Grace Cohen Grossman, “Dr. Stephen S. Kayser: A Personal Testimonial” (Berkeley, California: Judah L. Magnes Museum, 2000), 1–22.

to help Maria emigrate. She refused both these and her brother's attempts to help her migrate to Switzerland.

In 1938, Hebrew Union College president Julian Morgenstern lobbied the Emergency Committee to Aid Displaced Scholars to help the Kayzers immigrate by way of Amsterdam.⁴²⁵ Upon arrival, Kayser began working at the HUC library in Cincinnati while his 22-year-old son worked in his cousin's meat processing plant, Kahn Meats.⁴²⁶ It remains in question whether Louise Kayser helped Stephen Kayser with his role of organizing HUC library's English-language collections on fine arts and other subjects; she had much more dexterity with English than her husband did, and she was unemployed while in Cincinnati. Their work was likely shared as early as these years, as it was difficult for Louise Kayser to pursue her own meaningful work as a female refugee. In 1940, Louise Kayser received word that her sister Maria Krehbiel was sent to a labor camp. They wrote letters back and forth when they could, but unfortunately, there was nothing Louise could do to help her immigrate at that point. Meanwhile, her son Charles married a Jewish woman from Ohio in 1942, and Louise and Stephen Kayser left later that year for Stephen Kayser's new teaching job on the West Coast. Maria Krehbiel tragically died in Auschwitz in 1943.⁴²⁷

Watercolors and Shipbuilding: Louise Kayser as Artist, Student, and Navy Engineer

⁴²⁵ Year: 1940; Census Place: Cincinnati, Hamilton, Ohio; Roll: m-t0627-03196; Page: 16B; Enumeration District: 91-250. Ancestry.com. 1940 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1940. T627, 4,643 rolls. Accessed January 15, 2019. See also Ancestry.com. *Mannheim, Germany, Family Registers, 1760-1900* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014, accessed January 2, 2019.

⁴²⁶ "Cincinnati's 'Porkopolis' Past Fades as Kahn's Plant Falls," *The Columbus Dispatch*, February 18, 2012, sec. News, <https://www.dispatch.com/article/20120218/news/302189861>.

⁴²⁷ Peter Selg, *From Gurs to Auschwitz* (SteinerBooks, 2013).

When they arrived in California, Louise Kayser's story really began in America because a confluence of factors opened a new working world to her. In 1941, Stephen Kayser was offered a job as the first professor of Judaica at the University of California, Berkeley. Her husband's job offer came amidst societal changes that had an outsized affect on the Bay Area. America had just entered World War II in December of 1940, and a new draft required Dr. Kayser to register and potentially be called to serve as American men were being solicited for the first time to fight in Europe. The post-Depression years inaugurated new airplane factories and shipyards on the West Coast before the war, and during it, they increased dramatically. December 1940 brought a new Bay Area naval shipyard, Richmond's Shipyard, built by Henry Kaiser, the son of German Jewish immigrants (no relation to the Kayzers). From its founding, Richmond's Shipyard was an industry leader in the employment of women; by the end of the war, 27% of its team was female. Other shipyards in the area such as Oakland Shipyard employed 20% women by 1945. In these years the area opened its naval, mechanical, and civil engineering jobs to women both because of a workforce drain (with men leaving for Europe) and because of systemic changes around gender equity. At the same time, Louise Kayser's husband's job represented her first opportunity to study at a university in the U. S. for free. In their first year of living in California, she began studying part time at Berkeley's engineering school, working part time as an engineer at a local shipyard, and also painting portraits and landscapes again. Her shipyard hours were nightly, 4:30pm to 12:30am, to accommodate her student schedule. The ships she helped design were ultimately sold to the U.S. Navy for World War II.⁴²⁸ The Kayser family kept and hung pictures of Louise in a sailor uniform holding building tools in the shipyard. Stephen used to visit her at

⁴²⁸ Helga Schreckenberger, "Light from Our Past': Rückbesinnung auf jüdische Traditionen im amerikanischen Exil am Beispiel der Künstlerin Lulu Kayser-Darmstädter," in *Ästhetiken des Exils/The Aesthetics of Exile*, trans. Armin Mattes (Rodopi, 2003), 187–208.
Louise Kayser-Darmstädter to Wilhelm Fraenger, 1.8.1948, Wilhelm-Fraenger-Archive, Potsdam.

night.⁴²⁹ Louise felt her engineering work and fine arts training were closely related and often wrote of how her painting informed her building.⁴³⁰

In California, Louise Kayser helped write Stephen Kayser's lectures and often sat in on them when she wasn't working. Her grandson recalls she did this until the end of her life and often brought family members and friends with her.⁴³¹ When they first arrived to the west coast, Louise Kayser wrote to her sister that she was particularly excited about her husband's courses on art-connoisseurship as well as a series of lectures at the de Young Museum of San Francisco throughout 1942.⁴³² At the same time she began selling her first paintings to galleries in Oakland and San Francisco and painted portraits for private clients in California.⁴³³ After a few months of Stephen lecturing at the de Young museum, Louise Kayser leveraged their connections to the institution to exhibit her first works of art in the United States at that museum. Her watercolor on posterboard, "Artist in War Time," was a tall 30x40 inches and appeared majestically on its own wall in the 1943 exhibit "Meet the Artist: An Exhibition of Self-Portraits by Living American Artists."⁴³⁴ In the exhibition catalogue Kayser wrote, "This picture is done in watercolor, a technique which I developed for this kind of work in portraying children. It is a product of speed not unlike the ships I am drawing now."⁴³⁵

⁴²⁹ Bennet Kayser. Phone Interviews by Ariel Cohen, September 2, 2020 and January 8, 2021.

⁴³⁰ Helga Schreckenberger, "'Light from Our Past': Rückbesinnung auf jüdische Traditionen im amerikanischen Exil am Beispiel der Künstlerin Lulu Kayser-Darmstädter," in *Ästhetiken des Exils/The Aesthetics of Exile*, trans. Armin Mattes (Rodopi, 2003), 187–208.

Louise Kayser-Darmstädter to Wilhelm Fraenger, 1.8.1948, Wilhelm-Fraenger-Archive, Potsdam.

⁴³¹ Bennet Kayser. Phone Interviews by Ariel Cohen, September 2, 2020 and January 8, 2021.

⁴³² Louise Kayser-Darmstädter. Letter to Maria Krehbiel-Darmstädter, September 30, 1942. Mannheimer Stadtarchiv.

⁴³³ Louise Kayser-Darmstädter to Maria Krehbiel-Darmstädter, September 30, 1942, Mannheimer Stadtarchiv.

⁴³⁴ Walter Heil, *Meet the Artist: An Exhibition of Self-Portraits By Living American Artists* (San Francisco, California: M. H. De Young Memorial Museum, 1943).

⁴³⁵ Walter Heil, *Meet the Artist: An Exhibition of Self-Portraits By Living American Artists* (San Francisco, California: M. H. De Young Memorial Museum, 1943), 74.

From California To New York: 1946 and a Two-For-One Recruitment Process

In March 1946, after much deliberation, JTS began recruiting the Kaysers and several others to the staff of the newly created Jewish Museum. The recruitment process lasted almost half a year as JTS floundered in funding and direction.⁴³⁶ Its leadership spent months considering hiring only part-time employees to cut costs.⁴³⁷ Other records of internal JTS conversations show that JTS also considered hiring three employees for curatorial work, including one research assistant and two head curators. After deciding on émigré scholar Guido Schoenberger as a research assistant, JTS eventually chose one curator, not two, because of limited financial resources. Once they had narrowed down their list to Dr. Gundesheimer, another refugee from Germany, and Stephen Kayser, the Board, Chancellor, and Library staff agreed that hiring both would be ideal. In late April, Finkelstein wrote to Frieda Schiff Warburg to report on the situation: “I am sure that an exhibit arranged with the insight of Doctor Kayser, the specific knowledge of Doctor Schoenberg and the general organizing ability of Doctor Gundesheimer would probably be very good. On the other hand, I do not imagine that we can afford the luxury of employing all three men.”⁴³⁸ After being rejected from the position, Dr. Gundesheimer went on to head the Art History department at Temple University.⁴³⁹

Schiff Warburg was one of the Kaysers’ earliest supporters at JTS and encouraged Finkelstein, Simon Greenberg, and others to hire them. On September 3rd, a few days before their first official visit to the Jewish Museum, she wrote that she was “honored to act as [their]

⁴³⁶ Louis Finkelstein and Frieda Schiff Warburg, March 8, 1946, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴³⁷ Louis Finkelstein to Frieda Schiff Warburg, April 26, 1946, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴³⁸ Louis Finkelstein to Frieda Schiff Warburg, April 26, 1946, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives

⁴³⁹ Louis Finkelstein, and Frieda Schiff Warburg, March 8, 1946. JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

sponsor.”⁴⁴⁰ Perhaps she had offered to pay their airfare or to fund their salaries directly. On September 6th, Louise and Stephen Kayser flew from California to New York for a ten-day visit on flights arranged by JTS administrators. Conversations with Schiff Warburg, Greenberg, and Finkelstein were seldom conducted without Mrs. Kayser present during that visit, though such meetings excluded Greenberg’s and Finkelstein’s wives.⁴⁴¹ A few days after their official visit, JTS asked only Stephen Kayser to be the first head curator and offered only him a salary.

Finkelstein wrote to Schiff Warburg after their visit: "I am of course increasingly happy about... [your approval of the Kaysers after their visit]. He and his wife seem to have made a remarkable impression on everyone whom they have met here."⁴⁴² Stephen Kayser wrote Louis Finkelstein to thank him on behalf of he and his wife for JTS’s hospitality and mentioned his gratitude that Louise Kayser was included in everything, both professional and personal, during the trip. He wrote, “Needless to say more about the many other impressions my wife and I had. I only want to express my particular gratitude for enabling us to have seen all these things together.”⁴⁴³ JTS wrote a moving-cost check that was inadequate to cover their expenses and offered a relatively low salary for only one of them, and yet, both Kaysers looked forward to

⁴⁴⁰ Frieda Schiff Warburg. Letter to Mr. Finkelstein. “Letterhead: Woodlands, White Plains, N. Y.,” September 3, 1946. JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁴¹ Louis Finkelstein to Frieda Schiff Warburg, August 30, 1946, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁴² Louis Finkelstein. Letter to Frieda Schiff Warburg, September 16, 1946. JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁴³ Stephen S. Kayser to President Finkelstein, “460 North 14th Street, San Jose 11, California,” September 29, 1946, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 3: Museum: Correspondences & Memoranda, 1946 - 1947, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

creatively working toward a noble cause that hit close to home for them both.⁴⁴⁴ “Any amount that is feasible right now will be welcome,” Kayser wrote.⁴⁴⁵

Stephen was hired, both Kaysers began corresponding meaningfully with JTS. Stephen often included Louise’s remarks in many of his letters, in which she weighed in on interior design matters and donor relations as well as exhibition ideas.⁴⁴⁶ Others at JTS acknowledged them as a couple and a team once they arrived. When Finkelstein considered hiring outside staff to help with the museum’s interior decoration, he received recommendations from Louise Kayser about Dr. Elizabeth Moses, head of the De Young museum in San Francisco.⁴⁴⁷ One of Stephen Kayser’s letters to Schiff Warburg indicated the latter’s intimate familiarity with Louise’s art practice well before JTS hired her.

After their visit, Stephen Kayser wrote to Louis Finkelstein about his time in New York:

To march in one line with the most outstanding scholars of this country in the field of Judaism became of lasting influence on my whole attitude towards the duties to which I am now looking forward. It was, as if my ancestors on my father's side who were all outstanding Talmudic scholars would have looked down upon me. The other great impression I received during our visit to Mrs. Frieda Warburg. It was as if I would be entrusted with a precious heritage. I felt that I am not just taking over the care for a building but the obligation to carry on the spirit of noble tradition in which it was once erected.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁴ Stephen S. Kayser. Letter to Miss (Edythe) Friedman. “460 North 14th St., San Jose 11, California,” December 1, 1946. JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 3: Museum: Correspondences & Memoranda. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Edythe N. Friedman. Letter to Doctor Stephen Kayser, December 6, 1946. JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 3: Museum: Correspondences & Memoranda. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁴⁵ Stephen S. Kayser to Miss (Edythe) Friedman, “460 North 14th St., San Jose 11, California,” December 1, 1946, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 3: Museum: Correspondences & Memoranda, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁴⁶ Stephen S. Kayser to Mrs. (Frieda) Warburg, November 1, 1946, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 3: Museum: Correspondences & Memoranda, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁴⁷ Louis Finkelstein to Frieda Schiff Warburg, November 5, 1946, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series C, 1945 - 1946, Box 55, Folder 15: Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁴⁸ Stephen S. Kayser to President Finkelstein, “460 North 14th Street, San Jose 11, California,” September 29, 1946, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 3: Museum: Correspondences & Memoranda, 1946 - 1947, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

Louise Kayser was only present in the shadows of this letter, as Stephen discusses “our” visit to Frieda Warburg. And yet this letter illuminates the couple’s shared vision for the Jewish Museum, foreshadowing Louise Kayser’s unique role in the years to come as a living artist working and living in a museum.

The Making of a Modern Judaica Artist/Curator: The First Year at the Jewish Museum (1946-7)

The formal opening of the Jewish Museum in 1947 was accompanied by a sense of cultural revival for postwar American Jewish life. The “living” metaphor extended even to the idea of the museum itself as a living organism. “If we are to judge from the plans for the Jewish Museum announced by Dr. Kayser,” wrote the author of “A Live Museum,” a report in *The Reconstructionist*, “‘something new has been added’ to the function of museums. According to Dr. Kayser, the Museum will not only bring the Jewish past to life. It will give ‘a comprehensive picture of Jewish artistic activity in the present.’”⁴⁴⁹ The author went on to explain that this new kind of museum would embody living Jewish art. Rather than a museum that felt like a finished history book, this one would be a living, ever-evolving space for both Jewish art commemoration and practice. Stephen Kayser described the experience of his first year at the Jewish Museum as “leaving the study hall... and entering into the task of forming a unit... a house and a collection.”⁴⁵⁰ If Stephen felt as though he left academia to focus on curation, Louise never left her art practice to focus on curation. Rather, she moved her art practice *into* the Jewish Museum, encouraging its development as a space for imagining the aesthetics of Jewish life in America.

⁴⁴⁹ “A Live Museum,” *The Reconstructionist* 13, no. 6 (May 2, 1947): 6.

⁴⁵⁰ Grace Cohen Grossman, “Dr. Stephen S. Kayser: A Personal Testimonial” (Berkeley, California: Judah L. Magnes Museum, 2000), 2.

Kayser, whose English was nearly perfect and less accented than that of her husband, became an important yet concealed arbiter between Schiff Warburg and JTS on museum matters.⁴⁵¹ Kayser often wrote letters to Finkelstein detailing Schiff Warburg's thoughts on the museum's development when she visited it. Finkelstein then regularly followed up with Schiff Warburg directly to ask for particular donations, such as a piano for the music room at the museum which would hold live performances.⁴⁵² Kayser scheduled meetings alone with Schiff Warburg and gave her individual tours of the space without her husband. In his own letters to Schiff Warburg, Stephen Kayser often invoked his wife's co-presence in the communication, either directly or by using the first-person plural, as in phrases like "we place the object" in a particular spot or "we set aside two rooms" for particular exhibitions.⁴⁵³ By the end of 1947, Finkelstein began publicly acknowledging their dual role."⁴⁵⁴

In 1947, Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR), an American organization that assumed trusteeship of heirless Jewish cultural property after the war, gifted many of its objects to the Jewish Museum. The trio of Kayser and Dr. Schoenberger were tasked to process these items.⁴⁵⁵ None of them could bring themselves to physically enter the room at first, recalled

⁴⁵¹ In the 1940s it was common for male academics to work alongside their wives. At the time, women had little to no possibility of teaching in colleges and it was difficult for them to attain advanced degrees. Many were glad to be participating in their husbands' intellectual and artistic lives, as Louise Kayser was. Vladimir Nabokov, for example, showed up to class with his wife who he often called "my assistant." Stacy Schiff, "Mr. and Mrs. Nabokov," *The New Yorker*, February 3, 1997, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1997/02/10/the-genius-and-mrs-genius>.

⁴⁵² Simon Greenberg to Mrs. Felix Warburg, April 25, 1947, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 3: Museum: Correspondences & Memoranda, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁵³ Stephen S. Kayser. Letter to Mrs. Felix M. Warburg, Meadow Farm, White Plains and CC: Dr. Simon Greenberg, October 3, 1947. JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 4: Museum. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Dr. Stephen Kayser to Dr. Simon Greenberg et al., "Re: Moving of the Collections Etc. to 1109 Fifth Ave.," January 31, 1947, Jewish Museum Papers, ARC 60, Box 1, Folder 1: Administration - Museum Committee Minutes & Correspondence Referring to Dr. Kayser, Curator, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁵⁴ Louis Finkelstein to Frieda Schiff Warburg, October 9, 1947, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Series D, 1947, Box 63, Folder 17, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁵⁵ Elisabeth Gallas, "Locating the Jewish Future: The Restoration of Looted Cultural Property in Early Postwar Europe," *Naharaim* 9, no. 1–2 (January 1, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1515/naha-2015-0001>; Herman, Dana (2008). *Hashavat Avedah: a history of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc (PhD thesis)*. Montreal: Department of History, [McGill University](http://www.mcgill.ca).

Grace Cohen Grossman, “They were overwhelmed with a sense of grief and loss.”⁴⁵⁶ Other sources testify to a shared husband-wife role in co-curating exhibitions together from the beginning of their time at the Jewish Museum.⁴⁵⁷ In Cohen Grossman’s interviews with Kayser in the 1980s, he told her that the museum got a “two-fer” because Louise worked full time without pay.⁴⁵⁸

In addition to being an integral part of a trio curatorial team and a distinctive intermediary between donors and the museum, Louise Kayser became a Judaica artist in her first year at the Jewish Museum when she created biblical stained-glass windows for a synagogue in suburban Philadelphia.⁴⁵⁹ Betty Greenberg, co-author of the famous Jewish aesthetics book *The Jewish Home Beautiful* (1941) whose husband Simon was Acting President of JTS at the time, initially connected Kayser to Har Zion Temple.⁴⁶⁰ Early JTS objects specialist Paul Romanoff had previously spoken about Jewish art alongside the Har Zion choir before the war, so JTS had a longstanding relationship with the community.⁴⁶¹ When Kayser received the commission,

⁴⁵⁶ Grace Cohen Grossman, “Dr. Stephen S. Kayser: A Personal Testimonial” (Berkeley, California: Judah L. Magnes Museum, 2000), 8.

⁴⁵⁷ Stephen S. Kayser, Curator to Mrs. Florence Slobin, Jewish Theological Seminary, “The Jewish Museum Under the Auspices of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America,” April 29, 1947, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 16: Museum, Stephen Kayser, 1947 - 1948, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Avi Decter, *Interpreting American Jewish History at Museums and Historic Sites*, Interpreting History (Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2017), 202.

⁴⁵⁸ Grace Cohen Grossman, email interview April 6, 2020. Original interviews from the early 1980s.

⁴⁵⁹ Louise D. Kayser, New York, 1958, “A Biographical Note from the Artist,” in *Light From Our Past: A Spiritual History of the Jewish People Expressed in 12 Stained Glass Windows Designed by Louise D. Kayser for Har Zion Temple, Philadelphia* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1959), unmarked page numbers; “Dr. Simon Greenberg Named Acting President of Jewish Theological Seminary for 1948-9,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Daily News Bulletin*, May 25, 1948, Vol. XV, No. 121 (30th year) edition, http://pdfs.jta.org/1948/1948-05-25_121.pdf?_ga=2.260016842.1104201408.1615226473-474141236.1612903271.

⁴⁶⁰ *The Jewish Home Beautiful* was the most enduring and successful of all Women’s League for Conservative Judaism publications. With 13 printings between 1941 and 1975, it helped shift and advance the physical artistic elements of Jewish rituals in homes and in communal Jewish spaces, both. Betty D. Greenberg and Althea O. Silverman, *The Jewish Home Beautiful* (Women’s League of the United Synagogue of America, 1947); Ken Koltun-Fromm, *Imagining Jewish Authenticity: Vision and Text in American Jewish Thought* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2015), 76.

⁴⁶¹ “SYNAGOGUE SERVICES: ADATH JESHURUN Services,” *The Jewish Exponent* (1887-1990); Philadelphia, Penn., April 3, 1936.

various scholars at JTS helped her with the ideas behind the windows; still, the execution of them was entirely her own craftsmanship. She wrote:

In the very first year of our museum work ... Har Zion Temple entrusted me with the designing of its stained-glass windows. I found that I would utilize all my previous experience as portraitist, stage designer, draftsman of blue-prints and architectural drawings, for this big project which involved the use and mastery of a new medium and... intensive study, contemplation, discussion and experiment... Unforgettable are the many hours we spent with the late Professor Louis Ginzberg discussing the contents of the various windows. His wisdom and profound learning became a main source of inspiration. The lively criticism of his beloved wife, Adele, added greatly to those memorable evenings.⁴⁶²

It was her first foray into the medium, but her experience in the fine arts made the work of learning it feel easy to her. Kayser wrote that in order to create the Har Zion windows she “would utilize all my previous experience as a portraitist, stage designer, draftsman of blue-prints and architectural drawings for this big project which involved the use and master of a new medium, and five years of intensive study, contemplation, discussion and experiment.”⁴⁶³ Stain glass windows have come to characterize medieval church architecture in Europe and have been used in United States synagogue architecture since the late 19th century.⁴⁶⁴ Like many other art historians, Stephen Kayser studied and lectured on stained glass windows, so when Louise Kayser asked her husband to serve as research assistant on the project he helped her conceive of ideas for different scenes, including an Emancipation scene that included ghettos, Herzl, and

⁴⁶² Louise D. Kayser, New York, 1958, “A Biographical Note From the Artist,” in *Light From Our Past: A Spiritual History of the Jewish People Expressed in 12 Stained Glass Windows Designed by Louise D. Kayser for Har Zion Temple, Philadelphia* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1959), unmarked page numbers.

⁴⁶³ Louise D. Kayser, New York, 1958, “A Biographical Note from the Artist,” in *Light from Our Past: A Spiritual History of the Jewish People Expressed in 12 Stained Glass Windows Designed by Louise D. Kayser for Har Zion Temple, Philadelphia* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1959), 1.

⁴⁶⁴ Jenna Weissman Joselit and 2012, “Through Stained Glass, Brightly,” *The Forward*, accessed March 8, 2021, <https://forward.com/culture/157730/through-stained-glass-brightly/>.

Talmudic academies.⁴⁶⁵ In January 1947, a few months before the stained-glass windows commission, Stephen Kayser lectured on Jewish art at Har Zion.⁴⁶⁶

Stained-glass windows had been used before for synagogues, but certainly were not trendy at the time. At a conference on synagogue architecture held in 1947 in New York, art and architecture historians and religion scholars expressed the opinion that stained glass windows were outdated for synagogues. Yet, undeterred by opposition, Louise Kayser began work on the windows in bold hues that others criticized as too bright.⁴⁶⁷ Louise Kayser's dedication to traditional, early modern Jewish aesthetics stood out in a New York art scene already moving toward modernity and abstraction. As famed female Jewish art critic Rose Goldstein wrote in her review:

With the devotion of a medieval artist... Louise Kayser tried to incorporate... all the episodes, trends, memorable figures and sites required by the program. To cite an example, the window devoted to the Emancipation in the period of the Enlightenment displays the facade of a university building, a Jewish peddler, the president of the Napoleonic Sanhedrin, a Jew in modern clothes, the arrest of Dreyfus, Theodor Herzl in one of his typical poses, the chimneys of Auschwitz, [and] the torch of the Statue of Liberty in New York.⁴⁶⁸

At the time, the Jewish Museum was considering hiring Marc Chagall to create a mural for the entryway, but the project never materialized.⁴⁶⁹ Chagall would become renowned for his stained-glass windows only in the early 1960s when he built the windows of the Jerusalem Hadassah hospital, and he would go on to create more in New York for the United Nations building, in Chicago for the 1977 American Bicentennial, and for churches in Germany, France, the UK, and

⁴⁶⁵ Rose B. Goldstein, "Explains Har Zion Windows," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 29, 1959, sec. Book News.

⁴⁶⁶ "Dr. Stephen Kayser at Har Zion Mon," *The Jewish Exponent (1887-1990)*, January 31, 1947.

⁴⁶⁷ Wischnitzer, Rachel. "Light from Our Past (Book Review)." *Jewish Social Studies; New York* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 1961): 62–63.

⁴⁶⁸ Rachel Wischnitzer, "Light from Our Past (Book Review)," *Jewish Social Studies; New York* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 1961): 62–63.

⁴⁶⁹ Chagall began to concern himself with glass-windows only in 1958: "In 1958 Chagall got to know Charles Marq, this incomparable glass painter and heir of a century old tradition." In Charles Sorlier, *Marc Chagall* (Munich, 1991), 206f.

Switzerland. When Kayser made the Har Zion windows, Chagall had not yet contemplated working in that medium and was focused instead on Surrealist painting and engravings.⁴⁷⁰

The Har Zion commission also eventually included an accompanying book with an introductory essay written by Kayser. Reviewing the text years later, the premier Jewish art historian Rachel Wischnitzer wrote, “New Yorkers are used to seeing him [Stephen Kayser] and his wife as a team in their work at the Jewish Museum. But if Louise Kayser never addresses the audiences there, here [in the Har Zion book] she felt able to say a few words herself and about herself.”⁴⁷¹ Kayser wrote her story for an American audience for the first time:

A few years before the Nazi revolution, I had my own art school with classes in composition and portraiture. Then came Hitler, emigration to Czechoslovakia and then to America where I had to begin all over again. My husband and I lived in California for seven years. Then he was called to New York to become curator of the new Museum of the Jewish Theological Seminary housed in the former home of Mr. and Mrs. Felix M. Warburg. A new life began as we established our living quarters in the museum building.⁴⁷²

1947, the same year that her “new life” began at the Jewish Museum, was also the year Louise Kayser fell ill with throat cancer. The Har Zion project, she wrote, was her source of strength while undergoing surgery and other treatments.⁴⁷³ Though the Har Zion windows were appreciated by their temple community, they only made a quiet murmur amongst art critics and Jews and were mentioned in passing in just several articles. The 1959 book about them that aimed to “make it possible for a wider public to draw inspiration” from the windows came out right after Chagall was commissioned to make the windows for Jerusalem’s Hadassah

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⁴⁷¹ Rachel Wischnitzer, “Light from Our Past (Book Review),” *Jewish Social Studies; New York* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 1961): 62–63.

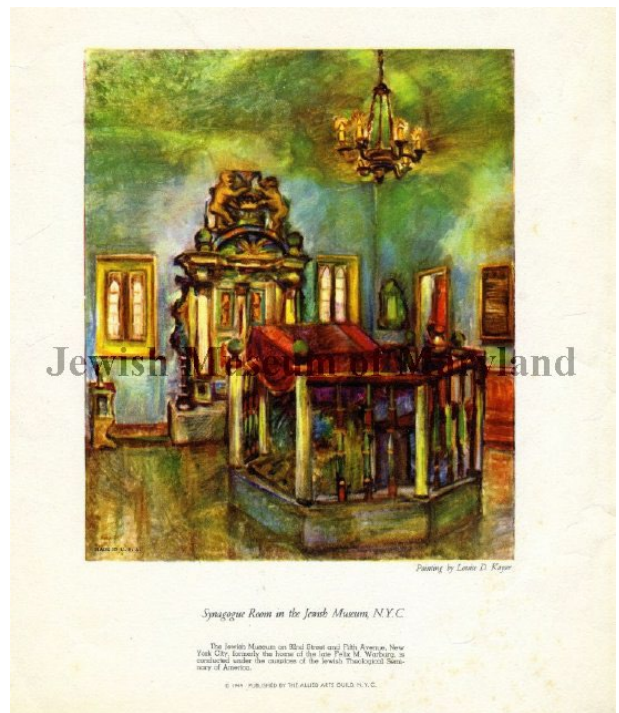
⁴⁷² Louise D. Kayser, New York, 1958, “A Biographical Note from the Artist,” in *Light From Our Past: A Spiritual History of the Jewish People Expressed in 12 Stained Glass Windows Designed by Louise D. Kayser for Har Zion Temple, Philadelphia* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1959), unmarked page numbers.

⁴⁷³ Louise D. Kayser, New York, 1958, “A Biographical Note From the Artist,” in *Light From Our Past: A Spiritual History of the Jewish People Expressed in 12 Stained Glass Windows Designed by Louise D. Kayser for Har Zion Temple, Philadelphia* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1959).

hospital.⁴⁷⁴ In other words, though Kayser was working in the medium long before, only his work in Jerusalem piqued the broad American interest in the medium that likely led to the publication of this book. Nonetheless, after creating the Har Zion windows Louise Kayser continued to create Jewish art, diversifying her mediums. She held her first one-woman show in America at the Jewish Museum the following year.

1948-1949: Early Exhibitions and Louise's First One-Woman Show

After the Har Zion windows and after her health scare, Louise Kayser began to develop a growing identity intimately linked with the physical space and mission of the museum. Here, she wrote to Wilhelm Fraenger in 1948, “[I have] acquired a certain knowledge about the Jewish religion, about the customs and celebrations, about the ceremonies and their sacredness.”⁴⁷⁵ In the museum walls she was



becoming a Jewish artist and curator at once. In 1948, the Jewish Museum presented an exhibition which circulated to Jewish community centers across the country over the course of

⁴⁷⁴ Goldstein, David, Foreword, *Light from Our Past: A Spiritual History of the Jewish People Expressed in 12 Stained Glass Windows Designed by Louise D. Kayser for Har Zion Temple, Philadelphia* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1959).

⁴⁷⁵ Louise Kayser-Darmstädter to Wilhelm Fraenger, 11.8.1948, Wilhelm-Fraenger-Archive, Potsdam. In an obituary on Stephen Kayser he is depicted in front of the painting that Lulu is describing here, see *Jewish Art*, vol. 15/1989, 120. Source found from Helga Schreckenberger, “‘Light from Our Past’: Rückbesinnung auf jüdische Traditionen im amerikanischen Exil am Beispiel der Künstlerin Lulu Kayser-Darmstädter,” in *Ästhetiken des Exils/The Aesthetics of Exile*, trans. Armin Mattes (Rodopi, 2003), 187–208. Louise Kayser-Darmstädter, *Light from Our Past* (New York, 1958).

the following year. Among the works were “Synagogue Room in the Jewish Museum” by Louise D. Kayser, her first work to be displayed in the Jewish Museum.⁴⁷⁶ It was a painting of a room she had designed at the museum:

My last painting is a view into an old peasant’s synagogue. Since we have built a very nice altar here in the museum, originally from Wilhelm and from 1720... and since I designed and decorated the entire room... myself, I captured it in a painting... The walls are a strong blue – the ceiling bright green – the columns and window frames a warm ocher, altar and lectern (Binna) grey with colorful drawings. Small curtains in alcoves in strong red colors, in front of them are the old sacral objects. The unity of the room is [ensured] by the nice colors, as the candelabrum is from Danzig, the cleansing vessel from another place in Europe, the eternal light again from another unknown synagogue, and the grand rug has been brought from Poland. All these sacred objects have found an asylum here.⁴⁷⁷

It was in her upstairs studio that she commemorated her own downstairs curatorial work in this painting. Though shared her living space with her husband, she wrote of her studio as a space of total solitude:

My special luck is the large studio on the VI floor, in which I have the total isolation that I need for my own work... In this atelier are a few saved treasures. The cross from the Liebfrauenkirche... Francis Jamme’s poems with drawings (Prayers of Humility), your photograph of [Hans] Jüdel, which I still love very much.⁴⁷⁸

She occasionally welcomed artists such as Marc Chagall into the space, and she was especially excited to invite him to create a series of murals for the Jewish Museum entrance. She saw her

⁴⁷⁶ “JWB Circulating 33 Paintings by Jewish Artists,” *The Jewish Exponent (1887-1990)*; Philadelphia, Penn., December 17, 1948.

⁴⁷⁷ Louise Kayser-Darmstädter to Wilhelm Fraenger, 11.8.1948, Wilhelm-Fraenger-Archive, Potsdam. In an obituary on Stephen Kayser he is depicted in front of the painting that Lulu is describing here, see *Jewish Art*, vol. 15/1989, 120. Source found from Helga Schreckenberger, “‘Light from Our Past’: Rückbesinnung auf jüdische Traditionen im amerikanischen Exil am Beispiel der Künstlerin Lulu Kayser-Darmstädter,” in *Ästhetiken des Exils/The Aesthetics of Exile*, trans. Armin Mattes (Rodopi, 2003), 187–208. Louise Kayser-Darmstädter, *Light from Our Past* (New York, 1958).

⁴⁷⁸ Louise Kayser-Darmstädter to Wilhelm Fraenger, 30.5.1948, Wilhelm-Fraenger-Archive, Potsdam. From Helga Schreckenberger, “‘Light from Our Past’: Rückbesinnung auf jüdische Traditionen im amerikanischen Exil am Beispiel der Künstlerin Lulu Kayser-Darmstädter,” in *Ästhetiken des Exils/The Aesthetics of Exile*, trans. Armin Mattes (Rodopi, 2003), 187–208. Louise Kayser-Darmstädter, *Light from Our Past* (New York, 1958).

studio as the perfect site for him to work.⁴⁷⁹ Unfortunately, the Jewish Museum didn't have the financial resources for the murals. Yet Chagall and other artists would often visit Louise in her studio. Together they set a precedent that led to the foundation of a Judaica artists' workshop in 1956, the Tobe Pascher workshop.

In its first several years, the Jewish Museum consciously promoted an image of itself as joining together the “anonymous builders of our ancient synagogues and our modern artist.”⁴⁸⁰ Yet this campaign did not publicize Louise Kayser or her life as an artist inside the museum. In his writings, speeches, and tours, curator Stephen Kayser linked ancient Judaica and synagogue architecture to modern Jewish paintings and objects. He wrote about the museum's first exhibition as exemplary of the museum mission to be “a home for living Jewish artists.”⁴⁸¹ Strikingly, though, he never mentioned his wife's artworks outright in a public forum nor in writings, though he did single out other Judaica artists such as Chagall and cited their work as part of a broader project to revitalize Jewish aesthetics. Louise Kayser's gender imperceptibly limited the reach of her public persona while male artists occupied museum publicity.

This is best evidenced by her first solo exhibition in America.⁴⁸² In March 1949, Kayser made history by presenting the first one-woman show at the Jewish Museum. The exhibition stood alongside that of Polish postwar immigrant painter Isaac Lichtenstein who, like Chagall, was part of a group of migrants from eastern Europe who trained in Paris and elsewhere. This well-known cadre of Jewish *male* artists became famous for turning to Jewish themes after the

⁴⁷⁹ Louise Kayser-Darmstädter to Wilhelm Fraenger, 11.8.1948, Wilhelm-Fraenger-Archive, Potsdam. From Helga Schreckenberger, trans. Armin Mattes (Rodopi, 2003), 187–208. Louise Kayser-Darmstädter, *Light from Our Past* (New York, 1958).

⁴⁸⁰ Dr. Alfred Werner. “A Shrine of Jewish Art.” *The Jewish Criterion*, October 1, 1948.

⁴⁸¹ Stephen Kayser, “Inaugural Exhibition: The Giving of the Law and The Ten Commandments (Jewish Art of Late Antiquity, Works of Contemporary Artists, The Torah In Synagogue Art),” April 6 1948, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 4: Museum, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁸² “N. Y. Bar Groups Praise Senate on Court Action,” *New York Herald Tribune* (1926-1962); *New York, N.Y.*, March 23, 1949.

war. A 1949 article about the museum's then-current exhibitions reveals how the *New York Times*, typical of other news sources at the time, perpetuated the gender inequity of a developing Jewish art historical canon. The author detailed Lichtenstein's training and analyzed his works:

Born in East Prussia, Lichtenstein received academic training in Krakow and lived and worked later in Russia, Italy, France, Spain, Scandinavia, England, the Near East and this country. His paintings in this twenty-five-year retrospective range from a kind of personal impression through expressionism to work in which he has assimilated elements of cubism. Subjects include group compositions of musicians and scholars, flower paintings and a darkly glowing ghetto reminiscence with stained glass tones. One canvas, "The Old Tree," seems to symbolize patience and endurance. His wiry line graphic work is individual and effective.

At the same time, (s)he completely ignored Kayser's professional background and used empty adjectives to describe her paintings:

Mrs. Kayser is a spirited colorist. Her still-lives, based on ritual and ceremonial objects, are among her best work and in portraits she reveals decided ability to individualize her subjects and convey character. In Palestinian and Californian landscape examples there is decided feeling for light and atmospheric effects. A group of well-planned designs for stained glass windows with Biblical themes is also being shown.⁴⁸³

Even Kayser's brother, who played a behind-the-scenes role at the museum, was granted more lasting recognition than her because he was credited in catalogues and in books that last in institutional records. In 1947, Kayser facilitated her brother's immigration to the United States from Switzerland by securing a job for him as the Art Historian/photographer of the Jewish Museum.⁴⁸⁴ From 1949 through the 1960s, all photographs in catalogues from the Jewish Museum were marked with his name as he worked alongside his sister. Her life was suddenly

⁴⁸³ H. D, "2 NEW EXHIBITIONS AT JEWISH MUSEUM; Oils by Isaac Lichtenstein and Paintings by Louise Kayser Are Placed on Display," *The New York Times*, April 28, 1949, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1949/04/28/archives/2-new-exhibitions-at-jewish-museum-oils-by-isaac-lichtenstein-and.html>.

⁴⁸⁴ Peter Selg, *From Gurs to Auschwitz* (SteinerBooks, 2013).

embodying Stephen Kayser's written intention that the Jewish Museum represent "the union of past and present creativity" and offer "the stimulus for future artistic development."⁴⁸⁵

Louise Kayser's curatorial work in the first two years of the Jewish Museum is well documented outside of her own exhibition. In a majority of letters to patrons, scholars, and administrators they signed "Stephen *and* Louise Kayser" In updates on the museum's progress to Simon Greenberg they wrote, for example, "*We* have made a few improvements meanwhile with regard to labeling etc."⁴⁸⁶ The onset of the 1950s would bring Louise Kayser more recognition for her curatorial work and more opportunities to display her Judaica. Her shifting role at the Jewish Museum coincided with the museum's increased visibility across the country.

The First Half of the 1950s: Renown, Circulation, and a New Era for the Jewish Museum

Grace Cohen Grossman once wrote that Stephen conceived the exhibitions while Louise "coordinated the display of them."⁴⁸⁷ In the early 1950s, she solidified their partnership in curatorial work, beginning with a 1951 trip to Miami. The couple flew down from New York together with 200 objects to inaugurate a new branch of the JTS museum in the Miami Beach Jewish Community Center. The centerpieces of the exhibition were a 129-year old Torah ark and an Eternal Light taken by the Nazis from a Hungarian synagogue.⁴⁸⁸ In 1954, the Kaysers co-curated an exhibition entitled "Under Freedom" at the Jewish Museum.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁵ Goldberg, Hannah L. "The Jewish Museum - An Interview with Its Curator, Stephen Kayser." *The Reconstructionist: A Journal of Contemporary Jewish Thought & Practice* 16, no. 8 (1950): 10.

⁴⁸⁶ Stephen & Louise Kayser to Dr. (Simon) Greenberg, November 8, 1948, JTSA Museum Records, RG 25, Box 1, Folder 17: Museum, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁸⁷ Joseph Gutmann. "Gutmann On Art: Kayser Was Museum Pioneer." *Jewish Post*. June 14, 2000, Marion County edition. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=JPOST20000614-01.1.11&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN----->.

⁴⁸⁸ "Dedication of Center Museum Scheduled for Sunday." *The Jewish Floridian*, March 2, 1951.

⁴⁸⁹ Avi Decter, *Interpreting American Jewish History at Museums and Historic Sites*, Interpreting History (Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2017), 202; Feingold, Jessica. Letter to Aunt Frieda, May 16, 1954. JTSA

Whereas in the early years of the Jewish Museum Louise Kayser wrote herself to donors and to JTS figures about her husband's curation, by the 1950s, JTS Chancellor (1940-1972) Louis Finkelstein's longtime assistant Jessica Feingold shifted into this role, communicating about both Louise and Stephen Kayser's work. Feingold often visited the Jewish Museum in its off hours to find Louise Kayser "just inside the door," ready to give her a personal tour to teach her about the objects on display so she could communicate back to JTS patrons.⁴⁹⁰ Feingold often told Schiff Warburg of the curatorial work of Louise Kayser and communicated Kayser's import to the Jewish Museum's exhibitions. She wrote to Schiff Warburg that an exhibit of mosaics inspired by Louis Ginzberg's 1909 chronicle, *The Legends of the Jews*, was "arranged with her [Louise's] usual wonderful touch... in your former kitchen."⁴⁹¹ She wrote often to Schiff Warburg to convey Mrs. Kayser's requests to borrow items for special exhibitions.⁴⁹² She even seems to have worked directly for Mrs. Kayser to employ the help of other JTS staff:

Mrs. Kayser asked me last night whether I knew about the pastel pictures which Mrs. Warburg once showed her. According to Mrs. Kayser they were offered to The Jewish Museum, perhaps about the time that the big house was stripped. Mrs. Kayser recalled that

Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Box 161, Folder 28: 1954, Frieda Schiff Warburg. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

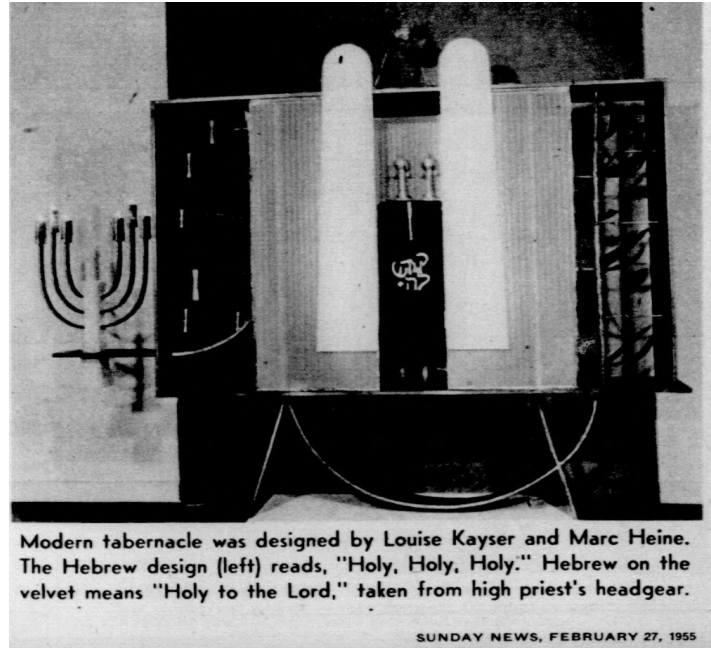
⁴⁹⁰ Louis Finkelstein to Frieda Schiff Warburg, December 12, 1956, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Box 151, Folder 34: Jessica Feingold to Frieda Schiff Warburg or "Aunt Frieda," Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁹¹ Louis Finkelstein to Frieda Schiff Warburg, December 12, 1956, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Box 151, Folder 34: Jessica Feingold to Frieda Schiff Warburg or "Aunt Frieda," Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁹² Feingold, Jessica to Aunt Frieda, December 15, 1955. JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Box 142, Folder 46: 1955, Frieda Schiff Warburg. Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives; Unknown to Aunt Frieda, December 15, 1955, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Box 142, Folder 46: 1955, Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

the Museum did not take them, and said she did not remember that disposition was made of them. I wonder whether you know or could find one without consulting Mrs. Warburg or without going to too much trouble.⁴⁹³

At the same time, Louise Kayser was continuing to exhibit her works at the Jewish Museum. In its 1955 tercentenary exhibition Louise Kayser included a modern tabernacle she co-created with another artist, Marc Heine. It included a velvet Torah covering and accompanying candelabra.⁴⁹⁴



Feingold wrote to Schiff Warburg that the first floor was “devoted to synagogue objects” arranged by Kayser, and “tapestry Torah curtains designed handsomely by Mrs. Kayser” formed the centerpiece of the exhibition.⁴⁹⁵ In these years Kayser continued displaying her art at the Jewish Museum and working on commission for local community centers and other endeavors.

As Louise Kayser moved from an invisible communicator to a visible curator, she also continued to consider the ways in which the Jewish Museum could serve as a hub for living Jewish artists. The Kaysers visited Rebbetzin Mignon Rubenovitz’s museum at Mishkan Tefila in Boston in the early 1950s. They clearly began to differentiate themselves from projects such as these, which seemed to freeze Jewish objects in time and behind glass containers.⁴⁹⁶ In 1956, a group of donors granted her and her husband the funds to inaugurate a Judaica workshop in the

⁴⁹³ Feingold, Jessica to Unknown, December 15, 1955, JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Box 142, Folder 46: 1955, Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁹⁴ “300 Years,” *Daily News (1920 - 2009)*, February 27, 1955.

⁴⁹⁵ Unknown. Letter to Aunt Frieda, December 15, 1955. JTSA Records, Record Group 1, General Files, Box 142, Folder 46: 1955, Frieda Schiff Warburg, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁴⁹⁶ Announcement by Mignon Rubenovitz. Herbert J. Selib, Walter C. Feinberg, and Editorial Advisors: Rabbi Herman Rubenovitz, Mignon L. Rubenovitz, Rabbi Israel J. Kazis, Abraham A. Bloom, Harry L. Katz, eds. *Temple Mishkan Tefila: A History, 1858-195*. 1st ed. Newton, Ma.: Temple Mishkan Tefila, Unknown.

Jewish Museum's basement. This defining moment marked the culmination of the Kayser's and Schiff Warburg's shared vision for a living Jewish museum.

1956-57: Tobe Pascher Workshop and Kayser's Growing Expertise in the Judaica Art Market

In 1956, the Kayser's officially founded the Tobe Pascher workshop in the Jewish Museum basement. The workshop's mission, "to apply the principles of contemporary design to Judaica," embodied Louise Kayser's hopes for Judaica: that it could be modern, efficient, functional, and also represent an international Jewish heritage and tradition.⁴⁹⁷ Inspired by ancient aesthetics and motivated by modern Jewish needs, artists who frequented the basement of the Jewish Museum in these years were often ones Louise Kayser had invited to her small upstairs studio in the late 1940s. From its beginnings the Kayser's linked the workshop to the cultural projects of Israel such as Bezalel and the international, artistic visionaries of Zionism like Abel Pann and Ephraim Moses Lilien. Louise Kayser wrote of how the visibility and publicity of the workshop was stimulating the Israeli economy by encouraging tourism and inspiring donations to Bezalel.⁴⁹⁸ The Kayser's chose Israeli craftsman and Bezalel professor Ludwig Wolpert to head the workshop, where Wolpert and his wife and daughter each monitored the progress of different works, "touched up new designs," and created a fun and social atmosphere filled with "banter."⁴⁹⁹ Wolpert was convinced by his experiences as a Zionist

⁴⁹⁷ Joseph Gutmann, "Zabari Retrospective," *The Jewish Post*, September 17, 1986, Hoosier State Chronicles: Indiana's Digital Historic Newspaper Program.

⁴⁹⁸ Louise Kayser, "Creating Antiques for Our Descendants," *Outlook* 27, no. 3 (March 3, 1957): 7.

⁴⁹⁹ Kenneth A. Briggs, "Museum Show Honors Wolpert," *The New York Times*, July 4, 1976, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/07/04/archives/museum-show-honors-wolpert.html>.

immigrant to Israel that “new designs are needed to revive the spare look of the distant past,” and that aesthetics could revive the Jewish people in America.⁵⁰⁰

In 1957, one year after the opening of the Tobe Pascher workshop, Louise Kayser wrote a seminal article that encapsulated her goals for the museum, the workshop, and herself. “Creating Antiques for Our Descendants” is her only published piece in English outside of an exhibition catalogue. She wrote of the high artistic standards of the workshop and its place in a larger world of art-market goods:

The School for the designing of ceremonial objects... above all should spread the concept of what represents genuine contemporary feeling in [Jewish ritual objects]. In this connection, the aid of an accomplished craftsman from Israel was secured - Ludwig Wolpert, who during the last twenty years created in Israel some new kind of style, based upon tradition but differing from the forms which were employed during the last 200 years, which cannot be used effectively today. This approach does not represent a devaluation of old objects, but makes us aware of the fact that the old cannot always be imitated or emulated. We have to put something reflecting our own time and feeling in its place. The main objective of this new School is, therefore, to teach the proper designing of items.⁵⁰¹

In other words, she wanted artists to use modernized aesthetics as a vessel through which to convey timeless customs and ancient meaning. She writes that students must remain connected to the holiness and meaning of Jewish rituals and “learn to express themselves in terms of the higher meaning of the objects which they are creating.”⁵⁰²

Kayser goes on to explain that though American Jews were eager to purchase Jewish objects in the postwar period, many objects for sale at auction houses were forgeries or beneath the standards of fine arts specialists and experts. She provides detailed reasoning for *not* seeking out ancient objects: despite their “the charm of age,” they were also becoming “scarcer and

⁵⁰⁰ Kenneth A. Briggs, “Museum Show Honors Wolpert,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 1976, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/07/04/archives/museum-show-honors-wolpert.html>.

⁵⁰¹ Louise Kayser, “Creating Antiques for Our Descendants,” *Outlook* 27, no. 3 (March 3, 1957): 21.

⁵⁰² Louise Kayser, “Creating Antiques for Our Descendants,” *Outlook* 27, no. 3 (March 3, 1957): 21.

scarcer” as donors bought them, and in the midst of that scarcity, forgeries were meeting the demand. She adds that art dealers selling forgeries are becoming dangerously prevalent across western Europe. She continues, “But we should not feel discouraged because the objects of old have become scarcer so far as the supply for the Jewish home is concerned. There are now forces at work to replace old objects by new production.”⁵⁰³ As the Tobe Pascher workshop developed, she enhanced her expertise in the art market and Judaica sales and found a new niche by serving as a quiet thought leader on purchases of Judaica.

Aesthetic choices, she explained, “should not be guided by momentary feelings and casual preferences... There should be no snap decision when it comes to the selection of an object with which we have to live and which is to play more than a casual role in our daily surroundings.”⁵⁰⁴ One function of the workshop in the Jewish Museum was to help the contemporary buyer to discern what comprised worthy Jewish art, or to “aid in truer understanding” of “what represents genuine contemporary feeling” in objects created for ancient Jewish rituals.⁵⁰⁵

The article also offers rare glimpses of Kayser’s experiences at the Jewish Museum and her passion for sharing objects that could draw Jewish viewers closer to their shared heritage.

For a decade it has been my good fortune to be close to objects that were once used in homes and synagogues for the practice of Judaism. I sense the great influence the viewing of these objects has upon the visitors... They are impressed by the beauty, antiquity and religious association of the objects, and looking at them creates a desire to return to practices that had once been alive in the Jewish home and which, for one reason or another, have become neglected in the course of time.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰³ Louise Kayser, “Creating Antiques for Our Descendants,” *Outlook* 27, no. 3 (March 3, 1957): 21.

⁵⁰⁴ Louise Kayser, “Creating Antiques for Our Descendants,” *Outlook* 27, no. 3 (March 3, 1957): 21.

⁵⁰⁵ Louise Kayser, “Creating Antiques for Our Descendants,” *Outlook* 27, no. 3 (March 3, 1957): 7.

⁵⁰⁶ Louise Kayser, “Creating Antiques for Our Descendants,” *Outlook* 27, no. 3 (March 3, 1957): 7.

She also illuminates how Jewish museum-goers find themselves wanting to return to old customs in a contemporary and functional way, especially women.

While objects associated with the observance of the Sabbath and the Festivals are still alive in the minds of the majority of visitors, and used by a great number of them, there are other surprising items which remind them of the variety of practices once used in and now absent from the Jewish home... Exposed to the experience of a visit to the museum, hardly any Jewish *woman* leaves the galleries without feeling an urge to do something in her home with objects which might add to it the dimension of beauty in Jewish life.⁵⁰⁷

One of Louise Kayser's rare pieces of writing came just months before everything at the Jewish Museum seemed to change. The institution's largest pivot yet would catapult its identity into question.

The Last Years of Jewish Art?: 1958-1961 and the Kayser's' Departure from the Jewish Museum

By the late 1950s, the Jewish Museum had established itself as the premier site for the display of Jewish heritage and etched itself indelibly into the landscape of New York City museums. Louise Kayser was finally gaining recognition as a Judaica artist, a curator, and a writer. In 1959, the first book on the Har Zion windows was published with an introduction by Louise Kayser, codifying her contribution to the field of Jewish art.⁵⁰⁸ The book made an impact on the growing field of Jewish art history and was reviewed by the premier female art historian of Jewish objects.⁵⁰⁹ In 1960, Louise organized an exhibition on Jews fighting in the Civil War

⁵⁰⁷ Louise Kayser, "Creating Antiques for Our Descendants," *Outlook* 27, no. 3 (March 3, 1957): 7.

⁵⁰⁸ Louise D. Kayser, New York, 1958, "A Biographical Note From the Artist," in *Light From Our Past: A Spiritual History of the Jewish People Expressed in 12 Stained Glass Windows Designed by Louise D. Kayser for Har Zion Temple, Philadelphia* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1959), unmarked page numbers; Rose B. Goldstein, "Explains Har Zion Windows," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 29, 1959, sec. Book News.

⁵⁰⁹ Rachel Wischnitzer, "Light from Our Past (Book Review)," *Jewish Social Studies; New York* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 1961): 62–63.

on both sides.⁵¹⁰ The centerpiece of the exhibition was Louise Kayser's sculptural replica of a 1904 Civil War memorial monument erected at the Temple Emanu-El cemetery in New York.⁵¹¹ The Kaysers continued to expand the collection in these years. In 1959 they returned to Europe for the first time after the war to search for art dealers and Jewish objects for the Jewish Museum collection, and in Venice they discovered a centuries-old synagogue they then dismantled and installed at the Jewish Museum several months later.⁵¹²

Still, while the Kaysers continued to develop their institution as a modest home for historical and contemporary art, in the late 1950s they faced a dramatically dropping visitorship to the museum despite a robust exhibitions program. In 1957, Professor Meyer Schapiro of Columbia University co-curated the first modern art exhibition at the Jewish museum with Stephen and Louise Kayser entitled "New York School: Second Generation." It was the first to include mostly non-Jewish artists.⁵¹³ In the exhibition catalogue Stephen Kayser worked hard to find and illuminate some Jewish connection, pointing out that some of the work happened to be by "prominent young Jewish artists," but he and Louise were caught in the middle of a tug-of-war between the need to pander to public and scholarly penchants for abstract art and Frieda Schiff Warburg's vision for a Jewish museum.⁵¹⁴ Schapiro, who had served on the Inner Museum Committee of the Jewish Museum in 1946 and remained involved in its development in

⁵¹⁰ "The Military and Civic Participation [Entries 58-150]. Catalog of the Exhibit of the Civil War Centennial Jewish Historical Commission," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 50, no. 4 (1961): 303.

⁵¹¹ "The Military and Civic Participation [Entries 58-150]. Catalog of the Exhibit of the Civil War Centennial Jewish Historical Commission," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 50, no. 4 (1961): 313.

⁵¹² Grace Cohen Grossman, "Dr. Stephen S. Kayser: A Personal Testimonial" (Berkeley, California: Judah L. Magnes Museum, 2000), 9-10.

⁵¹³ Ruth R. Seldin, "American Jewish Museums: Trends and Issues," *The American Jewish Year Book* 91 (1991): 71-117.

⁵¹⁴ Julie Miller and Richard Cohen, "A Collision of Cultures: The Jewish Museum and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1904 - 1971," in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, vol. 2 (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), 340-44.

the years that followed, saw a new opportunity for the Jewish museum to serve the broader art historical community and join in the ranks of modern art museums.

Yet, while modernist exhibitions garnered more attention from critics and visitors than galleries filled with Jewish ceremonial objects in years past, they also angered JTS leadership such as Chancellor Louis Finkelstein. The gulf between the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Jewish Museum widened as Seminary leadership became largely uninterested in its sister cultural institution.⁵¹⁵ In 1957, the museum, declaring more autonomy for itself than ever before, redefined its mission as threefold: “to represent the continuity of Jewish history and tradition,” “to help Jewish relate to the current society,” and, newly, “to contribute to the aesthetic life of the general community.”⁵¹⁶ Frieda Schiff Warburg died just a few months later.

The first exhibitions in Schiff Warburg’s absence offered a seemingly cacophonous display of synagogue schema, delicate silver candelabra, stained-glass windows by Louise Kayser, and temporary exhibitions of modern and contemporary art with little to no connection to Judaism.⁵¹⁷ What art historian Steven Fine describes as “the pull back and forth between the Jewish culturalists and the Jewish modernists” was slowly pushing the Kaysers, committed to Judaica and Jewish history, away from the Jewish museum and lowering their voices.⁵¹⁸

By 1961, the Kaysers, feeling increasingly alienated by the unclear, muddled direction the Jewish Museum was heading, left the museum and returned to California.⁵¹⁹ The Jewish

⁵¹⁵ Julie Miller, “Planning the Jewish Museum,” *Conservative Judaism* 48, no. 48 (Fall 1994): 66.

⁵¹⁶ Julie Miller and Richard Cohen, “A Collision of Cultures: The Jewish Museum and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1904 - 1971,” in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, vol. 2 (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), 342.

⁵¹⁷ DORE ASHTON, “Art: Synagogue Exhibits: Jewish Museum Displays Ceremonial Objects in Liturgical Field,” *New York Times*, 1958; Dr. Ernst Phillips, “The Famed Jewish Museum: A Treat for New York Visitors,” *The American Jewish Outlook*, September 12, 1958, sec. 1.

⁵¹⁸ Steven Fine. Phone Interview by Ariel Cohen, May 16, 2020.

⁵¹⁹ As late as 1958 Stephen Kayser was publicly advocating for synagogues to be homes for Jewish objects, and explaining the Jewish Museum’s role in leading the way to make this happen. DORE ASHTON, “Art: Synagogue Exhibits: Jewish Museum Displays Ceremonial Objects in Liturgical Field,” *New York Times*, 1958.

Museum continued to wrestle with its own identity and embody a blended ethos of abstract and Jewish art, with some vague interaction between the two.⁵²⁰ The Tobe Pascher Workshop continued in the Jewish Museum basement through the 1980s. In 1962, Ludwig Wolpert won an award from a secular nonprofit for artist-craftsmen in New York.⁵²¹ At the same time as Wolpert was helping the institution become the premier place for the production of Jewish art in the country, from 1962 to 1964, Alan Solomon, the new head of the museum, pushed for the institution to become one of the foremost beacons of contemporary art in New York.⁵²² In 1964, he was asked to commission the American contemporary/abstract art exhibition for the Venice Biennale.⁵²³ Tony Smith, a Minimalist sculptor-artist, also became one of the head curators of the museum in these years. Kynaston McShine of MoMA became the curator of painting and sculpture and curated the famous *Primary Structures* exhibition of 1966 that solidified the Jewish Museum's move toward abstraction. In this show, works included Judy Chicago's feminist abstract sculptures. Louise Kayser's brother Frank Darmstadter, Judaica photographer, would stay at the museum as photographer for a decade after his sister left, though his subject matter shifted.⁵²⁴ In the Kayser's absence the fissures that lay deep inside Jewish communal life deepened.

Their former institution moved forward with an ambiguous identity that was perhaps foreshadowed by early developments, but that never could have been predicted. In 1947, Stephen

⁵²⁰ Julie Miller and Richard Cohen, "A Collision of Cultures: The Jewish Museum and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1904 - 1971," in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, vol. 2 (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997).

⁵²¹ "Artist-Craftsmen of New York Award," 1962, The Center for Jewish History Archives Space, https://archives.cjh.org/repositories/6/archival_objects/30966.

⁵²² Norman Kleeblatt, "Alan Solomon," *Brooklyn Rail*, November 2016, 1–2.

⁵²³ Julie Miller and Richard Cohen, "A Collision of Cultures: The Jewish Museum and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1904 - 1971," in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, vol. 2 (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), 311.

⁵²⁴ Mina Hoffenstein and Anna Kleban, March 6, 1963, American Academy of Jewish Research, ARCH 9, Box 1, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

Kayser had convinced abstract Jewish sculptor Jacques Lipchitz to attend the Jewish museum opening and to follow his attendance by a talk to the Rabbinical Assembly about the importance of art in Jewish life. Synagogues across the country in the postwar period were integrating the arts into their curricula in unprecedented ways. And even the contemporary art scene was porously working with and alongside the Jewish museum to create abstract exhibitions that spoke to one another.⁵²⁵ Yet Jewish and contemporary art exhibited a publicly fraught relationship, one that leadership could never repair or reconcile..

A Cacophonous Symphony: Jewish Art, Abstract Art, and the Nebulous In Between, 1961-1971

At first, with the Kaysers still living inside the institution, the Jewish Museum rushed to “react quickly to the frenetic developments” of young downtown artists and JTS watched with a lovingly distant eye.⁵²⁶ Simon Greenberg visited in 1957 and commented that he didn’t understand how some of the abstract art was relevant, but he was still supportive of the institution as a whole.⁵²⁷ But 1961 ushered in a decade in which the Jewish Museum’s shows of Dada, pop and op art, and abstraction embarrassed JTS, and the Jewish Museum swiftly became the neglected child of JTS.⁵²⁸ In the fallout of the Kaysers’ exits the community of art historians interested in Jews questioned what Jewish art was and meant, and where its address was if not at

⁵²⁵ Julie Miller and Richard Cohen, “A Collision of Cultures: The Jewish Museum and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1904 - 1971,” in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, vol. 2 (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), 336, 340.

⁵²⁶ Ruth R. Seldin, “American Jewish Museums: Trends and Issues,” *The American Jewish Year Book* 91 (1991): 82.

⁵²⁷ Julie Miller and Richard Cohen, “A Collision of Cultures: The Jewish Museum and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1904 - 1971,” in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, vol. 2 (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), 336.

⁵²⁸ Julie Miller and Richard Cohen, “A Collision of Cultures: The Jewish Museum and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1904 - 1971,” in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, vol. 2 (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997).

the Jewish Museum. In 1966, the same year the Jewish Museum's exhibition *Primary Structures* made countrywide news, famed art historian Harold Rosenberg asserted that there was no such thing as "Jewish art" because there was a "progressive fading of national styles in modern art generally":

In short, a Jewish handicraft exists and a handicraft tradition. This is what scholars usually accept as Jewish art. Without troubling themselves as to whether Chagall bears any relation to Modigliani through the fact of their both being Jews, the scholars give their attention to the stream of carvings, silver castings, and embroideries with a Jewish iconography and biblical references. I doubt, however, that this priestly work is art in the sense in which the word is used in the 20th century... Otherwise, why would the Jewish Museum feel compelled to supplement its exhibition of Jewish crafts with showings of contemporary paintings and sculptures, to make imposing events of retrospectives of Rauschenberg, Johns, and Rivers?⁵²⁹

Rosenberg's piece asked readers to consider: what comprised Jewish art if not functional ritual objects? In the turn toward the abstract, would the Jewish Museum's identity be entirely secular? Why was it using contemporary art as an apology for a longer tradition of historical Judaica?

Despite Rosenberg's article, after 1961, the museum did maintain a Judaica collection and a strong exhibitions program of Jewish objects in its top two floors even alongside contemporary art. The same year as the Rosenberg article and the *Primary Structures* exhibition, the Museum inherited the monumental Harry G. Friedman Judaica collection that still comprises the Jewish Museum's main exhibitions today.⁵³⁰ Many patrons and Jews around the country demanded that Jewish art come back as the primary component of the exhibitions program and fought against the direction of the museum. Other patrons and Jews around the country demanded that the Jewish museum "keep up with the Joneses" of museums on Museum Mile.

⁵²⁹ Harold Rosenberg, "Is There a Jewish Art?," *Commentary* (blog), July 1, 1966, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/is-there-a-jewish-art/>.

⁵³⁰ "Financier Was Benefactor, Gave Treasure to Museums," *Jewish Review*, February 6, 1966, sec. International, Press Clipping Bureau, Inc., New York City.

The Kayzers left these unresolved tensions completely, returning instead to teaching about Jewish art in their later years at both secular and religious institutions. Ironically, the Jewish museum attempted to follow their lead. By 1971, JTS officially forcibly abolished the contemporary art program at the museum.⁵³¹ The museum announced that it would “return to its earlier policy of emphasizing exhibits of Jewish interest rather than those dealing with radical forms of contemporary art.”⁵³² The transition to Judaica exhibitions and paintings of Jewish subject matter was supposed to mean an immediate end to exhibits without a demonstrable Jewish connection. And yet, the contemporary art program was *not* abolished forever. A period of a few years of no abstract art was followed by several decades of both Jewish and abstract secular art in the exhibitions program of the museum.

Legacies: Louise Kayser’s Imprint on the Jewish museum

From the Jewish museum’s opening night, there was much more crossover between these worlds inside 1109 Fifth Avenue than most museum experts and Jewish leaders saw.⁵³³ The Kayzers included contemporary Jewish artists who created abstract art into the exhibitions of the first years of the institution. They spoke at synagogues about the importance of art and art history. Louise Kayser’s stain glass windows were at once cutting-edge and reviving a historic medium. Still, when they left, the Jewish museum of the 1960s was forever marked by a failed

⁵³¹ Julie Miller and Richard Cohen, “A Collision of Cultures: The Jewish Museum and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1904 - 1971,” in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, vol. 2 (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997).

⁵³² Daniel Friedenberg, Curator of Coins and Medals at the Jewish Museum, “?,” *New York Times*, August 29, 1971, JTS Museum Records, RG 25, Box 5, Folder 5-21: Museum Programs, 1972 - 1973, Jewish Theological Seminary Library Archives.

⁵³³ Jacques Lipchitz was only one of many other abstract secular European artists to attend opening night at the Jewish museum. Further, Ludwig Wolpert’s Tobe Pascher Workshop Julie Miller and Richard Cohen, “A Collision of Cultures: The Jewish Museum and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1904 - 1971,” in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, vol. 2 (New York, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), 340.

convergence, broken ties with JTS, and severed relations with the contemporary art movement. The Kayzers never could have imagined it.

Their Jewish museum was a workshop, a studio, and an exhibitions space with a diverse program that helped people understand the complexity of the Jewish experience, in America and elsewhere. By honoring and embodying the culturally-specific mission of Frieda Schiff Warburg, and by expanding it to include the production of living, breathing Jewish art and writing about the art market, both Kayzers attempted to put Judaica in conversation with modernity.

When the Kayzers returned to California in 1961, they continued teaching about Jewish art. Stephen Kayser lectured at UCLA, where famed Jewish feminist artist Judy Chicago (formerly Judith Sylvia Cohen) was completing a bachelor's degree ('62) and then a master's degree ('64) in fine arts. Louise Kayser rarely missed a lecture and often prepare his notes for them.⁵³⁴ Chicago and the Kayzers even ironically overlapped at the institution for three years. Though records don't show that they ever met, Kayser knew of Chicago as one of the artists in the famed 1966 *Primary Structures* exhibition. She changed her name to sound less identity-specific and thought of herself as a universal feminist artist rather than a Jewish artist. As a counterpoint to Jewish art, she created art about women's experiences and wound up on exhibit at the Jewish Museum. Stephen and Louise Kayser never wrote about her or studied her and likely did not teach her as she was in the fine arts school and they Stephen Kayser was lecturing in the college of arts and sciences.

After Kayser's tenure at the museum, unfortunately Kayser's ideas about modernity and Jewish art did not pan out the way she would have hoped. Her very presence at the Jewish museum as a Jewish artist insisted upon the modernity of Jewish art, and her exhibitions

⁵³⁴ Bennet Kayser. Phone Interviews by Ariel Cohen. September 2, 2020 and January 8, 2021.

demonstrated Judaism as a core piece of the history and present of humanity. Still, her ideas lingered under the surface, and even today the Jewish Museum is still attempting to work out its own relationships to Jewish cultures, modern art, abstraction, and Jewish religion. Still unsure of what constitutes Jewish art, critics and art historians continue to wrestle with these issues and while they land on different sides of spectrums, Kayser in some ways landed at the center of these worlds and conversations. She asserted new ideas of museums as living artistic spaces into broader conversations about what museums could be, and ultimately, she made room for future identity museums that question the same things, asserting that identity is a work in progress, and that art should mirror its constant evolution. Perhaps we owe the modern identity museum, exemplified by the National Museum of the American Indian, the National Museum of African American History, and many more, in part to her legacy.

Today, some call the museum a “morgue” for dead Judaica, no longer in use, while others chastise it for trying to be modern or contemporary like a secular museum would.⁵³⁵ Ironically, all of this plays out today among a curatorial team and leadership that is largely female, and the museum is still trying to both keep up with art museums in the neighborhood as well as maintain the integrity of its Jewish roots. The years directly following the departure of the Kaysers set the stage for these later tensions that they could never resolve.

Louise Kayser passed away in Switzerland in 1983 while on a teaching trip with Stephen Kayser’s students.⁵³⁶ Until her dying days, she co-wrote lesson plans, co-graded Kayser’s students’ papers, and created portraits and landscapes in her Santa Monica apartment. Though she largely gave up Judaica toward the end of her life, she never gave up hope that Judaica and

⁵³⁵ Edward Rothstein, “The Problem with Jewish Museums,” *Mosaic Magazine*, February 1, 2016, <https://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2016/02/the-problem-with-jewish-museums/>.

⁵³⁶ Phone Interview with Bennett Kayser. September 2, 2020.

Jewish art could join the highest echelons of contemporary art, without giving up its identity as Jewish – without secularizing itself.

Legacies of Change and Effacement: Identity Museums, Philanthropy, and #MeToo

In November 2019 I sat down at the Upper Manhattan / New York City dining room table of Professor Menahem Schmelzer, former Chief Librarian at the Jewish Theological Seminary, to interview him about his friend and colleague Anna Kleban. Schmelzer's wife Ruth sat in the neighboring kitchen, interjecting every so often when she overheard something about Kleban that wasn't quite right, or when her husband left out important details: how Kleban loved to joke around; how she never planned her vacations in advance, instead opting to book even her international flights the day before; how her hair bounced as she leaped from object to object.⁵³⁷ When I approached Ruth and asked her to join the room, she objected, saying, "but I have nothing to say. My husband knows everything! He's the one who worked with her!" Eventually, after about half an hour of her eloquent interjections from the other room, Ruth Schmelzer finally agreed to take a seat at the table.⁵³⁸

The dynamics of this interview suggest the complex realities of historical narratives about women like Anna Kleban.⁵³⁹ While Menahem told of Kleban's life from the perspective of JTS male leadership, which entitled her "Secretary" from 1921-1957 and "Field Coordinator" from 1958-1982, Ruth illuminated Kleban's persona as the vibrant sole storyteller for Jewish objects at JTS. She shared her view of the whole of Kleban's life, her inconsistencies, her quirks, and her hopes for Jewish art and culture, not just the occupational labels that masked her everyday activities. As the sole woman to bring the treasures of the Rare Book Room to life with "great

⁵³⁷ Menahem and Ruth Schmelzer, interview by Ariel Cohen, November 5, 2019.

⁵³⁸ Menahem and Ruth Schmelzer, interview by Ariel Cohen, November 5, 2019.

⁵³⁹ Interviews with Jonathan Sarna, Menahem Schmelzer, Hector Guzman, Grace Cohen Grossman, and Ruth Messinger. Add dates and locations later.

charm and wit,” Kleban according to Ruth had quirky mannerisms, a flamboyant style, and a thick accent, and she cultivated her own career path in spite of the ostensible limitations of her formal titles.⁵⁴⁰ At the end of the interview, Ruth Schmelzer refused to take the black and white cookies I’d brought, saying in a thick accent, “I don’t want your cookies. Just please, for me, write nicely about Anna. She deserves to be remembered!”⁵⁴¹

The kind of oral and visual storytelling that Kleban did does not live on in written histories other than this one. Perhaps the presence of someone like her was almost ethereal, unable to be captured by words or images. Writing the story of someone so charismatic from an age before video recordings became commonplace is certainly a challenge. But the biggest hurdle to researchers is not that her in-person charm is uncapturable; it is that institutions did not bother to maintain documents, correspondences, and records of her life, and usually because their leaders did not deem them important.⁵⁴² Even where women’s’ archives *are* maintained, institutions often categorize them by related men’s names and only shuffle the writings of women within them, making it difficult to use finding aids to find their writings.⁵⁴³ In oral interviews, women like Ruth often stay quiet because they don’t feel their observations are worthy of sharing or because they might contradict more widely accepted narratives based on limited archives and narrow institutional memories. If they were put into conversation with such narratives, they’d change them. Today, some scholars are revisiting historical tropes and reconsidering who and what they emphasize. Some, like me, are recovering the lives of invisible

⁵⁴⁰ Ruth Schmelzer, Anna Kleban at the Jewish Theological Seminary, interview by Ariel Cohen, Oral Interview, November 5, 2019; Herman Dicker, *Of Learning and Libraries: The Seminary Library at One Hundred* (Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1988), page 38.

⁵⁴¹ Ruth Schmelzer, Anna Kleban at the Jewish Theological Seminary, interview by Ariel Cohen, Oral Interview, November 5, 2019.

⁵⁴² Kleban’s male colleagues’ archives at the Jewish Theological Seminary are pristinely preserved.

⁵⁴³ Anna Kleban’s untouched, unlabeled file cabinets in an offsite JTS storage site were discarded by researchers until I luckily stumbled upon them with the help of archivist Naomi Steinberger.

women that shaped history, digging in the archives and tracking down the people who remember them. Yet few institutions, and few of their archivists and librarians, are rethinking the structures of the very historical archives that guide the production of scholarship. Even fewer scholars are expanding the narratives of American Jewish history to include not just more women, but also more varied phenomena such as culture and art history. Rethinking the categorization of our archives and including more voices in our retellings of history will allow us to see that the partition between culture and power is false; culture can create and perpetuate certain power dynamics or challenge them.

Though including women like these in our narratives can help offer a fuller picture of American history and its cultural dynamics, the legacies of the institutions they created are confusing and mixed, bearing both continuities and discontinuities. After the 1960s, the world of Jewish museums changed dramatically. Symbolic of this change is the Jewish Museum of New York's 1960s existential crisis; suddenly, as other museums were pursuing avant-garde exhibitions and visitorship declined, the Jewish museum's leadership devoted exhibitions almost entirely to abstract secular art. The death of Frieda Schiff Warburg in 1958 meant she was no longer involved in perpetuating her vision for an institution upholding the values of Judaism for a future America, and her vision no longer stood in the way of curators looking to put the Jewish museum on the contemporary art map and universalize its exhibitions. The museum became a battleground for what constituted Jewish art and how Jewish museums needed to represent it. Some museum board members saw an opportunity to "elevate" Jewish museum to the levels of the secular avant-garde institutions surrounding it in New York, while others were "outraged" because they believed Jewish museums had an obligation to the Jewish community to uphold and present Jewish history authentically and display works of Jewish artists. Perhaps reflective of an

existential crisis in Jewish identity in America, the exhibitions program at the Jewish museum eschewed synagogue architecture and art, leading longtime specialist Avram Kampf to criticize JTS for its failure to provide guidance in “carrying out a serious program of research and publication on its own collection.”⁵⁴⁴ As the Jewish museum diverged dramatically from its historical exhibitions and the Seminary’s hopes for the institution in the ‘60s, this process was reflective of a broader separation between Jewish museums and their historical mission from the decades prior: to authentically represent Jews and Jewish history in galleries for an American public.

The Jewish Museum of Boston also reveals the changing notion of what constituted a Jewish museum in the face of broader racial and socioeconomic processes in America. In the late 1950s, Mignon Rubenovitz’s Jewish museum inside Temple Mishkan Tefila moved from Roxbury to Newton alongside the Jews who fled Roxbury to the Boston suburbs. The Roxbury neighborhood quickly became predominantly black and remains approximately 60% black today. Meanwhile, a small museum space in the new Mishkan Tefila building in Newton housed some of the art objects while most of the collection lay in storage.⁵⁴⁵ In 1968, the Jewish Federation of Boston gave the former Jewish museum space, which it was holding on to for a decade, to Elma Lewis and her National Center for Afro-American artists. Lewis’s cultural experiment ultimately failed, and the museum space famously languished in ruin for lack of care where it was once a vibrant center of art and culture. This episode is remembered as a failed attempt at repairing black-Jewish relations in the Civil Rights era.⁵⁴⁶ But perhaps it was also a symbolic Jewish

⁵⁴⁴ Ruth Seldin, “American Jewish Museums: Trends and Issues,” *The American Jewish Year Book* 91 (1991): 71–117, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23604211>, 81-85.

⁵⁴⁵ Most of the collection was sold in 2016 with Mishkan Tefila’s recent move and downsizing for financial reasons.

⁵⁴⁶ Gerald H. Gamm, *Urban Exodus: Why the Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed* (Harvard University Press, 1999). !

attempt at ceding leadership over the movement of culturally specific museums to other ethnic groups – also known as identity museums.

In other words, there was a changing of the guard in culturally-specific museums in the 1960s when broader fluctuations and power struggles in American society shifted attention from Jews to other groups. Starting in the late 1960s, the new kind of institution Americans labeled identity museums were considered as spaces for the voiceless to be heard, for the powerless to become empowered to tell their own stories. Jews in postwar America experienced antisemitism and bias, but they were no longer considered to be voiceless nor powerless. In fact, they were seen as overwhelmingly white, privileged, and in positions of power and overrepresentation at the highest echelons of political leadership and even cultural representation.⁵⁴⁷ Meanwhile, American identity museums proliferated and blossomed in the late 1960s and early 1970s when Civil Rights, Second-Wave Feminism, the American Indian Movement, and many more groups and movements fought for political and cultural representation in America. Though Jews, and Jewish women in particular, were the first to pursue the cultural-diplomatic strategy of representing and perpetuating a group identity in galleries, from the postwar socio-political climate up until today, people are reticent to remember their contributions.

It wasn't that Jewish museums disappeared altogether, nor that they stopped garnering the attention of critics. It was that they faded as important vehicles of identity and inclusion while making room for other minority groups, and some downsized or fell apart while others became universalizing, projecting messages of general inclusion and diversity rather than telling Jewish history. In 1955, though Mishkan Tefila moved to a beautiful new space designed by famed architect Percival Goodman, there was no dedicated museum as part of the architectural

⁵⁴⁷ Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*, 1998,

plan. Instead, the museum was pushed into a small side room next to the larger library. In the 1970s, the Mishkan Tefila sisterhood once again advocated for the recreation of a larger museum space, and another, slightly larger room in the synagogue was turned into a museum – not as large as the 1940-1955 space. But in 2016, when Mishkan Tefila was sold to Boston College and moved to another location, most of the collection was auctioned off and the museum disappeared for the second time. Today, several pieces of the collection linger only in the lobby of the new Mishkan Tefila in Boston. Furthermore, though the Jewish museum in New York today still exhibits Jewish art, it no longer serves in the role it once did – creator and maintainer of community and torch-bearer of Jewish history. Now, as of 2017, it exhibits Jewish history in displays not organized temporally but rather aesthetically, with displays of Hanukkiah's grouped by style or medium. With objects from 1200 and 2020, and from Morocco, England, and Israel, convened beside one another, visitors are left wondering about Jewish history and its timelines. No longer are there cohesive narratives of Jewish history in each room the way there once were under curator Louise Kayser's watch.

Many Jewish museums today are universalizing their missions, attempting to become beacons of inclusivity, democracy, and diversity rather than specifically Jewish spaces. In the fall of 2018, the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles show, "The Jim Henson Exhibition: Imagination Unlimited," attempted to draw loose links between a mainstream puppet show and Judaism by explaining that Henson and his Muppets imagined their way into a better, more equal, kinder world as good American Jews have in the past. Somehow, a commitment to the "American democratic ideals of freedom and equality," one of the imprecise tenets of the Skirball, aligned the Muppets and their creator with "Jewish values" enough to merit their inclusion as one of the main exhibitions. Ironically, the collections of the Skirball Museum of the

Hebrew Union College, established in 1913 by America's Reform Jewish women's movement, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, formed the basis of the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles. In 1996, some 25,000 objects from the Cincinnati collection travelled to Los Angeles. Yet the objects mostly sit in storage today while exhibits such as that on the Muppets populate the galleries. The Skirball in Los Angeles was designed to "welcome people of all communities and generations to participate in cultural experiences that celebrate diversity and hope, foster human connections, and call upon us to help build a more just society." In its universalizing mission, something of the history of Jewish museums – and specifically, the history of the HUC museum – is lost.

A flurry of Holocaust museums in the decades following the 1960s also exemplifies a trend toward the universalism of Judaism and Jewish values in museum galleries. The Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, an educational arm of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, avoids Judaism in its name though it is a renowned Jewish human rights organization. It was designed to help visitors confront and understand discrimination and prejudice in all its forms. Art historical critic Ed Rothstein famously criticizes Jewish and specifically Holocaust museums for "engaging ignorant forms of advocacy" by ignoring the particular experiences of Jews in the Holocaust and practicing "self-abnegation" as a religious/ethnic group. Jewish museums, he writes, reflect the "confused condition" of Jews in the Western world.⁵⁴⁸ While the Jewish museum in New York has changed directions many times over the course of the past 50 years since 1960, its identity is left unresolved. Still, these unresolved tensions in the current state of Jewish museums do not diminish the achievements of the women in this dissertation and their

⁵⁴⁸ Edward Rothstein, "How Jewish Museums Reflect the Condition of Mainstream Jews," *Mosaic Magazine*, February 22, 2016, <https://mosaicmagazine.com/response/arts-culture/2016/02/how-jewish-museums-reflect-the-condition-of-mainstream-jews/>.

Jewish museums: they created the template for other minority groups and the creation of their identity museums.

Beyond inspiring other culturally specific museums in America, the four women in this dissertation also created a new kind of philanthropy and community organizing that projects today rely upon. The earliest Jewish museums in America were dependent on the same kind of philanthropy and community organizing that projects like #MonumentalWomen grew from – a movement that is putting up the first statues of real, historical women in Central Park amongst hundreds of statues of real, historical men. Mignon Rubenovitz's Sisterhood at Temple Mishkan Tefila supported the foundation of the Boston Jewish museum. Frieda Schiff Warburg's ties to her female extended family members like Nina Warburg, who donated her home to the New York University's Institute of Fine Arts across the street from the Metropolitan Museum, helped her rethink what her contribution to art history and Jewish life could be. Anna Kleban often toured sisterhoods around the Seminary Library collection that then donated objects and funds for the display cases. Jewish museums exist because Jewish women gathered to create them from the 1920s on. Now, statues of women exist in public squares in part because of a similar kind of activism by women. In this way, the legacies of the women in this dissertation extend far beyond the Jewish museum spaces that continue to benefit from their visions and into the fields of cultural philanthropy and activism.

Before the 1920s, there were natural history museums and art museums with wings and sections for different peoples, cultures, and movements. Mostly white and mostly-male scholars studied diverse groups, categorized them, and decided who amongst them deserved places in display cases, on walls, and in textbooks. With the advent of Jewish museums, Jews decided who to include or exclude in their own narratives and displayed their own identities for wide swaths

of Americans. Women funded and envisioned the physical spaces for this experiment, and women also curated and organized the collections for these early organizations. The concept of self-curation was altogether new in America, and the women in this dissertation who invented it for Jews laid the groundwork for other groups to invent it for themselves. They were the pathbreakers who inspired the proliferation of other identity museums, or culturally specific spaces for exhibiting the art of one identified group.

Jews were some of the first Americans to use culture as a catalyst for creating community, reexamining professional roles, restoring and revitalizing art history and its relevance, and building a new genre of philanthropy. Now, museums are being used by all kinds of identity groups as stimuli for the creation of more equitable public histories at large. They have become instruments to amplify the voices of minorities and underrepresented groups. Ironically, the Jewish origin of identity-specific museums is now forgotten as Jews have been written out of this story to make room for other ostensibly more oppressed minorities. So is the gendering of this history.

Today, Jewish museums still play roles as loci for Jewish self-representation, even while their missions are mixed and sometimes befuddled – and even if they don't serve exactly the same purposes they did in years past. But what matters more than the current state of Jewish museums, indeed what would probably matter the most to these women, are the templates they left behind – that of a new kind of informalized cultural philanthropy, and that of an innovative kind of museum: the identity museum. These women challenged philanthropy and its structures, the hegemonies of men in the Jewish world, and the notion that Jews couldn't represent themselves. Their achievements inspired processes that are still at play in American cultural and political institutions today. As Confederate monuments come down and sculptures of Elizabeth

Cady Stanton, Sojourner Truth, and Susan B. Anthony go up, perhaps it's time to wonder about the people who made room for these processes and the challenges that they pose to the hierarchies of history.