

# SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society

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2011

Volume 14



# Southern Jewish History

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Articles appearing in *Southern Jewish History* are abstracted and/or indexed in *Historical Abstracts*, *America: History and Life*, *Index to Jewish Periodicals*, *Journal of American History*, and *Journal of Southern History*.

*Southern Jewish History* acknowledges with deep appreciation grants from the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, New York, and the Gale Foundation, Beaumont, Texas.

In memory of the late William Lee Frost, president of the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation and friend of *Southern Jewish History*.

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ISSN 1521-4206

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*Note from the Website Review Editor . . .*

I am thrilled to introduce the first website review to be published in *Southern Jewish History*. From this issue forward, website reviews will be a regular feature of the journal. In our increasingly digital world, the information on southern Jewish history available at our fingertips can sometimes be overwhelming. Our hope is that readers will benefit from critical reviews of museum websites, special collections, online exhibits, digital archives, and genealogical websites. Unlike book reviews, which focus on content, website reviews will also evaluate the form and function of websites, such as aesthetics, use of multimedia technology, and accessibility. We will be featuring a range of websites, from large multifaceted organizations—such as the American Jewish Archives site reviewed in this issue—to smaller websites dedicated to temporary special exhibits.

If you know of websites that you think should be reviewed, please contact me. I would also like to hear from you if you are interested in being a potential website reviewer.

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## Website Review

**The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives.**  
<http://www.AmericanJewishArchives.org>. Reviewed June 19, 2011.

For those of us who are researchers, genealogists, historians, teachers, etc., whether professional or amateur, websites are a valuable tool to assist with our research, guiding us towards essential resources and records. I rely on many websites to help guide me in my various research projects. Important aspects I look for in a website are ease of access to data, speed of download, and simplicity of search features. Overall website organization and design are also important, because the ability to navigate easily through the pages and components of a website can make or break the experience. If you cannot easily locate a database, or if the search functions are confusing, the search process can be slow and frustrating.

The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati identifies, collects, and preserves materials that document American Jewish life. Undoubtedly because of its affiliation with the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, there is clearly a substantial amount of material reflecting the Reform presence in America. For those interested in southern Jewish history, the website will be quite useful as the Reform movement had and continues to have a strong presence in the American South. The website is extensive, reflecting the enormous scope and mission of the organization. It serves as an online source of historical records housed in its archive and presents information on their programs, exhibits, events, and news.

The “Do Research” section on the home page serves as the portal to the research collections and the options available for accessing information on the collections. Among the choices are the online catalog, major manuscript collections, and genealogical

*Website at [www.AmericanJewishArchives.org](http://www.AmericanJewishArchives.org).*

research. The online catalog does not contain all the materials in the archive, but includes all new accessions since 1997, all major manuscript collections, and the entire photo collection, as well as family histories and most of the nearprint collection. The manuscript materials section spells out what is available on-site and online. One can search various topics such as personal and family papers, rabbis, organizations, and synagogues. The user clicks on each topic and receives an alphabetical listing of the holdings, each with a brief description. Those collections that have a full inventory or search tool available online are noted. Information on photographs, microfilm, audio-visual, and nearprint materials is also included. The genealogy section includes a good introduction, ideas on how to start your family tree, useful links, and instructions on searching the online catalog for family and personal collections. There is a useful "Frequently Asked Questions" section and also information about the newest collections available at the archive. The online catalog search parameters are typical of a library catalog and include title, keyword, subject, etc.

This website is very extensive, and the research portion contains a great deal of material organized in several sections. The organization of the website is mostly very clear. However, visitors must be able to take time and go through the various steps required to fully comprehend what is available on the site since there are too many options for just casual usage. For information on exhibits and programs, the non research portions of the website are easy to use and understand. These sections are predictably less detailed, and much of the detail and content are devoted to the research aspects and collections of the American Jewish Archives.

Considering the immense amount of information it includes, I found this website to be well-organized, easy to search, and fairly simple to follow. The serious researcher, the family genealogist, or the casual historian, will no doubt find this website extremely useful. The synagogue collections have been most helpful to me especially with regard to the scope and content notes. I found the collections useful for dates and information regarding my research into West Virginia Jewish history and also American synagogue architecture.

*Julian H. Preisler, Falling Waters, WV*

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