

History of the Quitman Library of Germantown Jewish Centre

written by GJC members Mindelle Goldstein and Chana Bonn (February, 2017)

Rabbi Adam Zeff has often said that the founders of our congregation deliberately named our synagogue Germantown Jewish Centre to reflect their vision of a center for Jewish life as well as a house of prayer. Included in this vision was the establishment of a library available to all congregants and to the neighbors in the Germantown community.

The early history of the Germantown Jewish Centre and its library is securely preserved in the Philadelphia Jewish Archives, maintained by the Special Collections Research Center of Temple University Libraries, located in The Paley Library (1210 Polett-Walk in Philadelphia, PA 19122.) All materials pertaining to the Germantown Jewish Centre, including information related to its library, comprise Accession 2040.

The synagogue's archival material was researched by Chana Bonn for information concerning the library, and Mindelle Goldstein interviewed Mollie Tinkleman, the synagogue's last regular librarian, and Marianne Schick, daughter of the first librarian, Bess Schick. Mindelle also wrote the first draft of this essay, giving coherence to the disparate notes and information found by Chana. The following paragraphs, based on the written and oral resources and Mindelle's draft, present a synopsis of the library's genesis and development from the 1930's through the 1990's, followed by a synopsis of library related events from 2009 through 2017.

Within the 57 boxes of Accession 2040 (containing folder after folder filled with budgets, accounts, copies of the synagogue Bulletin, The Centre Call dating back to 1939, announcements, meeting minutes, committee reports, lists of committee members, contributions, purchases and school records) is a treasure trove of information describing the development of the Quitman Library, established by Belle and Sidney Quitman in honor of their daughters Edith and Lynn.

The records indicate that in 1936, a notice announcing the formation of a library appeared in the synagogue Bulletin, along with a request for donations of suitable books of Jewish interest. By 1938, a Library Fund was established, and shortly thereafter, The Centre Call the synagogue's main vehicle of communication, noted that it had "become a Centre tradition for parents to make a contribution" to the fund in honor of their children's birthdays. It was also noted that this resulted in "a considerable proportion of books for the library." In 1939, a notice in The Centre Call requested the following items for the library: a victrola(!), a bookcase, a typewriter, an office desk, books of Jewish interest, Chumashim and a set of The Jewish Encyclopedia. There was at least one more similar request found in the existing synagogue records.

The Centre's first librarian was Bess Schick, who began her stint in this position when the congregation was still in its first home, an annex of the Pelham Club known as the Ross House, located at 6815 Emlen Street. Bess catalogued the books according to the Dewey Decimal System. In 1947, when the present school building was built and the synagogue moved to 400 West Ellet Street, Bess once again organized the library and served as librarian.

There are many gaps in the records as preserved, but it appears that the Library Fund was used for books and that the librarian's salary was funded by the synagogue's operating budget. A record in the archives notes that on June 25, 1951, Bess Schick signed a letter indicating her employment as librarian at a salary, per budget, of \$425.00. She ultimately received \$442.00.

Library hours, originally set daily from 3:30-5:00 p.m., were posted in The Centre Call (hereinafter The Call), which occasionally published the titles of new fiction and nonfiction additions to the library, often with brief reviews and recommendations. Contributions to the Library Fund were also listed in The Call. Eventually, the

library's hours were expanded to 3:30-5:30 p.m. daily and 10:00- 12:30 on Sunday mornings, and a "Book of the Week" was chosen and reviewed weekly in The Call. Jewish Book Month was also announced via The Call, with the result that many members of the Centre family made use of the library's offerings. The library was well used, and toward the end of each school year, there would be repeated pleas for the return of borrowed books. It would also be noted in The Call that "Books may now be taken for summer reading."

By 1955, the Centre needed a librarian for Sundays, and Martha Resnikov was hired at a salary of \$109.20 (\$3.50 per Sunday plus carfare). In October of the same year, a reading contest was announced, points to be awarded as follows: 3 points per Hebrew book, 2 points per English book on a Jewish subject, 1 point per children's book. Records from 1955 also mention evening meetings of a library committee. S.J. Leibowitz (Religious School principal) served as the committee's secretary, and the chairpersons were Bess Cukell and Flora Mendelsohn. There are records in the archives of many Library Committee meetings throughout the years, as well as lists of the committee members.

During the 1957-58 school year, Ann Nodler, appointed by the Library Committee to promote membership in the Jewish Publication Society, also became chairman of the Library Committee. The latter grew to 16 members plus two ex-officio members. Within the larger committee, Bess Schick (librarian), Rabbi Elias Charry, and Morris Tarasow (Religious School principal) comprised a subcommittee that discussed such topics as the selection of new books, plans to interest the religious school children in the library, and training people in the use of the library's reference materials. There were also suggestions for making the library more attractive. Meanwhile, reminders to visit the library continued to appear in The Call.

In 1957, Rabbi Charry began speaking to the children in the Centre's school about the United Nations, and about the Jews of different nations. He wanted these sessions to be held in the library one month and in the classroom the following month, thus integrating the library into the school curriculum. The following school year, 1958-59, Sidney Quitman served as coordinator of the Library Committee and Belle Quitman served as its chairman. Also in 1958, the Main Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia featured a "Jewish Books of Interest" exhibit that synagogue members were encouraged to visit.

During the 1950s, Gabriel Cohen, was the synagogue's Religious School director. He encouraged children in the school to participate in the book and art contests sponsored by Philadelphia's Board of Jewish Education. The students' participation in these contests served as an incentive for them to use the library.

In 1961-62, the Quitman Library was accredited by the Jewish Library Association, the first synagogue library to be accredited by the association. The achievement of accreditation was recognition of the library's value as a resource for the study of topics ranging from Jewish history to Jewish religious thought and practice.

It eventually became necessary to expand the library's hours to:

Monday through Thursday 4:00-6:00 p.m.

Sunday 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Monday and Wednesday evenings 8:00 - 9:15 p.m.

and The Call contained the plea, "Wanted!! Workers to man the Quitman Library." Also, parents were urged, via The Call to ensure that their children return borrowed books.

In 1967, Della Charney became librarian of the Quitman Library, and the following year, Mildred Magil became secretary of the Library Committee. That same year, 1968, Hortense Steinberg, another committee member, began writing a column in The Call with the goal of arousing congregants' interest in particular library books. To further pique interest in the library, books from its holdings were displayed on a table set up in the Marcus Auditorium at the Oneg Shabbat following Friday evening services. Similar book display tables were also set up at both Men's and Women's Club meetings.

The Philadelphia Board of Jewish Education contributed a library cart to the synagogue. This facilitated bringing large numbers of library books into the religious school classrooms. At some point, a library shelf was set aside for books relating to the courses offered by the synagogue's Adult Education Institute, thus integrating the library's resource materials with what was being taught in the classes.

Della Charney resigned as librarian in the early 1980's, and two years elapsed before the next librarian, Mollie Tinkleman, was appointed to the Quitman Library. Mollie had received training as a synagogue librarian from Gratz College, and was asked to serve as the Centre's new librarian by Anne Orloff, a member of the Centre office staff. At the same time, Anne encouraged congregant Cele Marits to assist Mollie. Cele and Anne promised Mollie, "If you agree, we will help you." Mollie agreed, and Verna Word, mother of our current Projects Manager, Eric Word, was enlisted to help with the task of reorganizing and refurbishing the library. It was she who arranged to have additional shelves built and also oversaw the library's repainting. Verna's work was invaluable.

Mollie and Cele began their work by reviewing the many books that had been contributed by Centre members from their own book collections, choosing to keep the relevant ones for the library and offering those not being kept to the members of the congregation. These offerings were placed on a table in the hall, with a sign that read, "Congregants - Please Help Yourself." Mollie and Cele had a vision for the Quitman Library, and worked to make it an attractive and inviting place. Large potted plants were placed on the wide window sills, and sunshine streamed in through the windows. Posters from the New York Jewish Book Festival were hung, and later on, a sculpture of Rabbi Charry by Cele's husband Lou Marits, was displayed in the library, as were sketches by Joe Goren, also a Centre member. Finally, an air conditioner was obtained, and the library became more comfortable during the warmer months. It was hoped that the library would become a hub where synagogue members would congregate, enjoy conversation, discuss books and browse.

When Mollie and Cele began their work, the library had a paucity of children's books with Jewish content, so money from the Library Fund was initially devoted to purchasing more of them. For the children in the Centre's religious and nursery schools, the library scheduled story hours featuring Jewish books. Additionally, Cele often used the library to tutor boys and girls preparing for their Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

Over time, adult books of Jewish fiction were purchased to enlarge that section of the library, a corner shelf was set aside for Jewish mystery stories, and another shelf soon filled with books written by synagogue members. It was Cele Marits who catalogued all the new books, using the Dewey Decimal System. Periodicals such as *Moment* and *Commentary* were also added to the library's holdings. Three books were kept atop the librarian's desk. They dealt with 1) Jewish genealogy; 2) baby naming and the Hebrew derivations of the various names; 3) Jewish family life.

Members often thought of the library when planning celebrations, and one family even used beautifully wrapped children's books as centerpieces at their daughter's Bat Mitzvah. These books were then donated to the Quitman Library. Generous donations to the Library Fund enabled Mollie Tinkleman to purchase books dealing with Jewish scholarship, and to expand the library's collection on Jewish art. She was also able to travel to booksellers in New York and to the New York Jewish Book Festival in order to purchase valuable books for the library. When Mollie and Cele needed to be absent, closing the library was not really an option. Job Itzkowitz, the teenage son of a Centre family, willingly covered for them.

The Centre kept careful records of the specific books purchased with contributions to the Library Fund. Included in the records were the dedications intended by the various donors. To honor donor dedication requests, Belle and Sidney Quitman commissioned an artist at the Jewish Theological Seminary to design a bookplate for the library. As newly acquired books were added to the library, donor and dedication information was recorded on the bookplates. The engraving plates used to print these bookplates, at one time displayed in a glass case inside

the Charry Lobby, were ultimately given to Martha Schleifer to return to Edith Quitman as a memento of the Quitman Library named in honor of Edith and her sister Lynn. Over time, other bookplate designs were also used.

The Quitman Library became a place for serious research by academics, those in the art world, and students from Bryn Mawr College. Dr. Salo Weindling, at one time a teacher at Akiba (now Barrack) Hebrew Academy, often did his research in the Centre's library, studying books written in Greek concerning Jewish thought. The library's first set of Steinsaltz Commentaries, and a book trolley, were purchased with his generous contribution. As with all libraries, the unfortunate problem of missing library books also plagued the Quitman Library. These books were referred to as "miracle books that were able to just walk out of the library and never return." It finally became necessary to lock the library except during the regularly scheduled "open" hours. On the other hand, Anne Orloff, in the synagogue office, would gladly give the key to Centre members should the door be locked when they needed to use the library.

Mollie Tinkleman had served as librarian of the Quitman Library for approximately ten years, from the mid-1980's to the mid-1990's, when the synagogue made the decision to no longer fund the position of librarian. With no regular librarian to oversee the collection and to maintain its integrity, the Quitman Library became a place where synagogue members often donated/dumped books they no longer wanted. They also donated their unwanted artwork to hang on the library walls. Michael and Gail Tunick, the latter a trained librarian, worked in the library on Sunday mornings, as well as Tuesdays and Thursdays during religious school hours, but there was no regular culling of irrelevant donated material. This resulted in multiple copies of books only marginally related to things Jewish, and the collection soon became filled with a great deal of material that was unnecessary, and often inappropriate, for a serious synagogue library. This untenable situation prevailed for several years.

In 2009, the synagogue chose to make the library space into a gathering place/meeting space for synagogue members. As of this writing, the reorganization of the Quitman Library is an ongoing project.