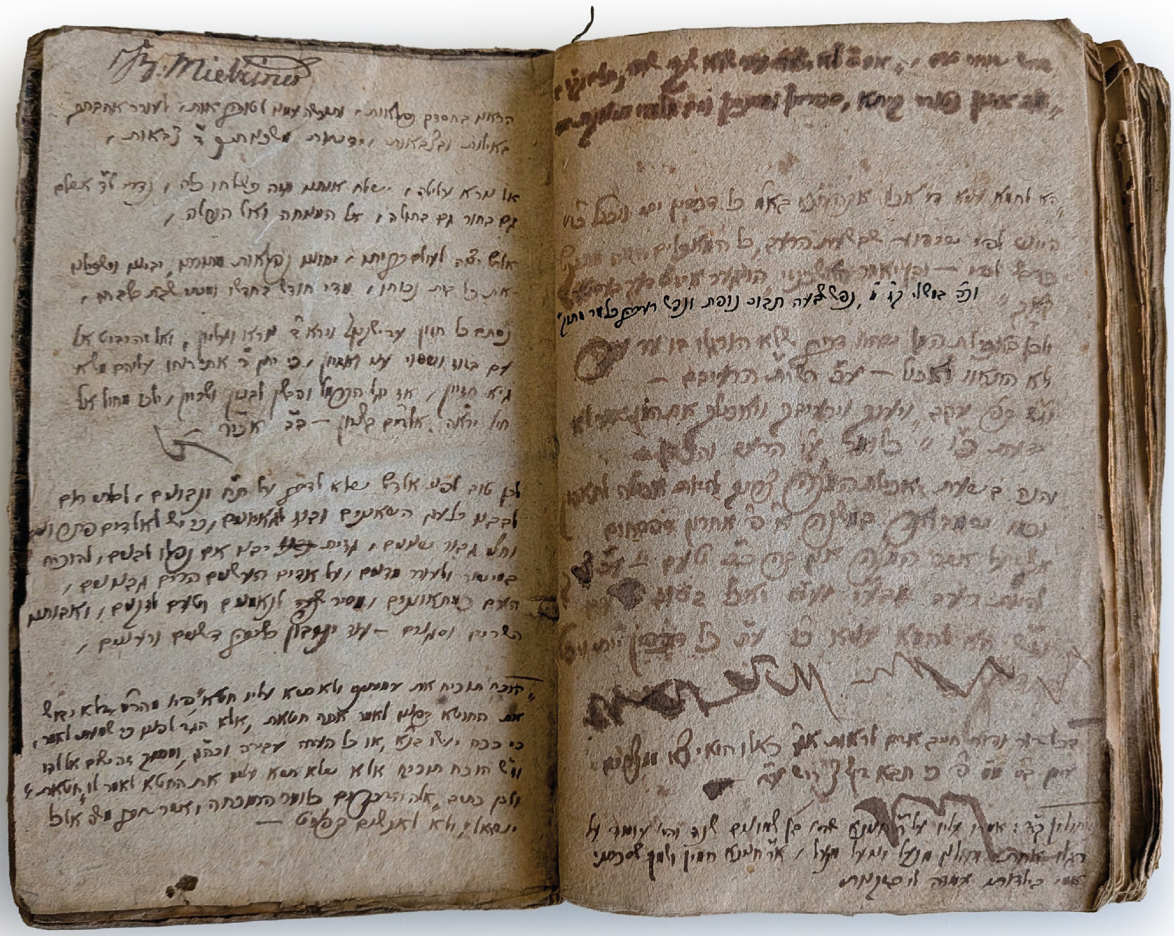
“Though Your Beginning Be Small”

The Hebrew Union College Library, 1873–1907



Jason Kalman

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Gift of Moses Mielziner. RBR MS 37, Klau Library.

For
Michael A. Meyer
Historian of Hebrew Union College
with heartfelt appreciation for two decades of friendship and support

עד מאה ועשרים

Acknowledgments

Despite having spent hundreds of hours in the stacks and rare book room of the Klau Library during my two decades on the faculty of Hebrew Union College, in the spring of 2024 I still did not know the extent of what the collection held, or perhaps more importantly, who brought it here and how. As we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the College, it seems an appropriate time to look back and acknowledge the contributions of so many to build its remarkable library.

This is my attempt to tell one part of the story: how the Hebrew Union College Library grew from nothing to something remarkable. The history of the College collection has been briefly told, primarily by its first professional librarian, Adolph S. Oko. His accounts glorify the efforts he undertook while only superficially addressing the contributions of his predecessors. The following is an effort to remedy this by offering a detailed record of the individuals and the books that shaped the life of the library and the community that used it from the first donation in 1873 until Oko's appointment as librarian in 1907.

Research for this volume relied heavily on the kindness and assistance of the staff of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives and the Klau Library on the Cincinnati Campus of Hebrew Union College. These unique resources preserve the thoughts and ideas of generations of Jews from virtually every century of the people's existence and every place of their habitation. It is a legacy that Dr. Dana Herman and Dr. Jordan D. Finkin and their respective staffs labor every day to steward, protect, and share. I offer them and their colleagues my inadequate gratitude. I am especially thankful to the American Jewish Archives for the Starkoff Fellowship which allowed me to complete this manuscript in the summer of 2025 and for financial support for its publication.

Although books often bear the name of a single author, there can be little doubt their production is a collaborative process. Many individuals answered questions, shared thoughts, and offered insight and expertise, as I wrote this volume. I offer my thanks to Zachary Baker, Samantha Baskind, Yoram Bitton, Zev Eleff, Steve Fine, Warren Klein, Michelle Margolis, Leonard Rogoff, David Selis, Chelsea Simon, and Felix Steilen. My HUC colleagues David H. Aaron, A.J. Berkovitz, Judah Cohen, Haim O. Rechnitzer, Richard S. Sarason, and Gary P. Zola took particular interest in this project.

I am especially appreciative to Jordan D. Finkin, Michael A. Meyer, Jonathan D. Sarna, and Gary P. Zola for reading earlier drafts of this manuscript. It is customary to state that all errors which remain are my own. (This is mostly true. However, I do suppose that if they had really wanted to help, they could have read my drafts even more closely and carefully and eliminated all my errors.)

I am indebted to Jordan D. Finkin for accepting this manuscript into the Bibliographica Judaica series sponsored by the Klau Library and to Sonja Rethy of Hebrew Union College Press for her careful editing of the text. Their friendship, collegiality, and support of more than a decade are so genuinely appreciated and important to me.

This is the first book I have written while all my children were old enough to understand what I was doing and the subject that I was studying. Though they often rolled their eyes (a skill I think I taught them), I hope that some of the stories I shared with them of medieval and modern books saved for generations, and of the individuals who donated and cared for them, may one day inspire Charlie, Harry, and Libby to open the tomes and discover the treasures safeguarded for them.

As always, my wife, Dana Herman, has been a constant support throughout this process. Research for this book often put us in common physical space throughout the day in the American Jewish Archives where she is associate director. The ghosts in this book thus lived with us day and night. Her patience and tolerance, guidance and love, are more than I can ever repay.

This book is dedicated to my friend, colleague, and teacher Michael A. Meyer. When I was introduced to his book, *Ideas of Jewish History,* as an undergraduate in my first Jewish Studies course at McGill University in 1994, it was transformational. I never would have imagined then the many Shabbat dinners we would enjoy with him and his wife, Rabbi Margaret (Margie) Meyer, or the German lullabies he would sing to our children as he bounced them on his knee. I hope that he will find some pleasure in knowing that his own *A Centennial History* of HUC-JIR inspired my research and that he will find in this new volume a fitting tribute for all he has contributed to my life as a scholar and to our family life in Cincinnati.

Notes to the Reader

A Note on Transliteration, Authors' Names, Book Titles, and Dates

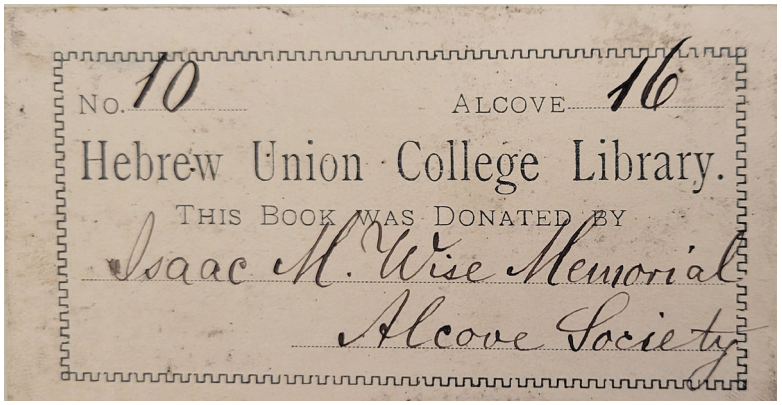
The records of the Hebrew Union College Library contain the words and writings of hundreds of individuals over the three and a half decades covered in this volume. Each recorded Hebrew terms, especially the names of authors and their books, in their own idiosyncratic transliterations. Generally, I have preserved the transliterations as written in the original documents without systematizing them for consistency. When such transliterations would not lead readers to clear identification of the author, title, or term, I have either modified them for clarity or added a note. The titles of individual books acquired by the library are not included in the index except when an illustration is also provided or a particular book appears in the narrative. Many of the library's early acquisitions are mentioned by title in the notes, though these are not indexed. Authors are identified in the index by the commonly used orthography with the spelling used in the body of the text following in parentheses. I have relied heavily on donor lists published in various proceedings and in newspapers. In these, names of authors, titles, dates and places of publication were not always recorded correctly. I have not verified these details for every entry in the narrative and notes. Where I have found such errors, I have noted them either in the text or in the notes. Similarly, I have not verified that each work is in the current library collection, but when I examined a particular book, I have included the location information for the convenience of future researchers.

A Note on AI

In a spirit of transparency, it is important to clarify how AI was used in the production of this book. Initially I turned to AI to help transcribe minute cursive handwriting in English and German, a task it performed semi-successfully provided I still checked each word against my own transcriptions. It was particularly useful for drawing up lists of words that potentially corresponded to the remaining unidentifiable squiggles on an onionskin letterpress copy of an original nineteenth-century letter. AI also proved helpful for searching photographs of letters for names or titles when I could just not remember where I had seen something of relevance. Once the first full draft of the manuscript was complete, AI was used to check for consistency of usage, spelling errors, material out of chronological sequence, and potential contradictions.

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Sigmund Mannheimer with students, circa 1905.
PC2890, American Jewish Archives.

והיה ראשיתך מצער יאחריתך ישגה מאד

These words of Bildad (Job viii. 7), so often realized in the history of institutions established for the moral, spiritual and intellectual elevation of mankind, can also be properly applied to the Library of the Hebrew Union College. The modest beginning of the latter gave rise to the equally modest beginning of the former.

When in October, 1875, the first session was opened, the books needed for instruction were partly loaned, partly donated. These formed the nucleus of a collection which year after year was increased by gifts and purchases. From all parts of the country the friends of the College and of literature enriched the Library with their valuable contributions.

Sigmund Mannheimer
Report of the Librarian
November 1, 1892
Proceedings of the UAHC, p. 3003

Introduction

When Hebrew Union College Professor Gotthard Deutsch attempted to prepare an address commemorating the celebrated Jewish scholar Solomon Munk in 1903, he faced a startling obstacle. Despite standing in the very institution intended to preserve such Jewish intellectual treasures, he could not access Munk's most important works. One might question whether this scholarly embarrassment resulted merely from an "underdeveloped" thirty-year-old library collection. Alternatively, this revealing moment perhaps exposes a deeper story regarding the ambitious creation of what would become the largest collection of Judaica outside Israel.[1]

At present, while many modern university libraries rush to digitize collections or relocate physical books to off-site storage and while many Jewish institutions dramatically downsize their holdings and offload their rare volumes, the extraordinary history of Hebrew Union College's library collection deserves attention. How did this small midwestern institution, subsequently expanded with coastal branches in addition to a Jerusalem campus, build such a monumental repository of Jewish knowledge?

The idea of founding a library in the mid-1870s in the United States was hardly novel in and of itself. By 1850 more than 550 public libraries stood in the country, and by 1875 more than 2,200 had been added, most of these new additions belonging to advanced schools, seminaries, and institutions.[2] But Isaac Mayer Wise proposed something different during the 1873 founding discussions of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC). First, Wise envisioned establishing a rabbinical college in Cincinnati, which he would lead as its first president once it opened in 1875. The library he planned would serve both this college and function as a national repository for American Jewry. By virtue of intended contents, scope, and mission, his vision was distinct. How the library was built was also distinct. In contrast to its peer institutions that grew through acquiring massive private collections, the library of the Hebrew Union College (HUC) emerged through countless small donations—individual books plus modest personal libraries gifted by rabbis, congregants, and Jewish intellectuals across America. Each volume represented a personal connection to Jewish learning along with a vote of confidence in Wise's bold aim to create not merely a school library but rather a central repository for Jewish scholarship in Cincinnati, which housed America's second-largest Jewish community during that period. Wise's aspirations for Cincinnati drew from his personal interest in creating a reputation for himself, as well as a real concern to establish a lasting institution. In Jewish circles, as in elite non-Jewish circles, the building of a library which included the necessary scholarly books but also rare tomes and manuscripts would serve research interests and, because of its cost and the difficulty of assembling such a collection, would also

expand the reputation of the person and institution that built it. It would provide such a person, and such an institution, with a very public podium from which to shape culture and community.[3] To build such a library, Wise would need to put himself and the new institution literally and figuratively at the very center of an international network of donors, philanthropists, scholars, authors, publishers, and printers.

The library's early guardian angels were not wealthy East Coast philanthropists; instead, they were devoted individuals such as lawyer and librarian Julius Rosenthal of Chicago and Moses Wilson, a non-Jewish Cincinnati police judge, who donated hundreds of books over decades. After the Board of Governors allocated a mere $500 (the equivalent of roughly $14,600 today) for acquisitions, an act they would not repeat for nearly twenty years, it became evident that this library would grow through personal sacrifice and dedication and not through institutional funding.

The years between 1880 and 1882 marked a turning point in the library's history—a period of extraordinary growth that would turn the small collection in Cincinnati into a genuine library. An invaluable manuscript arrived unexpectedly from Robert Clarke & Company, a Cincinnati bookselling firm whose ties to Wise stretched back decades. From across the country came evidence of Wise's far-reaching influence. In San Francisco, Abram Anspacher—once a resident of Evansville, Indiana and an agent for Wise's newspaper, *The American Israelite*, and before that residing in Cincinnati and Louisville—orchestrated the purchase of Rabbi Henry A. Henry's entire collection through a masterful campaign of personal contributions and community fundraising. The precious volumes traveled eastward by rail, a testament to the national web of relationships Wise had cultivated since his arrival in the United States.

No longer confined to the borrowed space of a synagogue vestry, the growing collection found a proper home when the College acquired its own building on West Sixth Street. Yet for all his success in the heartland, Wise could not hide his disappointment at the silence from the East Coast. He began a calculated campaign, publicly lamenting this lack of support in a thinly veiled attempt to shame the wealthy Jewish communities of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston into contributing. His fundraising strategy revealed both his political acumen and growing desperation. Wise understood with painful clarity that the library's future depended entirely on donated volumes or funds solicited specifically for the library.

The library's evolution accelerated between 1883 and 1889, when a significant change occurred: the replacement of student librarians with faculty leadership, instilling a new sense of permanence and academic gravitas. Rare volumes arrived from committed donors in Chicago, Cincinnati, and Dayton, while the collection of Jewish periodicals, essential for following changes in contemporary Judaism and scholarship, expanded significantly. The first cash donation earmarked specifically for book purchases arrived from a Chicago benefactor, a development Wise celebrated even as he continued to bemoan the East Coast's indifference. Yet not all eastern connections failed. Rabbi Max Landsberg of Rochester, a devoted friend to both Wise and his educational project,

contributed a substantial personal collection. Most telling of Wise's commitment was his personal purchase of Adolph Huebsch's library at a cost of $500 (while he earned no salary as College president), which he then donated to the institution. Student support would mean little if the building blocks of learning and cultural creation were unavailable.

The early 1890s brought both challenges and successes. While significant energy went into the unglamorous but essential work of organizing and cataloguing the swelling collection, two magnificent gifts arrived that would forever alter the library's standing in the scholarly world. Samuel Adler, the venerable former rabbi of New York's Temple Emanu-El, bypassed local institutions to send his 1,400-volume collection to Cincinnati. His decision showed the depth of his commitment to Wise's objectives. This was followed by nearly 300 rare duplicates from Temple Emanu-El itself, the result of a decades-long negotiation initiated by early HUC faculty member Max Lilienthal.

These victories came amidst growing competition, as Jewish communities nationwide began supporting Jewish Studies at their local universities and establishing their own educational institutions. The YMHA in Philadelphia, the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Gratz College in Philadelphia, and prestigious libraries at Columbia, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of California all vied for the same finite pool of books and philanthropic support. The complex web of loyalties facing community leaders raises a question that resonates even today: how did rabbis like Emil Hirsch in Chicago or Jacob Voorsanger in San Francisco navigate their responsibilities to both local institutions and the pioneering national project in Cincinnati?

The closing years of the nineteenth century witnessed a profound transition, as HUC faculty members, increasingly confident in their scholarly authority, began asserting themselves in the library's management, donating their personal collections, and actively soliciting new contributions. A second generation of support emerged as rabbinical alumni, now established in pulpits across America, directed gifts to their alma mater. The student body likewise raised its voice advocating for proper financing of the resource that even they recognized as woefully underfunded by the Board.

As the library's reputation grew, so too did its international connections. What had begun as a provincial collection now joined in a global exchange of knowledge by sharing volumes with Jewish communities as distant as India. This was a tangible fulfillment of Wise's original vision of Cincinnati as a worldwide center of Jewish learning. Then came the devastating losses of the turn of the century. The deaths of the long-serving librarian and his assistant were quickly followed most crushingly by the passing of the active octogenarian Wise himself. He had been the library's tireless champion, its visionary, and its most eloquent advocate. The vacuum of leadership might have spelled the end of institution-building, but a new generation of defenders rushed to fill the void. First among these were HUC graduate David Philipson, his colleague Max Heller, and the faculty members who united to safeguard Wise's legacy. Alumni rallied to create a memorial collection bearing their founder's name, while a renewed campaign finally convinced some Board members to become personal patrons.

The 1903 appointment of Kaufmann Kohler as HUC president, following interim leadership by Moses Mielziner and Gotthard Deutsch, ushered in both opportunity and ideological conflict. The library found a powerful new benefactor in distiller Isaac Wolfe Bernheim of Louisville, who not only contributed books through his connection to Philipson but laid the groundwork for funding an entirely new library building. Significant collections arrived from Jacob Ezekiel, former Board Secretary and honorary librarian, and Rabbi Aaron J. Messing, who was also among the very first donors and whose son Abraham was an HUC graduate.

Yet ideological battles loomed, as evidenced by the forced departure of faculty member and librarian Judah Magnes following disputes over Zionism. His replacement, Max Schloessinger, assisted by student Abraham Cronbach, began the crucial work of professionalizing the library, even proposing a deaccessioning policy to manage the growing number of duplicates—though staffing upheavals prevented its implementation. By 1907, ideological purges claimed Schloessinger too, along with other faculty members suspected of promoting Zionist sympathies among students. Before his exit, however, Schloessinger made two enduring contributions: establishing the alumni-supported Rashi Memorial Fund for special acquisitions, and hiring Adolph S. Oko, an East European with a different cultural lens, as his assistant.

By 1907, upon Adolph S. Oko's appointment as the library's first full-time professional librarian, the collection had increased to nearly 20,000 volumes, including several thousand pre-1700 works, dozens of incunabula and early Hebrew printings, and nearly seventy manuscripts. Oko would subsequently describe what he inherited as "large yet not great," arguing that the "mere accumulation of books does not make a great library."[4] At the time of his resignation in June 1933, Oko, highlighting all he had done to build the collection over his twenty-seven years, would claim, "From a miscellaneous collection of some 19,000 volumes (of which 14,000 had to be discarded), the Library, during my incumbency, has grown, through my labors, to the largest and greatest of its kind in the world…"[5] Recognizing that despite Oko's self-aggrandizement no library is built by a single individual, the letter, in which Oko acknowledges his own immodesty, raises fascinating questions about what was really in the library when he arrived and about the people who built this early collection book by book.

Who were these donors who chose to entrust their family treasures to Cincinnati as opposed to institutions in New York or Philadelphia? How did immigrant families decide which precious Jewish books to bring across the Atlantic? Moreover, what compelled them subsequently to donate these treasured heirlooms? What motivated Samuel Adler, former rabbi of New York's Temple Emanu-El, to send his 1,400-volume collection to HUC instead of the Jewish Theological Seminary or Columbia College in his own city?

The answers to these questions concern more than an institutional history; they constitute a window into American Jewish book culture of the late nineteenth century, revealing the social networks and personal connections that transformed a modest

collection into a world-class library. Although filled with names and details that might not captivate every reader, each donor, each book, and each decision forms a vibrant thread in the tapestry of American Jewish intellectual history. It is the story of how a determined group of rabbis and scholars, together with their supporters, built a monumental library one armful of books at a time. Through triumph and tragedy, generous gifts and bitter disappointments, personal sacrifice and, sometimes, institutional neglect, the Hebrew Union College Library emerged as something extraordinary. It became, and continues to stand as, a living testament to the power of intellectual commitment, cultural preservation and creation, against formidable odds.

One of the moving insights I have gained from a life lived among books and libraries—and a major theme of this book—is that the librarians, faculty, and staff who do the heavy lifting at libraries, and the individuals who donate their family's heirlooms and treasures to libraries, do so not in order for those books to be a permanent memorial warehoused on a shelf. Memorialization is achieved when these books serve those who wish to learn and study. The great Jewish libraries in the United States were built over the last century and a half by people committed to supporting ongoing learning by providing the bricks necessary for the construction of new Jewish culture. Sadly, we live at an agonizing time for these libraries. Gratz College has deaccessioned substantial holdings from its collection. Hebrew College has deaccessioned more than 80% of its books. JTS has sold rare tomes. The Ziegler Rabbinical School / American Jewish University Library is being deaccessioned and its rare books given to the National Library of Israel. In October 2025, following reports that Sotheby's auction house had assessed the Klau Library's rare book collection, HUC and the Ohio Attorney General reached an agreement requiring advance notice and justification before any items can be sold. The College maintains it had no plans to sell from the collection.[6] By all appearances, American Jewish communal institutions are reevaluating their responsibility to preserve and steward their cultural artifacts. Digitization is no substitute. With only about 5% of Jewish books preserved in this manner, digitization remains woefully insufficient for saving the Jewish literary and intellectual legacy. Books are more than texts; they are artifacts. Digitization does not account for what we can learn from the physical object. That deaccessioning is a popular trend does not make it a best—or even necessarily a good—practice. Once you have sold your birthright for a bowl of potage, there is no getting it back. If those American institutions that still hold their library collections do not step up to better care for them, to fund and staff them properly, and to ensure the collections continue to grow, the foundations for future learning, for future Jewish culture, will be lost to us.



Mound Street Temple, Postcard.
PC736, American Jewish Archives.

Chapter 1: 1873–1876

From One Small Gift

While an early historical account correctly notes that "The Library began with the College," its additional claim that the College "was founded in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1875" oversimplifies a more nuanced birth story.[1] The truth is more fascinating, as the library's collection began taking shape even before the College had been officially named and several years before it would open its doors. The library's remarkable journey from modest origins to scholarly prominence began with a widow's gift. In the autumn of 1873, as the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), an umbrella organization of synagogues and temples, took its first tentative steps toward establishing a permanent presence in American Jewish life, Rosina Loeb's generous donation would lay the cornerstone for an intellectual endeavor far more ambitious than anyone could have foreseen.[2] Loeb (1798–1885), who had journeyed from her birthplace in Worms on the Rhine to build a life with her grown children in Cincinnati, wrote to the newly formed Union's Board members, "I have concluded to donate the above books to the library of the Hebrew Theological Institute. These books are not to be taken from the library but to be accessible to all applicants, without distinction of sex, race, or creed."[3] Her gift of fifteen precious volumes, once cherished by her late husband, arrived when the Union was barely in its infancy, established just months earlier during the second week of July. The theological institute she referenced existed only in the minds and hearts of visionaries. Her wish was remarkably hopeful, for both the new institution and for the country, not even a decade after the Civil War. These modest beginnings would inspire decades of dedication to building a treasury of Jewish knowledge in the New World, embodying the very spirit of what the Union's founders had imagined when crafting their constitutional framework.

The founding document of the Union, adopted during those formative July meetings, had carefully laid groundwork for two distinct but intertwined projects. Article XIII of its constitution stated with precision, "All donations, legacies, and bequests granted to the Hebrew Theological Institute, shall pass to the Sinking-Fund, and all other income from whatever source derived shall be constituted a General Fund, to be controlled by the Council and expended for the purchase of a Library and for such other purposes as the same may direct."[4] This two-pronged plan for both an educational institution and a library to sustain it, reveals a profound understanding of what would be required to cultivate Jewish scholarship on American soil. It may also reveal that these founders ultimately hoped that the Union could acquire a library rather than having to build it one book at a time. There was evidence that this could be achieved; just a few years earlier, in 1871, Temple Emanu-El of New York had



Isaac Mayer Wise.
PC5004, American Jewish Archives

succeeded in purchasing a collection of nearly 5,000 rare volumes of Hebraica and Judaica from a dealer in Amsterdam (see more below).

Behind the gradual emergence of both a rabbinical college and its library in Cincinnati lay an understanding decades in the making, one that recognized the inseparable relationship between Jewish scholarship and the texts that sustained it. This visionary project relied on Isaac Mayer Wise (Steingrub 1819–Cincinnati 1900), its driving force, who understood that American Judaism needed both institutional structure and intellectual foundation. By 1873 he had been in the United States for almost three decades and had led Cincinnati's B'nai Yeshurun Congregation for two of them. Already in 1857, he had shared his dreams with a fellow German rabbi at New York City's Temple Emanu-El:

> The casual remark about a private conference of American ministers of the Jewish religion was no jest as far as I am concerned. I am earnestly desirous of the realization of this idea not only on account of the personal rapprochement which prevents many unpleasantnesses in public life, but chiefly for the discussion of the following points: (1) The basis for the establishment of a seminary for rabbis, teachers and cantors. (2) The founding of a Jewish library. The possibility of calling these institutions into being exists, and the conditions are very favorable; all that is necessary is earnest cooperation on the part of all our influential men. I do not know why this cannot take place.[5]

Wise's ambitions crystallized further over time. When he later campaigned for the creation of a Hebrew Congregational Union, he placed among its central purposes "to establish and support a scholastic institute, and the library appertaining thereto, for the education of rabbis, preachers and teachers of religion…"[6] The ambitious fundraising plan revealed both pragmatism and audacity: $60,000 to establish the College itself, followed by a much larger goal of $160,000 for creating a permanent campus and acquiring a proper library.[7] When questioned about this substantial sum, advocates explained the necessity. The building would need to be "well appointed in all their parts, especially as regards the library…."[8]

Wise conceptualized libraries as transformative institutions for identity-formation rather than as passive repositories. His own experience upon arriving in Albany in 1846 had taught him this lesson. At the State Library he not only perfected his English and expanded his knowledge of history and mythology, but also formed relationships that helped him understand his new homeland.[9] If a European-educated rabbi could absorb American culture through library resources, Wise reasoned that American Jews could similarly deepen their connection to Judaism through the right collection of texts. The alternative was unthinkable. Wise had experienced firsthand the intellectual isolation of serving as a rabbi without access to Jewish books. He starkly described that period,

> I had left my library in the old country, and in the entire city of Albany, with its two large libraries, no Jewish book, except the *Chumash* [Pentateuch] and prayerbooks, was to be found. Even the monthly *Occident*, the only Jewish organ in the country, had no readers in the capital of New York. I lamented my needs to [Rabbi Max] Lilienthal, and begged

> him to lend me a few books, and the dear friend sent me an *Eben Ezer* [a legal code], which I have never returned to him, and a *Nachlath Shivah*, which I have never again seen since that time until, a few weeks ago,… I wrote to Joachimsen, who sold Jewish books on Houston Street in New York.[10] He sent me a copy of the cabbalistic *Reshith Chochmah* with the excuse that he had nothing else in stock which might interest me. This was very good, for I had even less money in my pocket to pay for it than he had books in stock. The situation was painful.[11]

The relationship with Lilienthal (Munich 1815–Cincinnati 1882) would be longstanding and valuable, especially after Lilienthal moved to Cincinnati joining the *Israelite* as an editor and serving as rabbi at Congregation Bene Israel. Under Lilienthal's leadership the congregation would be the first home for the Hebrew Union College. However, Wise's personal struggle with intellectual isolation would later fuel his determination to ensure that no future American rabbi would face such bibliographic poverty. Per the recollections of his daughter Regina (Jean) Wise May (Cincinnati 1881–New York 1972) Wise was later reunited with his personal library and his study became his sanctuary. When Wise turned seventy, B'nai Yeshurun presented him with a home on Mound Street not far from the College.



Max Lilienthal.
PC2658, American Jewish Archives.

> My father's pride was the many books shelved on the walls of his *sanctum sanctorum*, his library. Cincinnati was a dirty city, and my mother was a meticulous housekeeper. The books were dusted periodically by a little, aging *yeshiva bochur* who was also a book-lover.
>
> On one occasion when my mother in her supervisory capacity felt impelled to peep into the library to check up on her co-worker, she found the professional duster seated on the top of the high moveable ladder holding a great tome in hand, and my father on the lower rung with his open book before him. They were earnestly reading and discussing Talmud.
>
> Mama, perhaps a bit irritated, slipped away silently, feeling a special kind of reverence for the two scholars.[12]

While the septuagenarian would eventually be surrounded by books at home and in the College Library, the challenge Wise initially faced underscored the necessity of establishing a world-class collection in Cincinnati.[13] The advancement of Jewish scholarship, rabbinical study, and religious learning required direct engagement with the textual sources of the tradition. Yet, as Wise's own arrival narrative suggests, such materials were largely unavailable locally. However, by the time Hebrew Union College was founded in 1875, nearly 150,000 Jews from German lands had immigrated to the United States, bringing books among their other assets. The publication of the proceedings from the first Union meeting was not merely a record of events but a deliberate strategy to cultivate financial and material support for the institution. The library's development, in particular, emerged from grassroots efforts, fueled by public discourse in the press and within the synagogue pews of Cincinnati.

A notable early donor, almost certainly the first, was, as noted, Rosina [Scheuer] Loeb. In November 1873 she contributed fifteen volumes, including a *Machzor* printed in Hamburg in 1730.[14] These books originated from the collection of her late husband, Leopold Loeb (Abernheim 1795–Cincinnati 1871). Leopold had been a disciple of a Rabbi Gallinger in Worms.[15] Following their marriage, Leopold pursued a career as a wine merchant. Together they immigrated to the United States in 1852, joining their son Solomon, who had arrived in Cincinnati in 1849. He initially worked for a cousin's company in the textile trade before later co-founding the prominent banking firm Kuhn, Loeb & Co.[16] Leopold Loeb, who had been a studious youth, assembled a modest yet significant collection of Judaic texts, including folio editions of the Babylonian Talmud and Midrash Rabbah. As Rosina later reflected, he had, "during fifty-seven years of our married life, read them with great delight and profit to himself and family, who shared in their elevating influence."[17] While he had been a traditionalist earlier in life, his affiliation with Cincinnati's B'nai Yeshurun led him to accept the congregation's evolving religious orientation. Notably, he was among the three individuals who laid the cornerstone of its new synagogue, Plum Street Temple. Wise, its rabbi, later described Loeb as the community's "learned and aged friend."[18] In 1864, the couple's fiftieth wedding anniversary was a major community event. Wise composed and recited a poem for the event, and fêted the couple in *Die Deborah*, concluding, "Father Löb is a highly respected member of our congregation and is known to us all as a man of honor, and his good wife is a wonderful example to her daughters as a wife, mother, friend, and benefactress."[19]

Rosina Loeb was evidently moved by the Union's mission, as her donation followed shortly after the publication of its first meeting's proceedings. Her letter of contribution arrived in November 1873, just a month after the Union's executive council held its inaugural meeting. At the council's second meeting that December, Board President Moritz Loth formally acknowledged the donation. Wise would publicly laud her for acting in "the true spirit of Judaism; it knows no distinction; it treats all alike; it welcomes all to come and learn to become good, wise, and useful." He then added in announcing the acquisition in his newspaper, *The Israelite*, a refrain that would often be repeated, "If any of our numerous readers should have books which would be of value to the library of the Hebrew Theological Institute, they are requested to forward them either to the President or Secretary of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations."[20] Rosina Loeb's prominence in the community and her connection to the international banking firm Kuhn, Loeb and Co. gave her significant influence. That the initial gift was from her served Wise well as he could showcase her example to a broader audience of potential library supporters. Since the Hebrew Union College had not yet been established, the Board thanked Mrs. Loeb for her gift to "The Hebrew Theological Institute." The absence of a formal institution also set the stage for the Board to resolve that its president retain custody of the books until an

appropriate long-term storage solution could be identified.[21] Ultimately, the collection was entrusted to the Cincinnati Public Library (founded in 1853) on the condition that the Union could reclaim the volumes as needed.[22] This initial deposit grew with new gifts, forming an essential foundation for the Hebrew Union College Library, which eventually would serve the students and faculty.

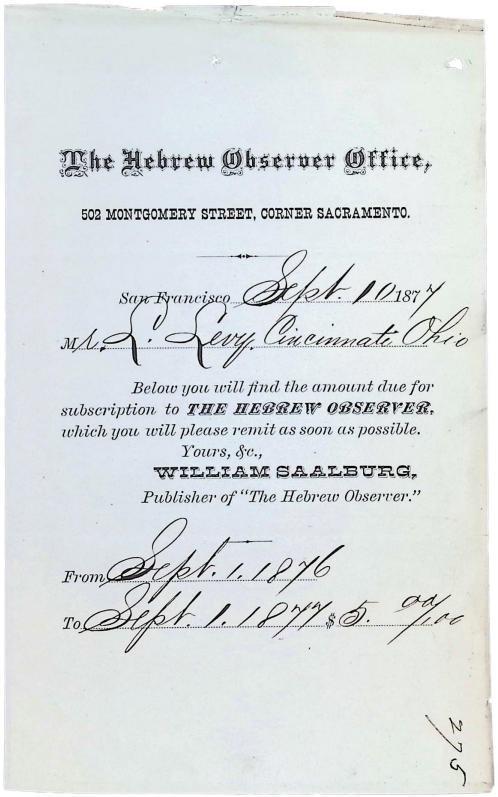
The College Opens

Hebrew Union College formally began with opening exercises on October 3, 1875, with nine students registering for their studies the following morning. Classes initially convened in the vestry of Bene Israel's Mound Street Temple, with instruction later moving to the temple's basement.[23]

The College's beginnings were undeniably modest: with only a single class in session, the entirety of the faculty consisted of Wise and his assistant, Solomon Eppinger (see below). At this early stage, the students' level of study was such that even the books donated by Rosina Loeb were not yet necessary for their coursework. As historian and long-time HUC faculty member Michael A. Meyer has observed, at its inception, the College functioned as "little more than an intensive religious school."[24] Joseph Krauskopf, a member of the class of 1883, later reflected on these humble beginnings, remarking, "Never was a college started under more unfavorable auspices. Our one classroom was a dingy synagogue-vestry room. Our library consisted of a dozen donated Hebrew prayer-books, which likewise served as our textbooks."[25] His recollections illustrate the gap between the students' immediate academic experience and the resources that had, in fact, already been acquired for the library. The extent to which the students had access to these materials, or were even aware of them, remains an open question in assessing the College's early years.

In February 1875, the Hebrew Union College embarked on its scholarly journey by initiating its periodical collection through annual subscriptions to two significant publications: the English-language *The Israelite* and its German-language companion *Die Deborah*. These periodicals, founded by Wise, remained under family stewardship. That Wise did not receive a salary as President of the College may have helped mitigate potential conflicts of interest.[26] The institution further broadened its nascent collection by acquiring *The Hebrew Observer* from San Francisco.[27]

Two months later, in April, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations Board formally transferred custody of the College's book collection to Wise, who by then had established himself as both president and principal instructor of the Hebrew Union College.[28] Concurrently, the Board requested that Wise compile a comprehensive inventory of the College's literary holdings, signaling the Board's intention to maintain active oversight in collection development.[29] Indeed, in the years that followed, the UAHC Board, and then the HUC Board, would exercise meticulous supervision over acquisitions. They reviewed individual purchase proposals, explored potential additions, and managed donated volumes.



The Hebrew Observer Office,

502 MONTGOMERY STREET, CORNER SACRAMENTO.

San Francisco Sept. 10 1877

M.L. Levy Cincinnati Ohio

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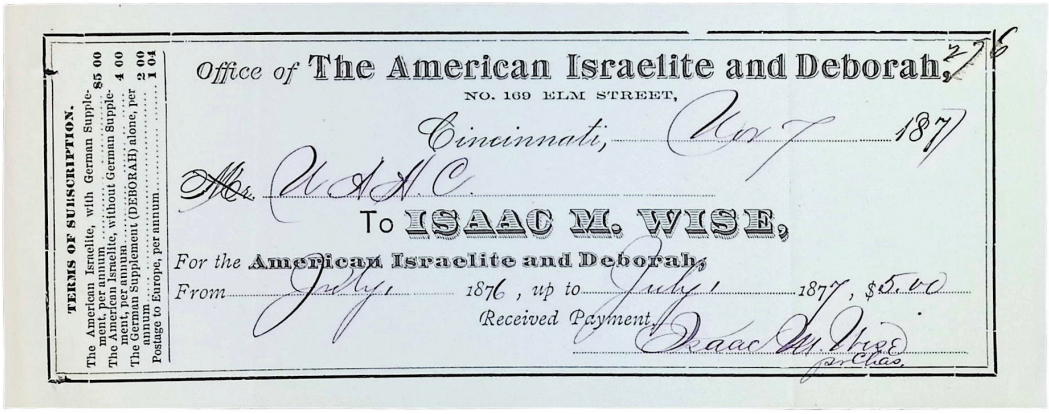
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From Sept. 1. 1876

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Mr. U.A.H.C.

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San Francisco, Nov. 15 1877

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Moritz Loth.
PC2741, American Jewish Archives.

Wise addressed the Board's inventory request at the UAHC annual meeting through his inaugural presidential report. "Calls on the community for books to the College library called forth several generous responses. There are now in the Public Library of Cincinnati a folio Talmud Babli and other books, the donations of Mrs. Loeb, of Cincinnati, and a folio Mikraoth Gdoloth by Sir Moses Montefiore."[30] Montefiore, the venerable British Jewish philanthropist then in his nineties, had received proceedings from the UAHC's first meeting sent by Moritz Loth (Milotice 1832–Cincinnati 1913), president of the executive council, on October 3, 1873.[31]

At the same time, Loth inquired if Montefiore might consider providing the new Union with a library to help ensure the creation and support of a Hebrew Theological Institute in America. Loth suggested Montefiore use "his great influence in obtaining

for that Institute a library" such that it might open its doors by the "first of May"! Further he aspired to have Montefiore join the community as "main founder of the Hebrew Theological Institute in America," noting that news of his gift of a library would strengthen the commitment of American Jews to joining the Union and assure the success of the College.[32] Montefiore was a global Jewish celebrity and for another year would remain the president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. By late 1873 and early 1874 he had become physically frail, but he retained clarity of thought and directed his primary attention to a Holy Land Relief Fund.[33] Montefiore's December response praised the initiative to establish a Union of Congregations but only offered advice in support of the College's library:

> I regret not being able to comply with your request, regarding the library you are anxious to secure for your college. Our own communities in England are now exerting themselves to have libraries in all their institutions, and will not, I am afraid, lend a willing ear to my representations on this subject. I think you will have no difficulty in procuring a beautiful library from the resources you have in your country, and you can easily secure the best works from Europe, by making known your intentions to distinguished authors in various parts of the world, who, I have no doubt, will be glad to deposit their works in your college, for the benefit of the rising generation.[34]

By September 1874, Wise personally corresponded with Montefiore, sending him the UAHC's second-year proceedings alongside two of his own scholarly works. Montefiore's October response commended the College's mission to "teach the law of God according to the spirit that pervaded the authors of Mishna and Talmud."[35] Having established his own seminary, "Ohel Moshe ve-Yehoodit," in Ramsgate in 1866—complete with its own growing library collection—Montefiore offered to donate a copy of the *Mikra'ot Gedolot* (the Torah text with medieval commentaries) to Cincinnati's budding institution, along with a copy of the statutes and regulations of his own seminary, as a gesture of respect for Wise's "hallowed cause."[36]

The Board enthusiastically endorsed accepting Montefiore's offer with gratitude. In response, Montefiore dispatched five folio volumes "containing thirty-two commentaries of our most ancient and most celebrated authors, accompanied by a copy of the statutes for the regulation of the college, 'ohel Moshe weYehoodit' in Hebrew and English, which I beg the Council of the Union will be pleased to accept and regard as a manifestation of the high esteem in which I hold the zealous exertions of our brethren in America for upholding and vindicating our holy law…"[37]

The edition (Warsaw 1860–1869) must have belonged personally to Montefiore as it includes his signature in Hebrew and English on the cover page of volume one and his personal book plate. It must have then been turned over to the school as each volume is bound in leather with a Hebrew insignia for the Kehillah Kedoshah of Ramsgate surrounded by the name of the seminary named for him and his late wife in Hebrew script. The charter for the school was signed in pen by Montefiore and the



Moses Montefiore.
PC3073, American Jewish Archives.



Embossed cover image from *Mikra'ot Gedolot*, gift of Moses Montefiore.
RBR Folio, C1025, Klau Library.



Mikra'ot Gedolot and *Statutes for College Ohel Moshe ve Yehoodit*, gift of Moses Montefiore.
RBR Folio, C1025, Klau Library.

signature witnessed by Louis Loewe, "The Companion of Sir Moses Montefiore on his philanthropic missions."[38] By eventually publicizing Montefiore's correspondence to Wise, the UAHC Board strategically sought to inspire similar philanthropic gestures from other potential benefactors. The Board's desire extended beyond mere gifts of books to include the essential financial donations that would enable future acquisitions and sustain the library's growth.

Bringing the Rosenthaliana to Cincinnati?

Montefiore had been correct. The appeals and publicity did bring international attention to HUC's need for a library. The news had most certainly reached Amsterdam. That October, the Board received an offer from Dutch banker George Rosenthal (Hanover 1828–Amsterdam 1909).

> Dear Sir,—From different sides in literary circles I have heard enthusiastically mention [*sic*] your progress to found an American College for the formation and the development of Jewish theologians.
>
> Please accept my congratulations with that imposing and noble scheme.
>
> I am in possession of the large and celebrated library left by my late father, formerly a literary man in Hanover. This library is known, besides those of Oxford and of the British Museum in London as the greatest and most important in the world.
>
> A very ancient and renowned bibliographer is occupied since some years to dress a reasoning catalogue, which abstractedly, by itself, must become a scientific work, and will be completely printed at the end of this year.
>
> I have had numerous offers by booksellers to buy the library at very high prices for dealing; but having resolved not to part with it, under the express condition that it must remain together and undivided. I wish to sell it only to a corporation.
>
> I am convinced that your college may have a great future, and for its purposes a large and renowned library will be an imperative requisite.
>
> I therefore take the liberty to address you to learn your intention about this matter and to propose to you the acquisition of the Rosenthal Library in question, which, no doubt, will be known by reputation to Rev. Dr. Wise, of your city, so that I need not add more about its renown and merits. Awaiting your answer, I am, dear Sir, in the meantime,
>
> Very truly yours,
> George Rosenthal[39]

In December 1874, the Board actively pursued the expansion of their burgeoning collection, directing their Secretary to obtain a catalogue and pricing information for the library of Rabbi Leeser Rosenthal (Nasielsk 1794–Hanover 1868).[40] Simultaneously, they published Montefiore's supportive letter alongside their acquisition efforts hoping to stimulate donor interest for an institution that, even before its first formal exercises, was garnering international attention from prominent Jewish figures. The Board received the Amsterdam catalogue in March as a gift directly from Rosenthal.[41] His letter arrived without the requested pricing information, necessitating further inquiry.[42] "Inferring from your previous letters that the library is for sale, the Board would be pleased to learn from you the price asked for it, in order to lay the information before the annual meeting of the Council at its session to be held next July."[43]



Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana of the University of Amsterdam, from Ernst Altkirch, "Der Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana in Amsterdam," *Ost und West*, 10 (1910): 551–52.

The Rosenthal collection represented a formidable scholarly treasure. Assembled through the financial resources of Rosenthal's wife's family, it comprised approximately

six thousand volumes, including nearly three dozen Hebrew manuscripts. The bibliographer Meijer Roest's two-volume *Catalog der Hebraica und Judaica aus der L. Rosenthalk'schen Bibliothek* received by the Board was subsequently reviewed in *The American Israelite*, though without mention of HUC's acquisition aspirations. The review did, however, illuminate contemporary perceptions of the collection's significance:

> M. Roest has just brought out a catalogue, in two volumes, of the collection of Hebrew books made by the late L. Rosenthal, in Hanover, and now in the possession of his son, a rich banker at Amsterdam. This collection is undoubtedly the richest after those of the Bodleian Library and the British Museum. M. Roest has followed the method of the British Museum catalog, drawn up by the late Mr. [Joseph] Zedner, confining himself to the titles, dates, and authors of the works, without entering into biographical details, or attacking biographers and bibliographers, as was unfortunately done by Dr. Steinschneider in his catalogue of the printed books in the Bodleian Library. The second volume of M. Roest's catalogue contains valuable biographical and bibliographical notes in Hebrew, made by the learned collector himself. We can not omit to mention that M. George Rosenthal, has published the catalogue for the benefit of learning, without the wish of gaining profit from it. This example should be imitated by many others who possess important collections, of which, however, little or nothing is now known. We only require the publication of catalogues of Hebrew books, printed in Russia, Poland, the East, and Leghorn, to be able, with those of Drs. [Moritz] Steinschneider, [Joseph] Zedner, and [Meijer] Roest, to produce a complete list of Hebrew literature.[44]

Despite the Board's optimism regarding acquisition, communications apparently ceased after their pricing inquiry. While they appeared to have been quite serious with their query, Rosenthal's intentions were less immediately apparent. As it turns out, Rosenthal had been trying to dance with more than one partner. With the appearance of the catalogue in the autumn of 1874, Rosenthal had begun soliciting potential buyers all over the world, the availability of the collection for purchase having been announced by Chicago Rabbi Bernhard Felsenthal in the *Nation* in October 1874.[45] By January 1875 Rosenthal could report, as he had also told the UAHC, that he had already received high offers from booksellers competing for it.[46] As in the letters to HUC, no specific price is mentioned in his other correspondence. The Sinai Congregation in Chicago and Cornell University also showed interest in providing an American home for the collection.[47] Soon after, various German institutions considered acquiring it. However, Rosenthal and his family had a change of heart and decided to donate the entire collection to the Royal Library of Berlin, provided it remained intact. However, they added a condition: they wanted to receive German honorific titles in recognition of their donation. This demand proved too much, and the deal fell through.[48] When the Leeser Rosenthal collection was ultimately donated to the city of Amsterdam in 1880, establishing what became the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana of the University of Amsterdam, *The American Israelite* pointedly noted its extraordinary value—suggesting

that even had a price been specified, it likely would have exceeded the financial capacity of both the UAHC and the College.[49] Together the correspondence with Montefiore and Rosenthal reveals that, at least at the early stages of planning for the College and library, the Board imagined they would need to acquire a well-fashioned personal collection as a foundation for the new institution and that the publicity from the acquisition could be used to fuel additional giving.

The First Donors

While prestigious names like Montefiore and Rosenthal carried significant cultural capital, the College's library was primarily enriched by small donations of books from across the United States. The contributors understood they were taking part in a new national project of building a Jewish cultural institution on American soil. Reflecting on this formative period, Wise characterized the embryonic institution with deliberate humility:

> …as a little hole-in-the-wall of a school, in its not-too-bright cellar, carrying the pompous name of a college. Fortunately, we did not have to be ashamed in front of visitors, for none came. Also, no book was stolen, since each evening the whole library was locked up in a two-and-one-half-foot box, not because of thieves, but because of mice.[50]

Though his narrative was deliberately constructed to highlight the institution's subsequent progress, this description belies the considerable activity, dedicated effort, and generosity that quickly elevated the school beyond these modest beginnings. Montefiore's Pentateuch with commentaries and Rosina Loeb's contributions, among others, remained housed at the Cincinnati Public Library at least until that March when Wise sought to withdraw them for the use of the College.[51] Wise would soon report that by June 6, 1876, the end of the College's first operational year, the library had acquired 153 volumes beyond those in the public repository, constituting "the nucleus to a Hebrew Library, the increase of which by donations and purchases" he "recommend[ed] most urgently."[52]

Analysis of identifiable donors and their contributions reveals the composition of this foundational Jewish library. Of approximately 200 total volumes, the chronological distribution is telling: about 0.5% predated 1600, 2% predated 1700, 15% predated 1800, 50% predated 1850, 19% predated 1876, with 13.5% remaining undated when the inventory was compiled. The collection's content was predominantly rabbinic: Mishnah texts constituted 12.5%, Talmudic works 21.5%, Midrash 4%, Halakhah 10%, Hebrew and translated Bibles 10%, medieval biblical commentaries 9%, philological works and dictionaries 7%, Jewish philosophical texts 3%, with various other materials comprising the remaining 23%. The library contained sufficient foundational canonical texts (i.e., biblical and rabbinic texts) to support fundamental student scholarship, albeit with necessary sharing of resources. As Wise indicated, the library possessed five copies of the Mekhilta, an early rabbinic text, for student use. Additionally, the collection included several prayer books and a handwritten Esther scroll.



Louis Naumburg.
PC3207, American Jewish Archives.

Clerical Donors

The donor roster itself provides insight into how the College and its library were promoted and who supported the initiative. Clergy contributed the most substantial gifts numerically. Meyer Hirshberg donated his late uncle, Jacob Levinski's, collection of works published between 1696 and 1864. Rev. Jacob L. Levinski had worked as a private teacher during his final years in San Francisco.[53] Hirshberg, a commission merchant for a Cincinnati cotton enterprise, frequently advertised in *The Israelite*.[54] His uncle, formerly a Cincinnati resident, had begun producing an abridged Hebrew-English family Bible for Jewish children in the 1860s.[55] The opening of Levinski's preface indicates sympathy with progressive religious reforms, as he removed from the abridged edition "all possibly offensive representations and allusions, and all laws and statutes no longer in force..."[56] When the initial fascicles were published, Hirshberg served as his uncle's exclusive agent, marketing the book through *Israelite* advertisements.[57] Upon completion of the three-volume set, Hirshberg apparently transferred these responsibilities and the *Israelite* office at Bloch Publishing Company, owned by Wise's brother-in-law, became the new distributor.[58] The Bloch printing endeavor was established in 1855 to print Wise's newspapers. By 1900 they had published approximately 180 different books as well.[59] These connections suggest that business relationships with Wise's extended family and associates were formative to the building of the Union and College. Hirshberg's book donation was a genuine contribution to the College's mission and not merely the act of disposing of a deceased relative's possessions. In May 1874, he had also demonstrated his commitment through a one-hundred-dollar subscription fee supporting the College's establishment.[60]

Louis Naumburg (also Naumberg, Treuchtlingen 1813–New York 1902) was actively engaged in Pittsburgh's congregational life for decades. In 1866 *The Israelite*'s editor reported on congregations using Wise's prayer book, *Minhag America*, and turned his attention to Pittsburgh:

> The basement of the synagogue is occupied by the sexton and by two large schoolrooms, in which the Rev. Mr. Naumburg, assisted by an English instructor, teaches nearly 100 pupils, not only in the general elements of knowledge, but also in Hebrew and German, in the religion and history of Israel. The confirmation is introduced here as in all the other Minhag America congregations, taking place annually on the Feast of Weeks, for the retiring class of the school.
>
> The Rev. Mr. Naumburg, whose earnest and successful labors in the synagogues of Philadelphia have been often mentioned, has excellently succeeded here in giving to both synagogue and school the right organization, and he conducts both to the entire satisfaction of the congregation and to the honor of Israel.[61]

After arriving in America between 1848 and 1850, Naumburg served at Keneseth Israel in Philadelphia as reader and teacher, eventually becoming head of their religious school when it was founded in 1855. His departure in 1860 followed three years of

conflict with the congregation's first rabbi, who advocated for reforms beyond what Naumburg could accept. After moving to Rodef Shalom in Pittsburgh, he spent ten years implementing a moderate reform approach, helping introduce Wise's *Minhag America* prayer book, incorporating a choir and organ, and introducing confirmation ceremonies for teen boys and girls. Wise made a journey to the congregation in 1867 and praised their situation.[62] Naumburg remained in Pittsburgh until the last years of his life and continued to serve as an occasional cantor at the congregation.[63] His religious orientation clearly aligned with the new Union, its plans for a college, and library initiatives. His initial donations included select rabbinic and Jewish philosophical works in German translation.[64] In 1875, he donated to the College

> an old Hebrew Bible, with marginal notes written in Latin, Greek, French, German and other European languages, by Johannes Christophorus Hencke, 1721. The penmanship is in itself one of the most artistical, perhaps, ever seen, and some of it is written so very delicately that it requires the assistance of a magnifying glass.[65]

The announcement shows an early interest by the new library in the para-textual elements of the book. It does not name the editor, publisher, or year of publication of the "old Hebrew Bible" but highlights the value of its provenance and the book as artifact. Hencke was a Protestant Minister in the area of Teutoburg in the early to mid-1700s.[66] Beyond its literary and publicity value, this acquisition (along with a dozen other books), demonstrates the enterprising efforts of Moritz Loth, a wealthy businessman who, as president of Cincinnati's Plum Street Temple in 1872, helped establish the UAHC and served as its first president from 1873 to 1889.[67] Naumburg had given him the books during a visit to Pittsburgh where Loth solicited financial contributions while also building the library collection. This underscored the Board's commitment to the project beyond Wise's personal efforts, although it did not always translate into funding for the library.

Naumburg continued his patronage through the years. In 1891, he offered another rare edition, *Nagid u-Mitzaveh,* by the kabbalist Jacob Zemah (Amsterdam, 1712).[68] In late 1895 or 1896, he added a 1735 edition of Midrash Rabbah, followed by seventy-nine additional volumes in 1899 just ahead of his move to New York (on this gift and its significance, see below).[69] Naumburg's generous first gift to the library also inspired others.

Meyer Streng (Bavaria 1824–Allegheny 1899) immigrated to the United States in 1849, quickly establishing himself in Allegheny where he accumulated wealth through mining and real estate investments, becoming a significant Jewish community philanthropist. He belonged to the Sixth Street Synagogue, which had merged with Rodef Shalom approximately fifteen years before Naumburg's arrival.[70] In December, following the announcement of Naumburg's donation, Streng would offer his own, which *The Israelite* took as an opportunity to garner publicity for the library and to teach the public.

A Rare Book

Meyer Streng, Esq., of Allegheny City, Pa., handed to the Rev. Dr. L. Nauemberg [*sic*], of the same city, a beautiful old Hebrew Bible for the Hebrew Union College:

"Biblia Hebraica cum notis Hebraicis et Lemmatibus Latinis ex recensione, Danielis Ernesti Jablonski Berolini (1690)…[71]

The introduction is also adorned with musical notes by Don David Pinna, M. D., of Amsterdam, showing the manner in which Sephardim or Portuguese Jews recited the Thorah at that time, and which they do to this day.

This rare book was duly received by the President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, who placed it, for the present, in the Public Library of Cincinnati for safe keeping.

Our grateful thanks are herewith tendered to the donor, and also to our noble friend, Rev. Dr. L. Nauemberg [*sic*]; and at the same time we would request the friends of Hebrew Union College everywhere to send all the books which would be of any value as a donation to the institution, for books cost money, and money is as yet a rare article with the Hebrew Union College. Alas, that is so; but we hope that the day is dawning when its financial resources will be substantial, and its influences as beneficial to humanity as the rays of the sun.[72]

Streng's gift was soon followed by other significant donations. Rabbi Aaron Joseph Messing (1840–1916, see image p. 28), educated at Breslau's rabbinical seminary, would become an important early contributor to the College's growing library. Messing was likely an early subscriber to the publishing house Mekitze Nirdamim ("awakeners of the slumbering"). Founded in Lyck in 1861, it dedicated itself to publishing forgotten Hebrew works from manuscripts and early printed editions.[73] His first gift to the library included six of their volumes published between 1866 and 1871.[74] Born in Posen, he and his brothers immigrated first to London in the 1860s, then to the United States in 1867. Aaron and his younger brothers Mayer and Henry all received European ordination. In 1875, while serving B'nai Shalom Congregation in Chicago, he wrote to Wise to report the congregation's vote to join the Union, and actively participated as a delegate at the third UAHC conference in Washington, D.C. in July 1876.[75] At the time of his gift, Aaron served as rabbi at Beth Israel in Peoria, Illinois (1876–1877).[76] His brother Henry later served the Peoria congregation as well, while his brother Mayer's Indianapolis congregation had already joined the Union by March 1874.[77] Aaron Messing sent his son Herman (Germany 1861–New York 1926) to study at HUC in 1878, but Herman left after completing high school and turned to a career in business.[78] Aaron's youngest son Abraham Joseph (Chicago 1873–Albuquerque 1922), was ordained by HUC in 1897.[79] Aaron Messing was a regular and committed supporter of the College and continued occasional book donations, eventually contributing his substantial library after his retirement (see below).

A decade Messing's junior, Ferdinand Becker (Bavaria 1851–Philadelphia 1945), the minister of Congregation Bene Israel in Keokuk, Iowa, donated a two-volume Mishnah

edition to support the new college.[80] His small gift is an important reminder that most rabbis were not in the financial position to act as philanthropists for the project, but actively sought to demonstrate their commitment. A graduate of the rabbinical seminary of Kaiserslautern, Becker served in Keokuk from 1874 through 1879. His arrival coincided with the congregation's adoption of *Minhag America*, and, as reported by *The American Israelite* in early July 1874, with its adoption "our people are fast leaving the 'shadow,' to exchange it for the 'light' of our religion."[81] At that time, the community numbered just twenty people, had recently acquired an organ, and was fundraising for a synagogue building. By March 1874, the congregation had already joined the Union.[82]

Abraham L. Mayer [also Meyer] (Soest 1811–Baltimore 1881) donated two volumes of Abarbanel's Torah commentary to the library.[83] Mayer engaged in rabbinical studies in Munster, graduating in 1830, and later continuing his studies in Darmstadt. Arriving in New York in 1861, he began his American rabbinical career in Syracuse after previously serving in Alzey and Mainz. He subsequently relocated to Richmond, Virginia, serving Congregation House of Israel as its first rabbi. With his arrival, the congregation adopted *Minhag America*, a development communicated to Wise and others via an *Israelite* letter to the editor.[84] Notably, Wise himself delivered the dedicatory sermon at the synagogue's opening.[85]

Gustav Ensel, who had served as a rabbi near Bremen before immigrating to America, was born in Hechingen in 1827. He received both musical and religious education. According to his obituary, he and his father arrived in the United States in the late 1840s, initially settling near Morganfield, Kentucky before relocating to St. Louis.[86] However, records indicate Ensel arrived in the United States in 1857, settling first in Cincinnati, where he established himself as a piano teacher. He served as temporary cantor at Wise's B'nai Yeshurun congregation, helping the congregation prepare musically for implementing *Minhag America*, which they had recently adopted.[87] Simultaneously, his work promoted *Minhag America* more broadly. An advertisement for the liturgy in *The Israelite* included an introductory note: "Mr. Ensel offers to all congregations having introduced the MINHAG AMERICA, a complete copy of all the music, solos, choruses and recitations, as used in the Synagogue in Lodge Street."[88] After a brief tenure with the congregation, he remained in Cincinnati until summer, when he relocated to St. Louis. There, with his father and recently arrived brothers, he opened a liquor store while volunteering his musical talents as choir director at B'nei El Congregation. Opening another liquor store in Springfield, Ensel moved there permanently around 1874. There he involved himself with a small congregation, Brith Sholem, becoming a regular service leader. During this period, he donated to Cincinnati's new library an edition of the Torah and Haftarot with Rashi's commentary (5 volumes, Amsterdam, 1797).[89] Throughout these developments, he apparently maintained cordial relations with Wise. His interest in the College, library, and Wise's Union is evidenced both by this gift and his 1878 election to the national

finance committee.[90] In late 1881, he contributed a copy of his own work, *Ancient Liturgical Music: A Comparative and Historical Essay on the Origin and Development of Sacred Music from the Earliest Times, with Illustrations of the Music Employed in the Worship of the Synagogue, Church & Mosque* (1880). The library held the item as a special treasure, eventually cataloguing and preserving it among their manuscripts and rare holdings.[91] The work was indeed rare. Printed through the then new hectograph process to accommodate its many illustrations, it appeared in only about twenty copies, which Ensel then had professionally bound.[92]

Lay Donors

Beyond clergy, individuals nationwide sought to support the new school and library. In these formative years of America's first Jewish seminary, a remarkable network of benefactors emerged, building an institutional foundation for Jewish scholarship with their personal libraries. Their gifts created not just a collection of books, but a bridge between the world of European Jewish learning and American Jewish aspirations. Among the most generous of these early donors was Ignatz Herzog (Hungary ca. 1815–Chicago 1893), a Chicago furrier, who donated a trove of works of rabbinic learning including a complete twelve-volume Babylonian Talmud, a six-volume Mishnah with German translation, and a Hebrew edition of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*.[93] Herzog's commitment extended beyond his lifetime. In his accompanying letter to Wise, he pledged the remainder of his library to the College after his death. His gift came with a heartfelt condition frequently stipulated by donors of both funds and books: "All the rest of my library shall be devoted to the same purpose (Hebrew Union College) after my death, for which I only beg one favor, that one of the scholars on the day of my Yahrzeit shall say Kaddish."[94] Thus, the gift and subsequent recitation would constitute a permanent memorial. This practice of commemorating donors through ritual remembrance illustrated how the library functioned not merely as a repository of books, but as a sacred trust connecting generations of American Jews. The Board accepted this condition, as became customary, and upon Herzog's death in 1893, his widow Sofia (Sophia Blominfelt) Herzog (Bavaria, ca. 1835–Chicago, date unknown) informed the Board of his passing and her intention to fulfill his commitment.[95] In March 1894, the books arrived. The approximately one dozen titles, some of more recent dates of publication, suggest Herzog had continued acquiring Jewish books after his initial donation. Among the notable contributions was an edition of Abarbanel's Torah Commentary published in Hanau in 1710.[96]

From the heartland of America came other significant contributions. Solomon Loeb Levi (Jebenhausen 1807–Oskaloosa 1884)—the son of Rabbi Maier Levi of Württemberg (1767–1849) and an Oskaloosa, Iowa store clerk in 1870—donated a three-volume Mishnah edition (Berlin, 1763), perhaps encouraged by the UAHC's Oskaloosa representative.[97] A four-volume edition of the *Shulchan Aruch* (Amsterdam, 1804 or 1810) came from Moses Williams (Bavaria 1828–Philadelphia 1894), a notions