The Jewish Publication Society of America

REPORT OF EIGHTY-SIXTH YEAR

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(Elected May 19, 1974)

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1Term expires in 1975
2Term expires in 1976
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REPORT OF THE 86th JPS ANNUAL MEETING

Jerome J. Shestack, prominent Philadelphia attorney and civic leader, was re-elected president of The Jewish Publication Society of America for a third term at the 86th annual membership meeting of the Society on May 19, 1974.

Elected to the post of Society vice-presidents were Robert P. Abrams who has served as treasurer in recent years and Dr. A. Leo Levin, of the law school of the University of Pennsylvania. Three vice-presidents were re-elected. They are Mitchell E. Panzer, Justice Samuel J. Roberts, and Philip D. Sang. Dr. Edward B. Shils was re-elected Society secretary. Robert P. Frankel was named treasurer.

Named to the JPS board of trustees for three year terms were Norma Fields Furst, professor of psycho-educational processes at Temple University, and Ronald Perelman, Philadelphia business executive.

Francine Klagsbrun and David Sidorsky, both of New York, were named to the Society’s publication committee.

The annual meeting of the Society was addressed by President Shestack who reported on the progress of its publishing activities. Dr. Chaim Potok, JPS editor, explained his views as a writer and editor and Arie L. Eliav, member of Israel’s Knesset and author of the new JPS book, “Land of the Hart,” a “dovish” look at the future of the Middle East, discussed the situation in that part of the world.

Annual Report of JPS President Jerome J. Shestack (May 19, 1974)

In the 17th century, Joseph Solomon de Medigo wrote to his friend, Zerah Ben Nathan, advising him to fill his house with books, for they “delight those who are sad or sated with life.”

During 1973—an incredulous year in which life was often saddened with tragedy or sated with disillusionment—we at JPS helped perhaps to temper the bleakness of contemporary history with offerings of learning and of beauty.

I mention first “Jeremiah”—that prophet of despair and hope, of foreboding
and fulfillment, whose anguish and ambivalence is so pertinent today. We published this year our new translation of Jeremiah illustrated with the woodcuts of Nikos Stavronlakis, a Greek Jew of extraordinary artistic talent. It is one of the most beautiful books we have ever published. A translation pure and sparse, a type generous and bold, woodcuts haunting and powerful—all combined to form a moving and unique book.

But the achievement of "Jeremiah" goes further. For it demonstrates how the traditional can be fused with the modern and produce a harmonious whole. And if we can continue to do that on many fronts, then we may indeed make a most creative contribution to Judaism and Jewish learning.

The second book is "The Jewish Catalog." When the young authors, Sharon and Michael Strassfeld and Richard Siegel, came to Chaim Potok with this book, he saw its promise and helped the talented authors to mold their vision. And the Society backed the venture fully. It was in many ways an implausible book, for it sings the song of traditional Judaism in the counter-culture style of modern youth. Yet, it touched a great need, and today it is a bestseller. We published it at the close of 1973, and in three months, over 50,000 copies had been sold. Before long, 100,000 copies will be in print. In campus bookstores, it is eagerly sought. Most books fill a demand; this one helps create and shape the demand for Jewish tradition. We congratulate the authors on their achievement and ourselves on our foresight. "The Jewish Catalog" is a significant milestone, hopefully a forerunner of others with equal appeal.

During this past year, we published 30 books. This was a record for the Society—more than double the highest number of books ever published before. And the list had a remarkable diversity—enough to please the most discerning scholar, the lover of belles lettres, the devotee of current sociology, the lover of history and legend. Our membership increased to over 14,000, a high for this decade, and our sales of books exceeded $600,000, also a new record. We have come a long way from our experience 30 years ago when we published only three volumes, and our revenue from books was $15,000.

Along with this expansion, we have enlarged our reputation and influence not only in circles of Judaica, but in the book world as a whole. All of this portends well for the future, giving us increased capability to attract authors as well as readers.

But the experience has not been without a sobering lesson. One cannot enlarge a book list without a correlative increase in book buyers. And while our members bought more books than at any time in our history, it was not enough. I spoke last year of a growth that would incur a deficit of $100,000. It actually reached $124,000.

The poet, Robert Francis, once said:

Had we the wit
To use the surplus for the deficit
We'd make a fairer, fairer world of it.

We did have the wit to utilize our surplus for growth, and made a fairer Society by doing it. At the same time, prudence commends restraint until our membership expands still further. Of making books, there may be no end, but
of publishing books there is a limit. So, this year we have programmed 20 volumes—a good deal more than in prior years, but not quite as exuberant a rate as last year.

In 1973, we made plans for some superb volumes which will be on our 1974 list. I mention for now only two.

"Haggadah and History," is a remarkable fusion of art and Jewish history by Professor Yosef Yerushalmi depicting the Passover Haggadah over the ages. It will be an expensive book for the Society, but well worth it. As Elizabeth Barrett Browning once said:

We get no good
By being ungenerous, even to a book
And calculating profits
It is rather when
We gloriously forget ourselves and plunge
Soul-forward, headlong, into a book's profound,
Impressioned for its beauty and salt of truth—
'Tis then we get the right good from a book.

I predict that "Haggadah and History" will be one of the most beautiful and significant volumes in the Society's history.

Another important volume is "Land of the Hart," by Arie Lova Eliav. This is a keen and sensitive appraisal of conflict in the Mid-East which made a significant impact in Israel and was updated after the Yom Kippur War.

Thus, 1973, in which such books were wrought, will produce an even more fruitful 1974.

Last year, I announced that we were contemplating a new Commentary on the Bible written by the leading scholars in world Jewry, yet readable and usable for our lay readers. We moved ahead with the careful planning needed to realize this monumental project. In August, I met in Jerusalem with Dr. Nahum Sarna, Dr. Moshe Greenberg, Dr. Jonas Greenfield, Dr. Yosef Yerushalmi, and Dr. Chaim Potok to mold the guidelines for the Commentary. It was an exciting meeting and perhaps even a historic one, as the scholars of our Commentary planning committee articulated the need for such a modern Commentary, and as we formulated the scope and plan of the Commentary.

The minutes of that discussion were reviewed by a number of our leading scholars, and I think you will be interested in the comments of our revered Dr. Louis Finkelstein. He wrote:

To read the discussion was an inspiration

While scholarship is the pursuit of truth; and the truth, itself is the same for everyone, it is inevitable that in humanistic studies, at least, one's point of view should be reflected in one's work. Indeed, it is probably good that this is so. The interpretation of a great work, or rather a series of great books like the Bible, is not simply a mathematical equation. Different scholars will bring to the Bible different questions, and therefore get different answers.

It is no accident that Yehezkel Kauffman introduced such a revolution in Bible studies in our time. He brought to the Bible the sense of a committed Jew, who was making his life in the Holy Land and hoping for the establishment of the very state
which the Prophets prophesied would come into being. Inevitably, in his enthusiasm and zeal, he saw in the Prophets shades of meaning which had escaped others. He also, for the first time in modern Bible scholarship, recognized the unity of the whole Jewish tradition.

Dr. Finkelstein went on to describe the need—

to discover in the Bible . . . what the Bible as a whole has to say to us; what makes it unique among all the books of the world; and why it has had such an incredibly great influence on civilization

in any event, I feel deeply indebted to you and to Dr. Chaim Potok, after reading the minutes, because of the inspiration offered me by the clear vision and practical insights, as well as understanding of the needs of the hour, which were reflected in the remarks which both of you made.

The guidelines are now finished, and we are ready to move forward. I am happy to announce that Dr. Nahum Sarna, Professor of Biblical Studies at Brandeis University, will be the General Editor of the Commentary, joined by an editorial committee of distinguished scholars. The scholars who will prepare commentaries for three of the five books of the Pentateuch have already been selected and should begin their work shortly.

To finance the Bible Commentary project, we shall seek to establish a modern supporting “Septuagint” of 70 donors who will each contribute $5,000 to fund the scholarship effort. I am confident we shall be successful and that the JPS Bible Commentary will be one of the memorable contributions of our age to Jewish learning.

The JPS translation of Prophets and Writings is also progressing well and hopefully will be ready by the end of 1975.

Another project which we planned in 1973 and which will see fruition this year is the JPS Series of Classics. Here we plan to republish some of the great classics of Jewish literature in paperback form to be sold at low cost so as to attract college students. There is a dearth of Jewish books on campus, and we recognize a major obligation to concern ourselves with this area.

There are other major projects still in the planning stage which will be described in time; suffice it to say that the imaginations of our Editor and Chairman of the Publication Committee are fertile and fruitful.

This brings me to the announcement that our Editor, Chaim Potok, has decided to remain next year in Israel and that accordingly he feels it necessary to relinquish the duties of Editor. The officers have accepted this decision with the greatest reluctance, for we, above all, appreciate his magnificent and creative contributions to the Society during his service as our Editor. One redeeming aspect, however, is that Dr. Potok will remain as Special Projects Editor with particular assignments relating to our Bible Commentary. This is heartening, for it assures us of the proximity of his invaluable counsel and support in the promising years ahead.

Happily, Professor Yosef Yerushalmi remains as Chairman of our Publication Committee. He is a man of rare discernment, judgment and sensitivity, and we are fortunate indeed to have the benefit of his guidance.
I would like also to express a personal word of thanks to our Executive Vice President, David Gross, who in the face of some very trying times has maintained an unswerving faith in the progress of the Society and a singular devotion to its welfare.

Ben Johnson once said, "There is no book so poor that it would not be a prodigy if wholly made by a single man." Our books are not the product of a single person but of all of our loyal and hardworking staff.

It seems almost superfluous to add that our accomplishments would not have been possible without the support and deep commitment of our Trustees and officers. These are not just perfunctory acknowledgments; they reflect a debt of gratitude that I feel and which the Society acknowledges to those who make its work fruitful.

In sum, we look back with a sense of accomplishment and yet challenge. To see what has been done is to whet our appetite for what can be done—and hopefully shall be done.

In the 12th Century, Judah ibn Tibbon, a lover of books, addressed his Testament to his son, Samuel ibn Tibbon, a physician and philosopher who translated the Moreh Nebukim of Maimonides into Hebrew. In it he said:

"My son! Make your books your companions, let your cases and shelves be your pleasure grounds and gardens. Bask in their paradise, gather their fruit, pluck their roses, take their spices and their myrrh. If your soul be satiate and weary, change from garden to garden, from furrow to furrow, from prospect to prospect. Then will your desire renew itself and your soul be filled with delight!"

It's a testament we at the Jewish Publication Society heartily affirm.

**JPS Treasurer's Report for 1973**

Continuing the encouraging trend of the past two years, income from sale of Jewish Publication Society books and bibles rose to $327,667 in 1973, the 86th year of operations for the Jewish Publication Society of America.

In the previous 12-month period sales were $293,000 and in 1971 they were $271,000.

Our membership income advanced to $252,315 in the past year from the 1972 level of $213,200 while the individual membership figure went over the 14,000 level at the year's end, an increase for the year of about 1,000 new members.

For 1973 welfare funds increased to $26,752 from $21,000 while donations rose to $5,299 from the 1972 level of $1,250. Investment income from the special purpose fund rose to $62,102 from the $50,000 level of 1972. In addition, there was in 1973 a $25,898 contribution from the special purpose fund.

Our 1973 expenses, including book costs, royalties and general administrative expenses rose from $554,376 in 1972 to $699,175 which was $106,132 in excess of the revenue from publications.

However, after contributions from special purpose funds and a gain of $157,577 on the sale of the Society's 15th Street building to the Commonwealth
of Pennsylvania. JPS 1973 revenues in excess of expenses came to $171,496.
During the year the Jewish Publication Society expressed its solidarity with
the State of Israel by transferring $100,000 of its funds into Israel bonds.
The new year has started most auspiciously for JPS. We have a major
best-seller, "The Jewish Catalog," which has received nationwide attention.
We have already sold more than 60,000 copies of this publication and during
the first quarter this was reflected in a sales figure of $267,983 against $158,243
for the same quarter last year. We can count this a good omen for 1974.
Our fiscal position continues to be a sound one.

JPS Publications

In 1973 we published the following new volumes, with titles, authors,
quantities printed, and distribution as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Printed</th>
<th>Distributed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISAIAH: A New Translation</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>3,580</td>
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<td>Illustrated by Chaim Gross</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISAIAH: A New Translation</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>920</td>
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<td>Text Only</td>
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<td>PSALMS: A New Translation</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>3,150</td>
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<td>AMBIVALENT AMERICAN JEW</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>3,113</td>
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<td>By Charles Liebman</td>
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<td>ISRAEL AT THE CROSSROADS</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>2,662</td>
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<td>By Eliezer Schweid</td>
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<td>FIRSTFRUITS: A Harvest of New Israeli Writing</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>2,853</td>
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<td>Ed. by James A. Michener</td>
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<td>THE JEWISH CATALOG</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>6,592</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ed. by Michael and Sharon Strassfeld, Richard Siegel</td>
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<td>SUKKOT AND SIMHAT TORAH ANTHOLOGY</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>2,363</td>
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<td>By Philip Goodman</td>
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<tr>
<td>THE JEWS OF POLAND</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>1,131</td>
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<td>By Bernard Weinryb</td>
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<td>AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK (Volume 74)</td>
<td>3,750</td>
<td>2,185</td>
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<td>1973. Edited by Morris Fine &amp; Milton Himmelfarb</td>
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<td>Martha Jelenko, Executive Editor</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Co-published with American Jewish Committee)</td>
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<td>SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF THE JEWS</td>
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<td>2,543</td>
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<td>(Volume 15)</td>
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<tr>
<td>By Salo W. Baron</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Co-published with Columbia University Press)</td>
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<td>THE MARTYR: The Story of a Secret Jew and the Mexican Inquisition in the Sixteenth Century</td>
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<td>705</td>
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<td>By Martin A. Cohen</td>
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<td>WHITHER? AND OTHER STORIES</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>618</td>
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<tr>
<td>By M. Z. Feierberg</td>
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THE SACRED LAND: LEGENDS OF JERUSALEM  
By Zev Vilnay  
4,000 1,714

ADVENTURES IN THE GALILEE  
By Yehoash Biber  
5,000 2,862

MASADA WILL NOT FALL AGAIN  
By Sophie Greenspan  
3,000 1,893

1973 Reprints

During 1973 we reprinted the following books:

AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF AMERICAN JEWS (H.U. Ribalow) 3,000;
ANTHOLOGY OF HOLOCAUST LITERATURE (J. Glatstein, I. Knox, S. Margoshes, eds.) 1,500;
ROSH HASHANAH ANTHOLOGY (P. Goodman) 4,000;
PURIM ANTHOLOGY (P. Goodman) 3,000;
MENORAH TREASURY (L.W. Schwarz) 3,000;
TEN AND A KID (S.R. Weilerstein) 3,000.