

Ira Robinson

**Ninety-Nine Meetings: The Jewish Public Library  
of Montreal in its First Century**

As the Jewish Public Library (JPL) of Montreal celebrates its centennial, it rightfully needs to take stock of itself: past, present, and future. Doing so in any detail, however, requires the concerted efforts of several talented researchers, whose contributions on specific aspects of the Library are to be found in this publication.<sup>1</sup>

I was asked to contribute a more general evaluation of JPL in its first century to complement the more specific studies presented here. But how can JPL's history in all its complexity be approached in the compass of one necessarily limited article? My approach to the task at hand is to examine the ninety-nine reports presented annually to JPL members at the Library's Annual Meetings (AM).<sup>2</sup> These reports come in different styles and languages over ninety-nine years. However they all attempt to present a fair summary of the JPL's position and activities in the year under review and hence, taken collectively, they make an appreciable contribution to the institution's history, and represent, in my opinion, the best means to begin to understand JPL in its first century. What follows constitutes my reflections on JPL's ninety-nine AMs.

### **JPL's Ambitions**

In 1957, the book commemorating the first forty years of the existence of JPL evoked "[t]hat mythical but widely known creature, the future historian and sociologist"<sup>3</sup> It was evident to the people connected with JPL in its first century that what they were doing was of historical significance.<sup>4</sup> It was of equal significance that, from the beginning, the founders of JPL understood that the collection of Judaica in Hebrew, Yiddish, and other languages that they were assembling would ultimately be of great importance for researchers.<sup>5</sup>

The founders of JPL were culturally ambitious. In 1919, JPL president H.M. Caiserman<sup>6</sup> well expressed this ambition when he pointed out that that the Jewish Division of the New York Public Library then boasted 150,000 volumes to the JPL's 3,100. How many years, Caiserman rhetorically asked, would it take for JPL to catch up (*ontsuyogn*)?<sup>7</sup> It must be said that, if JPL never exactly caught up with the New York library, in the long run the ambition expressed by Caiserman was substantially fulfilled, for today the JPL's claim of 150,000 items in its collection<sup>8</sup> compares quite favorably with the New York Public Library Dorot Jewish Division's claim to house some 250,000 items.<sup>9</sup>

### **Foundational Principles and the Invention of Tradition**

The first JPL AM report covers the period from March, 1914 to July 15, 1915 and consists of a printed pamphlet.<sup>10</sup> Among the many items included in the report are the JPL's statement of its fundamental principles (*grundprinzipn*) published on pages 31–32. The first of these principles is important for us to note: "JPL is of and for the people (*folk*)"

This principle implied for the founding leaders of JPL that they did not merely derive from the Jewish people but that they had a responsibility to the people to both share and shape its political and cultural life. The JPL leadership “acted locally but thought globally.” As expressed in the 6<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1920), the Library’s leaders already spoke of a JPL tradition (*tradiziye*) to pay attention not merely to acquiring books but also to strengthening Jewish life. This specifically included participation in and support for such fundamental Jewish political initiatives as the Canadian Jewish Congress and the Palestine Workers’ Fund.<sup>11</sup>

That same document boasted of another JPL “tradition,” “that all of [JPL’s] endeavors carry a cultural/aesthetic character and attract to it all the intellectual forces of our city.”<sup>12</sup> The founders of JPL were thus not merely asserting themselves as communal leaders. They also saw themselves as innovators of “tradition.”<sup>13</sup> The 14<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1928) similarly emphasizes that JPL is not merely a library but an institution dedicated to bringing the wider public closer to Jewish cultural life.<sup>14</sup> This assertion was even further emphasized in the sixteenth annual report (1930) which stated:

There is no longer any question for whom [the JPL exists]. It is an understood fact that there is a growing Jewish intelligentsia and a Jewish youth [in Montreal] who come daily to the JPL as their cultural source.<sup>15</sup>

Who were the people who had such ambitions and principles? The JPL’s major founding leaders were Reuben Brainin, the charismatic scholar and editor of Montreal’s Yiddish-language daily, the *Keneder Adler*,<sup>16</sup> and the young intellectual, Yehuda Kaufman.<sup>17</sup> However both of them left Montreal for the United States soon after the Library was founded. The AM report for 1917 states somewhat plaintively: “Now the steering committee has no ‘leaders,’ only plain dedicated members.”<sup>18</sup> In historical perspective, they were, perhaps, unduly modest.

What else can we learn about the leadership? With respect to its leaders, the JPL’s original *grundprinzipn* had this to say:

- JPL was to be directed by a committee.
- That committee was to have 23 members.
- That committee was to meet weekly.<sup>19</sup>

Leadership of the Library was a constant, collective endeavor, week-in and week-out. Weekly meetings of the Board, on Tuesday nights, were a feature of JPL institutional life until 1950, when there was a move to make business meetings only every other week and to reserve the other Tuesday night for cultural activities.<sup>20</sup>

In the spirit of the Labor Zionism that motivated so many of the JPL’s founders, JPL leaders in the early decades referred to each other as “comrade”: *Haver* and *Havera*.

This convention lasted at least until the early 1950s. In 1954, JPL Director David Rome thus issued an invitation for a celebratory “glass of wine” on the occasion of the AM from himself and “*Havera Rome*” (his wife) and ended the invitation with the salutation, “with comradely regards” [*mit havershn derekh erez*].<sup>21</sup>

The founders of JPL were dedicated to the Jewish people in heart and soul, but they were not religiously observant Orthodox Jews. This can be seen in their original policy on opening hours and lending:

- JPL was to be open daily with the exception of Yom Kippur and the Seder Nights.
- It was to lend books daily except for *Shabbes* and *Yom Tov*.<sup>22</sup>

Having the Library open on the Jewish Sabbath and holidays as well as organizing programs like a 1920 Friday night boat excursion on the “Rapids King,”<sup>23</sup> was obviously galling to the strictly observant Orthodox Jews of Montreal,<sup>24</sup> but definitely expressed the character of the people who made up and led the institution in its early years.

The Library and its members never lost their connection to Jewish life elsewhere, particularly in Europe. JPL had been founded in 1914, in the midst of the tragedy and human carnage of World War I that especially affected vulnerable Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. Within less than a generation, a new and deadlier war began. The vicissitudes of the Second World War near its beginning were expressed in the 26<sup>th</sup> AM Report (September 26, 1940). Now, the Report said, just like in 1914, the year of JPL’s founding, we are in a “bitter despair” [*bitern ye’ush*].<sup>25</sup> At the end of the Second World War, Librarian Rokhl Eisenberg’s report for the 32<sup>nd</sup> AM (1946), published in the *Keneder Adler*, stated baldly: “For the first time after all the war years we are in contact with Jewish life overseas... We feel orphaned.”<sup>26</sup>

## A Library and its Languages

Another of the fundamental principles promulgated at the Library’s beginnings also rewards our attention: “[JPL’s] mission is to collect *all* [my emphasis] printed treasures of the Jewish people, especially in Hebrew and Yiddish as well as to collect the ‘classic’ books of other peoples in their languages.”<sup>27</sup> This meant that they took the broadest possible view of what “Jewish” was and were intellectually prepared to admit political and intellectual ideas and points of view that clashed with their own.

In this fundamental principle the founders showed a clear preference for Yiddish and Hebrew in terms of Jewish cultural expression. This was evidenced by the fact that in the first AM report, there was no English at all save for a few names in the advertising section, though it is clear that at least some of the founders were fluent in English.

This linguistic purity did not last long, however, nor could it if JPL was to maintain its cultural responsibility to a Jewish community that was rapidly acquiring English. Thus, by 1926, the invitation to the 12<sup>th</sup> AM on October 24 was printed in a bilingual Yiddish–English format, the same basic format that it would retain for several decades.<sup>28</sup>

During those decades, English increasingly formed a part of the AM Report. In 1936, for instance, we see an added appeal in English for contributions to JPL's annual campaign.<sup>29</sup> In 1944, along with the Yiddish material, appeared excerpts from a recently published English article by Cecil Roth, "The Jewish Love of Books."<sup>30</sup> In the postwar period, we see the first substantial evidence for the use of English in the AM. For the 34<sup>th</sup> AM (November 21, 1948), there exists a three page report in English in typescript alongside eight pages in Yiddish.<sup>31</sup> The next year for the first time we see a JPL AM press release in English.<sup>32</sup> 1954 saw the first typed AM minutes in English.<sup>33</sup> Minutes of AMs continued in English with the exception of 1956 when it reverted temporarily to Yiddish.<sup>34</sup> Another sign that English was increasingly becoming the Library's working language was that the handwritten report of the nominating committee for the 46<sup>th</sup> AM (1960) was written in that language.<sup>35</sup> By 1970, the AM Presidential address, by J.B. Lightman, was entirely in English.<sup>36</sup> This innovation obviously did not go unnoticed by partisans of Yiddish at JPL, whose protest was doubtless heard. The next year, 1971, Lightman began his speech with eight lines of Yiddish and then continued in English.<sup>37</sup>

In 1972, the Executive Director's Report is first presented in English and only then in Yiddish, and most committee reports were now published in English alone except for that of the personnel committee, whose report is trilingual in English, French, and Yiddish, and the reports of the *Kultur Komitet* (Cultural Committee) and the *Froyen Farein* (Women's organization) whose reports are only in Yiddish.<sup>38</sup>

By 1975 the Cultural Committee, which had overseen the gamut of JPL cultural programming, was split into Yiddish–Hebrew and English–French components.<sup>39</sup> Next year's president's report goes far to explain the change:

While we were successful in Yiddish and Hebrew cultural programming, we would need to re-examine and reshape the French and English section. Somehow we feel that our programming in these languages does not attract a sufficient number of people. The absence of a younger crowd was particularly noticeable...<sup>40</sup>

The French factor at JPL first appears in the 29<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1943), which speaks of Jean Bruchési, a Quebec government official, who visited the Library and donated 24 books in French.<sup>41</sup> The first appearance of the French language in the AM comes at the JPL's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary banquet that also served as its AM (May 30, 1965). On that occasion, the JPL Jubilee dinner was addressed in Yiddish by Abraham

Joshua Heschel, and in French and English by Montreal Mayor Jean Drapeau and by Quebec Cultural Affairs Minister Georges Emile Lapalme.<sup>42</sup> By the early 1970s, with the position of the French language in Quebec a prominent public issue, and with a rapidly growing francophone Jewish community making its presence increasingly felt, it was obviously thought by the committee planning the AM that part of the president's address should be in French.<sup>43</sup> In J.B. Lightman's presidential report for the 1971–72 year, he tried in the French section to reach out to the newly established francophone Jewish community of Montreal.<sup>44</sup> In 1980, the JPL bylaws added an official French name for the Library: la Bibliothèque publique juive.<sup>45</sup> However despite the French language outreach and the change in the official name, the Library often found it difficult to attract francophones to its programs. In the 1983 AM Report, the "Report on Jewish Book Month" stated:

To our regret, the French lecture did not attract a large enough audience. In spite of our very heavy publicity and all our efforts, not enough francophones showed interest in attending.<sup>46</sup>

By the first decade of the twenty-first century, the entire AM Report had become fully bilingual in English and French.<sup>47</sup> In 2004, the JPL AM report celebrated its fifth "official" language—Russian, and noted that the Library had begun to collect children's books in Spanish as well.<sup>48</sup>

## **Yiddish and its Decline**

The rise of English and French to prominence in the AMs of the JPL was accompanied by a declining use of the Yiddish language in which JPL had been founded. As we have seen, use of English had been on the rise since the 1920s, a point at which major Jewish immigration to Canada had largely ceased and when, therefore, a natural growth of English, which the younger generation was acquiring in school, was to be expected.

The 37<sup>th</sup> AM (1951) observed a revival in Montreal's Yiddish cultural life because of the influx of Holocaust survivors. This influx gave JPL leaders the confidence that "we know we are building not merely for the present but for the future as well."<sup>49</sup> By the mid-1950s, however, it was becoming clear that Yiddish was in decline. The 39<sup>th</sup> AM (1954) noted that not all the children who were library readers knew Yiddish. It also noted the global decline in Yiddish culture by reporting that the Library was acquiring more English and Hebrew books as a result of the diminution of publishing in Yiddish.<sup>50</sup> In 1971, the committee planning the 57<sup>th</sup> AM proposed that the guest speaker address the meeting in Yiddish.<sup>51</sup> By that time, it was obviously no longer self-evident that major JPL speakers would share their thoughts with the JPL audience in the Yiddish language.

By 1973 members were hearing reports of difficulties in obtaining librarians with appropriate skills in Yiddish, Hebrew, and French. That same meeting saw the report of a new JPL English-speaking women's committee that supplemented but did not replace the original Yiddish-speaking *Froyen Farein*.<sup>52</sup>

In the President's Report at the 62<sup>nd</sup> AM (1977) we hear that "although we are a four language library, we always emphasize the Yiddish."<sup>53</sup> The very fact that those words had to be spoken [in English] is a telling sign of Yiddish's decline. The 1998 AM saw, for the first time, the absence of a parallel Yiddish section in the AM Report and the inclusion, for the first time, of a paragraph in Hebrew, along with another in Yiddish, in the "Report on Cultural Committees."<sup>54</sup> The parallel Yiddish section was to reappear, temporarily, a year later only to disappear completely afterward.<sup>55</sup> The Yiddish that remained in the JPL AM report consisted of the report of the Yiddish Committee.<sup>56</sup>

## Finances and Locations

One of the striking things about the early AM reports is the relatively small sums that represented the Library's finances. Indeed it would not be until 1943 that the JPL annual budget exceeded \$10,000.00.<sup>57</sup> Thus the Second annual banquet appeal in 1916 yielded a net profit of \$115.00,<sup>58</sup> while its first annual picnic brought in \$150.00. In the budget year 1917/18 the Library's income was \$996.94 and its expenditures were 980.16, leaving a positive balance of \$16.78 which was noted in the financial report as "remarkable" given that on October 11, 1917 there was only \$31.10 in the JPL treasury and the institution had maintained itself with small loans from two members.<sup>59</sup>

Doubtless for reasons of slim finances, many of the AM reports after the Sixth were not printed, but rather are present as handwritten drafts in the archives, sometimes done in pencil. The 1922 AM Report is typical of many when it states that JPL found itself "in a difficult struggle for the maintenance of the institution" because it was unable to pay its debts and its creditors were threatening legal action. In May the decision was taken to close the Library for several weeks and, even after it was reopened, the "permanent worries" (*shtendige daygos*) concerning finances and the struggle for funds persisted. As that report concluded, "the year is over but we cannot breathe. The crisis is still not past."<sup>60</sup>

Beyond finances, the other great and persistent JPL concern was space, which had become inadequate in JPL's quarters on rue St-Urbain. The issue of satisfactory space for all of the Library's manifold needs was not to be really satisfied until JPL acquired a "splendid" (*prachtfül*) new home at 4099 Esplanade which was purchased in 1929. The 1930 AM report, which celebrated the new location, ruefully looked back to the previous condition of crowdedness and looked forward to the many possibilities the new space afforded.<sup>61</sup>

These possibilities, unfortunately, needed to be deferred because of the onset of the Great Depression, which affected JPL existentially. The seventeenth AM (1931) spoke of the severe economic crisis and portentously warned that “If the Library is dear to you, none of you can choose to stand afar.”<sup>62</sup> The AM Report for 1932 stated that:

Comrades [*Haverim*] discussed the question of closing the Library at the meetings with great distress [*hartzveitog*] since there seemed no other way out.

But necessity was the mother of invention. Literally ten cents at a time, JPL supporters sold \$530.00 worth of “tags”; put on rummage sales (\$200.00) and other fund-raising programs, and collected enough to keep the institution’s doors open.<sup>63</sup> The next year’s report called the Library’s struggle to survive “dramatic.”<sup>64</sup> Whether JPL’s home at 4099 Esplanade would be foreclosed by its creditors was the question of the hour. It is to the creditors’ merit that they did not insist on foreclosure and apparently agreed to defer the payment of interest on the Library’s debts. These deferred interest payments would not be paid off for more than ten years.<sup>65</sup> There was no money for new books.<sup>66</sup> In the next year, 1934, it was out of the question once again to print the AM report and send copies to all JPL members.<sup>67</sup> There would not be a positive financial report until 1940, when the onset of the Second World War effectively ended the Depression.<sup>68</sup>

The postwar period saw an important turning point in JPL’s finances. In November, 1949, the Library for the first time joined the Combined Jewish Appeal of Montreal as a constituent agency.<sup>69</sup> At the 1951 AM, members learned that Montreal’s organized Jewish community had contributed \$26,850 of the Library’s total income for that year which amounted to \$41,731.<sup>70</sup> JPL dependence on Jewish community funding would become a crucial element in the organization’s finances from that point on.

In the 30<sup>th</sup> AR (1944) it was reported that the entire year’s work had been overshadowed by preparations for a large campaign for a new building to replace 4099 Esplanade.<sup>71</sup> This new building, located at 4499 Esplanade at the corner of Mount Royal, was opened in October, 1953. It was the first facility specially built for JPL, and the 1954 AM was informed that since the opening of the new building, the number of readers had increased by one third and the circulation of books by 50%.<sup>72</sup> By the early 1960s, however, major demographic movements within the Montreal Jewish community were making the JPL’s building on Esplanade a white elephant. One indication of the movement of Jews out of JPL’s immediate neighborhood was the establishment of JPL branches in areas of new Jewish settlement like Côte Saint-Luc, St-Laurent, and Chomedey.<sup>73</sup> By 1966, the 52<sup>nd</sup> AM was informed that for some time the neighborhood of Esplanade and Mont-Royal had seen an exodus of most of its Jewish inhabitants for new homes. As with all other Jewish institutions in the area, such as the YM-YWHA, JPL would be forced to move.<sup>74</sup> The next year’s AM reported the sale of the building for \$291,000.<sup>75</sup>

JPL wound up relocating in an office building on 5253 Décarie Boulevard. The 1968 AM was told that “after a few years of near isolation,” JPL was “again located in the heart of the Jewish community.” But this attempt to put a good face on the move could not mask Décarie’s many negatives. JPL’s second story location made it difficult to locate. There was an “absence of even elementary facilities.” The only hope for the future was to build a proper home for the Library in conjunction with the building plans of Montreal’s Jewish Federation.<sup>76</sup>

J.B. Lightman, in his draft presidential report for the year 1971/2 gave a rather devastating picture of what the Décarie location was like:

Let me talk for a moment about the image of the Library. Do you know what a ‘shtibl’ is? With our premises in these temporary quarters ...it was not much different from a run-down ‘shtibl’ because a philosophy that had been [blank space] for a number of years that as long as a temporary [sic] we need not [blank space] conditions<sup>77</sup>...As long as we are living in a given place ever so temporary it must be decent and clean and presentable...You will see what a nice clean set up we have...and a decent atmosphere where our young people are not ashamed to come...<sup>78</sup>

Even as late as the 1980 AM, both the nostalgia for JPL’s Esplanade building and the nightmare of its Décarie location were vividly evoked:

Ten years ago we found ourselves situated in temporary quarters on Decarie Boulevard. Our membership was at a low ebb as was our circulation. Gone were the good old days and security of Esplanade.<sup>79</sup>

In the early 1970s JPL’s budget increased significantly, in sync with its move into 20,000 square feet of space in the Montreal Jewish Community’s Cummings House, at 5151 Côte-Sainte-Catherine. In 1972 its budget had been \$90,000, in 1973, \$100,000, and in 1974, in inflationary times, its budget was forecast at \$260,000.<sup>80</sup> By 1980, the JPL budget had reached nearly \$500,000, 80% of which was financed by Montreal’s Combined Jewish Philanthropies.<sup>81</sup>

By the 1980s, due in large part to the significant changes in the Montreal Jewish community resulting from Quebec’s “Quiet Revolution” and the coming into power of the Parti Québécois, the organized Jewish community of Montreal struggled to maintain its finances and those of its constituent agencies. It was becoming clear to the Library’s leaders that their institution was underfinanced and “certainly in no shape to undertake the major cultural and fundraising projects we had planned.”<sup>82</sup> By 1990, the JPL president was speaking of the Montreal Jewish community’s “aging and declining populations” as well as an “intense battle” for Federation support.<sup>83</sup> It was to get worse. The 79<sup>th</sup> AM (1993) heard that there had been budget reductions of 17% over the past two years,<sup>84</sup> and a year later, President

Aaron Gonshor summed up his perception of the Library's situation when he said:

The Library faces a constant dual challenge: to be responsive to an ever-changing dynamic community with diverse needs, and accomplish these aims with diminishing resources, both financial and human.<sup>85</sup>

Two years later, President Barbara Kay bemoaned the "powerful rain of budget cuts on an unprecedented scale," which required budget cuts of 9% involving the cutting of \$20,000 in book acquisitions and two staff positions, and caused the Library once again to consider "strategies to survive."<sup>86</sup> Among these strategies was the sale at Sotheby's of the JPL's little-used Judaica silver collection in 1997, a year that saw a further 8.9% (\$60,000) reduction in the Library's budget.<sup>87</sup>

At this low point, as if to add insult to injury, 1999 saw the Library go into temporary exile in Côte Saint-Luc's Cavendish Mall while its home was being rebuilt as part of a major renovation of Cummings House.<sup>88</sup>

The audience of the 91<sup>st</sup> AM of 2005 got good financial news, for a change. The Library had received \$515,000 in funding from the McConnell Foundation that gave it an "extraordinary opportunity to reposition itself within the community...after years of cutbacks and restraint."<sup>89</sup> It was clear to all, however, that, as Library Executive Director Eva Raby stated:

Our ability to attract outside funding is critical if we are to remain a first-class research and cultural centre.<sup>90</sup>

The ups and down of the financial world impacted JPL once again in the recession year of 2009, which required the JPL leadership to find new cost-cutting measures.<sup>91</sup> The next year, the economic downturn had turned into a fiscal nightmare as the Library had to weather a 12% budget cut and plan for a further 10% reduction, as a result of which positions remained unfilled and the Library was closed for two weeks in late December.<sup>92</sup>

## Children and Archives

In its founding principles of 1914, JPL left unmentioned two aspects of its institutional presence that developed over the decades into significant elements of JPL's identity: the Children's Library and the Archives.

Children may not have been in the original plans for a JPL, but by 1926 the AM report noted as an issue to be addressed that an ever larger number of children were coming to the Library and that they had not received sufficient attention. There were neither sufficient children's books for them nor an adequate space.<sup>93</sup> JPL obviously took these issues seriously and began making library services for children one of its

priorities. Thus in 1932, it was reported that there were readings for children in Yiddish and English each Saturday.<sup>94</sup> Indeed children were taken so seriously as Library users that, in the 29<sup>th</sup> AM report (1943), long-time JPL librarian Rokhl Eisenberg complained that competition with children's libraries in schools meant that the circulation of children's books at JPL was not growing.<sup>95</sup>

In 1950, the AM Report referred to a "constant complaint" that JPL does not have a separate children's library and promised one in the coming year.<sup>96</sup> In 1951, the 37<sup>th</sup> AM heard that the children's library had indeed been established.<sup>97</sup>

The importance of the Children's Library to JPL was amply demonstrated in 1999. At that point, as has been mentioned, JPL was forced to go into "exile" in the Cavendish Mall, and was unable to fully function in its role as a public library. In this situation, in which the Library needed to most carefully prioritize its activities, its major priority was the continuous functioning of the Children's Library.<sup>98</sup>

While the development of an Archive was not directly on the minds of JPL's founders in 1914, at least one of the Library's original *grundprinzipn* is relevant. JPL's collection policy was to be non-partisan: "to collect with the same interest and love the books of all parties and movements with the exception of 'trashy' [*shund*] publications, though even they are to be collected so that literary researchers may become acquainted with them."<sup>99</sup>

The idea that "literary researchers" would need to become acquainted with a full range of material eventually blossomed and, among the space possibilities inherent in JPL's newly acquired building at 4099 Esplanade a "long desired Archives section" was included.<sup>100</sup>

The fact that archives had become a prime component part of what the JPL was about is amply illustrated after the Library's realization of the immensity of the Holocaust. One of JPL's major responses to the Holocaust was the resolution, in 1950, to create a Holocaust archive (*Hurbn archiv*) that would collect all publications, documents, and objects relevant to the Jewish *Hurbn* in Europe.<sup>101</sup>

In the late 1950s, JPL members were assured that:

When the future Jewish historian will research the intellectual nature [*geistign mohus*] of our community he will find in the A.F.B [Archives of the *Folks Biblioteke*] a treasure of material.<sup>102</sup>

That is not to say that the JPL Archives could always be at the center of the Library's concerns. The relocation of the Library from its home at 4499 Esplanade meant that much of its collection, including the Archives, had to be out in storage. The director's report for the 59<sup>th</sup> AM in 1973 remarked that JPL, in moving into its quarters at

Cummings House had been able to reclaim some 4000 boxes of books, rare books, and archives that had been stored at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue and had not been opened in many years.<sup>103</sup>

At a low point in the Library's financial situation in the mid-1990s, the archivist position had to be eliminated due to budget cuts, Executive Director Zipporah Dunskey-Shnay nonetheless saw fit to emphasize in her 1996 AM report that the archives were not closed but that there was rather business as usual.<sup>104</sup> And the archives did continue its work though not without incident. The 2006 AM report indicates that mould was discovered in the archives which necessitated a major effort at clean-up and renovation while resources for researchers, the original impetus for creating a JPL archives, were continually provided.<sup>105</sup>

### **Toward The Next Century**

In its first century, JPL has been many things to many people. A century of experience has also shown that it is easy to enumerate but inherently difficult to prioritize its manifold functions. What is JPL? Is it a popular library? A children's library? A scholarly resource? A cultural center? What should it be? Where is it heading?

When JPL members had a moment, in between figuring out whether mortgage payments and payrolls had been provided for, they expressed a variety of opinions. In 1951, for instance, the AM Report voiced an opinion that the People's (*folks*) Library should not be transformed into a research and archive library.<sup>106</sup> The issue never quite disappeared. Executive Director Eva Raby summed up the JPL's dilemma when she stated at the 91<sup>st</sup> AM (2005):

We continually play a balancing act between fulfilling the Library's mandate to purchase Judaic materials and meeting the needs of patrons whose reading needs extends to general interest books and fiction.<sup>107</sup>

Finally, the 99<sup>th</sup> AM report in 2013 asked an existential question:

Are libraries still relevant? With the internet and e-books, why would people still be interested in libraries?<sup>108</sup>

With that question asked, another remained unspoken: If libraries, in whatever re-invented form, are somehow still relevant, will Montreal Jews be sufficiently interested to devote their time, effort, and resources to give the JPL a second century? This question, or one very similar to it, had to have been on the mind of JPL President Danny Lighter, when, in the 2002 AM Report, he stated that his goal was "to involve a younger generation of community members in the activities of the JPL."<sup>109</sup> Like all really good questions involving the future, this one yields no completely clear and satisfactory answer.

**1**

Beyond this publication see, especially for the JPL's first decades, Rebecca Margolis, *Jewish Roots, Canadian Soil: Yiddish Culture in Montreal, 1905-1945* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011); Naomi Caruso, ed., *Folk's Lore: A History of the Jewish Public Library 1914-1989/Folks lor: yoyvl bukh: zibetsik un finfyor Yidishe folks biblyotek in Montreol 1914-1989* (Montreal: Jewish Public Library, 1989).

**2**

The source of all the annual reports up to 2004 is: JPL Archives, Group I "Annual Meetings and Annual Reports". All reference to JPL Archives in this article is to this source. From 2005 and onward, the annual reports are to be found on the JPL website: <http://www.jewishpubliclibrary.org/en/aboutus/annual+reports/> (accessed Dec. 22, 2013). Audio recordings of several AMs (1954, 1955, 1962, 1964, 1967, 1968, and 1971) are available online at the Yiddish Book Center website <http://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/podcast/frances-brandt-library> (accessed December 25, 2103).

**3**

*Our Library, 1914-1957* (Montréal: Jewish Public Library, 1957), 53. Cf. 45<sup>th</sup> AM (May 17, 1959).

**4**

They were not alone. Those Montreal Jews who had founded Poalei Zion also saw themselves as of interest to future historians. See Simon Belkin, *Le mouvement ouvrier juif au Canada, 1904-1920*, tr. Pierre Anctil (Sillery, Québec : Septentrion, 1999), 17.

**5**

Thus, according to JPL's founding fundamental principle 3, even *shund* (trashy) publications are to be collected so that literary researchers may become acquainted with them. 1<sup>st</sup> AM Report (1915), 31.

**6**

On Caiserman, see Bernard Figler and David Rome, *Hannaniah Meir Caiserman: A Biography* (Montreal: Northern Printing and Lithographing Co., 1962); Pierre Anctil, *Jacob-Isaac Segal: un poète Yiddish de Montréal et son milieu, 1896-1954* (Québec : Presses de l'Université Laval, 2012), 45ff.

**7**

4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1917-1919), 6.

**8**

"About Us/Collections," *Jewish Public Library*, accessed December 22, 2013, <http://www.jewishpubliclibrary.org/en/aboutus/collections/>.

**9**

"Collection Description – Jewish Division," *New York Public Library*, accessed Dec. 22, 2013, <http://www.nypl.org/locations/tid/36/node/62527>.

**10**

The pamphlet may have had two printings, because JPL Archives has exemplars with two different covers. See Pierre Anctil's detailed article on the first annual report in this collection.

**11**

6<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1919-1920), 9.

**12**

6<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1919-1920), 6.

**13**

On the implications of such "invented traditions" see Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

**14**

14<sup>th</sup> AM Report.

**15**

16<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1930), 5.

**16**

On Brainin, see Samuel Paz, "Reuven Brainin in Montreal, 1912-1916" (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1983); David Rome, *The Canadian Story of Reuven Brainin, Part 1* (1993); Naomi Caruso, *Mafteah lamihitavim beidish ubeivrit beizuono shel ruven brainin* (Montreal: Jewish Public Library, 1985).

**17**

On Kaufman, see Ira Robinson, "The Canadian Years of Yehuda Kaufman (Even Shmuel): Educator, Journalist, and Intellectual," *Canadian Jewish Studies* 15 (2007) : 129-142; "Yehuda Kaufman's Montreal Journalism, 1913-1917," *Canadian Jewish Studies* 18-19 (2010-2011): 77-94; "Yehuda Kaufman et le Développement Intellectuel de la Communauté Juive de Montréal, 1913-1917," » in *Cultures juives*

: *Europe centrale et orientale, Amérique du Nord*, ed. Cylvie Claveau, Stanisław Fiszer, Didier Francfort, (Paris : Éditions Le Manuscrit, 2012), 297-308.

**18**

3<sup>rd</sup> AM Report (1917), 8.

**19**

First AM Report (1915), 31-32.

**20**

36<sup>th</sup> AM Report (November 19, 1950).

**21**

39<sup>th</sup> AM Report (February 28, 1954).

**22**

First AM Report (1915), 31.

**23**

6<sup>th</sup> AM Report, (1919-1920), 8.

**24**

Ira Robinson, *Rabbis and Their Community: Studies in the Eastern European Orthodox Rabbinate in Montreal, 1896-1930* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), 33.

**25**

26<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1940), 1.

**26**

*Keneder Adler*, November 25, 1946.

**27**

First AM Report (1915), 31.

**28**

12<sup>th</sup> AM Report (October 24, 1926).

**29**

22<sup>nd</sup> AM Report (October 27, 1936).

**30**

30<sup>th</sup> AM Report (October 22, 1944).

**31**

34<sup>th</sup> AM Report (November 21, 1948)

**32**

35<sup>th</sup> AM Report (November 27, 1949). The press release is dated November 22, 1949.

**33**

39<sup>th</sup> AM Report (February 28, 1954).

**34**

41<sup>st</sup> AM Report (April 15, 1956).

**35**

46<sup>th</sup> AM Report (May 24, 1960).

**36**

55<sup>th</sup> AM Report (April 26, 1970).

**37**

56<sup>th</sup> AM Report (May 9, 1971).

**38**

57<sup>th</sup> AM Report (April 23, 1972)

**39**

60<sup>th</sup> AM Report (May 18, 1975).

**40**

61<sup>st</sup> AM (June 13, 1976), "President's Report".

**41**

29<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1943), 7. On Bruchési, see <http://www.archiv.umontreal.ca/P0000/P0057.html> (accessed December 22, 2013).

**42**

50<sup>th</sup> AM Report (May 30, 1965).

**43**

Minutes of Planning Committee for 57<sup>th</sup> AM, December 22, 1971.

**44**

Box B, file 6: "Report of President for the activities year 1971-1972".

**45**

66<sup>th</sup> AM Report (June 15, 1980).

**46**

69<sup>th</sup> AM Report (June 15, 1983). This sentiment is corroborated by a 1988 JPL document "At the Crossroads: Guiding the Jewish Public Library into the 1990's" [1988], the report of a long range planning committee chaired by Barbara Kay and Michael Rosenberg, which states on p. 13 that the "francophone community" did not use the services of JPL to any appreciable degree.

**47**

"Jewish Public Library 2005 Annual Report." *Jewish Public Library*, accessed December 23, 2013, <http://www.jewishpubliclibrary.org/media/mediaContent/Annual%20Report%202005%20-%20EN.pdf>

**48**

90<sup>th</sup> AM Report (September 13, 2004).

**49**

37<sup>th</sup> AM Report (November 18, 1951).

**50**

39<sup>th</sup> AM Report (February 28, 1954), 2, 7.

**51**

Minutes of Planning Committee for 57<sup>th</sup> AM, December 22, 1971.

**52**

58<sup>th</sup> AM Report (April 8, 1973).

**53**

62<sup>nd</sup> AM (October 18, 1977), President's Report.

**54**

84<sup>th</sup> AM Report (September 8, 1998), 7-8.

**55**

85<sup>th</sup> AM Report (June 29, 1999).

**56**

88<sup>th</sup> AM Report (September 19, 2002).

**57**

*Our Library*, 92.

**58**

3<sup>rd</sup> AM Report (1917), 7.

**59**

4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1917-1919), 7.

**60**

8<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1922), 1, 7, 9, 11.

**61**

16<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1930), 1.

**62**

17<sup>th</sup> AM Report (November 1, 1931).

**63**

18<sup>th</sup> AM Report (November 17, 1932), 2.

**64**

19<sup>th</sup> AM Report (November 7, 1933), 1.

**65**

30<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1944), AR, 2.

**66**

19<sup>th</sup> AM Report (November 7, 1933), 1.

**67**

20<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1933-34). Printing and distributing the annual report was a considerable expense. A report of the AM Planning Committee, dated October 7, 1950, recommended the printing 1500 copies of the eight-page Annual Report for a budgeted \$150.00 even though the committee estimated that only 10% of the members would actually read it. Folder 6.

**68**

26<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1940), 1.

**69**

35<sup>th</sup> AM Report (November 27, 1949).

**70**

37<sup>th</sup> AM Report (November 18, 1951).

**71**

30<sup>th</sup> AM Report (October 22, 1944), 2.

**72**

39<sup>th</sup> AM Report (February 28, 1954), 2.

**73**

49<sup>th</sup> AM Report (March 31, 1963). At the 57<sup>th</sup> AM, in 1972, Director Paul Trepman reported the closing of the Côte Saint-Luc branch which was no longer viable any more due to the opening of the Côte Saint-Luc Public Library. The Chomedey Branch lasted until March 31, 1994. 57<sup>th</sup> AM Report (April 23, 1972), 3; 80<sup>th</sup> AM Report (August 25, 1994).

**74**

52<sup>nd</sup> AM Report (April 23, 1966).

**75**

52<sup>nd</sup> [sic] AM Report (April 30, 1967).

**76**

53<sup>rd</sup> AM Report (April 21, 1968); 56<sup>th</sup> AM Report (May 9, 1971), 4.

**77**

In the published president's report (57<sup>th</sup> AM Report), the sentence had been changed to: "Well, as temporary as our quarters still are, they are no longer a 'shtibl!'."

**78**

Box B, file 6: "Report of President for the activities year 1971-1972", 4.

**79**

66<sup>th</sup> AM Report (June 15, 1980), Report of President, 1.

**80**

59<sup>th</sup> AM Report (April 21, 1974), Budget Committee Report.

**81**

66<sup>th</sup> AM Report (June 15, 1980).

**82**

71<sup>st</sup> AM Report (September 19, 1985).

**83**

76<sup>th</sup> AM Report (June 20, 1990).

**84**

79<sup>th</sup> AM Report (June 22, 1993), 9.

**85**

80<sup>th</sup> AM Report (August 25, 1994), 2

**86**

82<sup>nd</sup> AM Report (August 26, 1996), 2, 6.

**87**

83<sup>rd</sup> AM Report (August 27, 1997).

**88**

85<sup>th</sup> AM Report (June 29, 1999).

**89**

89<sup>th</sup> AM Report (September 2, 2003).

**90**

91<sup>st</sup> AM Report (2005)

**91**

95<sup>th</sup> AM Report (2009), 3.

**92**

96<sup>th</sup> AM Report (2010).

**93**

12<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1926).

**94**

18<sup>th</sup> AM Report (1932), 4.

**95**

29<sup>th</sup> AM Report (November 21, 1943), 3.

**96**

36<sup>th</sup> AM Report (November 19, 1950).

**97**

37<sup>th</sup> AM Report (November 18, 1951).

**98**

85<sup>th</sup> AM Report (June 29, 1999).

**99**

First AM Report (1915), 31.

**100**

Announcement of dedication of 4099 Esplanade, June 15, 1930.

**101**

36<sup>th</sup> AM Report (November 19, 1950).

**102**

45<sup>th</sup> AM Report (May 17, 1959).

**103**

59<sup>th</sup> AM Report (April 21, 1974) "Director's Report".

**104**

82<sup>nd</sup> AM Report (August 26, 1996), 7.

**105**

92<sup>nd</sup> AM Report (2006).

**106**

37<sup>th</sup> AM Report (November 18, 1951)

**107**

91<sup>st</sup> AM Report (2005), 5.

**108**

99<sup>th</sup> AM Report (2013), 3.

**109**

88<sup>th</sup> AM Report (September 19, 2002).