



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE • July 2023

Documents of Civil War Hero, Colonel Marcus M. Spiegel, Released to the Public July 25, 2023!

CINCINNATI, OH:—The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (AJA) is pleased to announce that the Civil War era documents of Colonel Marcus M. Spiegel have been digitized and are available on a searchable website. The collection of Spiegel's personal letters to his wife, Caroline, spanning the years 1861-1865 can be accessed at: <https://www.americanjewisharchives.org/research/digital-collections/>.

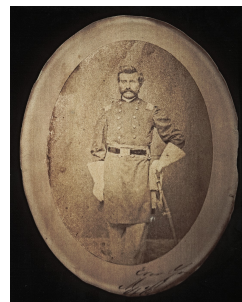
The letters of Col. Marcus M. Spiegel, a German-Jewish immigrant who became one of the highest-ranking Jewish officers in the union army, are now available digitally from the American Jewish Archives (AJA). Over 100 letters between Col. Spiegel and his family/friends reveal his eyewitness accounts of history, his views on politics and religion, and his evolution into an ardent abolitionist.

His great-great-granddaughter, Jean Powers Soman, spent years of her childhood admiring a leatherbound book on the shelf. That book, which contained all of Col. Spiegel's letters, had been passed down from mother to daughter for five generations. Now, those letters are available online for the first time so that a sixth generation can admire and explore them.

The Spiegel collection includes:

- Family correspondence and personal papers, including letters written while serving in battle as a Union officer during the Civil War.
- Certificates relating to both his military and civilian life.
- Documents relating to the death of Col. Spiegel in 1864
- Caroline's conversion certificate from 1853

The Spiegel collection is one of a kind, and as his great-great-granddaughter, Jean Powers Soman, wrote "His story of immigration, of familial devotion, of patriotism, and heroism, is at once a personal story and a national story. It is part of the narrative that has shaped America and thanks to the rich legacy he etched in letters, it is a story that will never be forgotten".



JEAN POWERS SOMAN is a writer, who co-edited, with Frank L. Byrne, the book, "A Jewish Colonel in the Civil War, Marcus M. Spiegel of the Ohio Volunteers" with a Forward by Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus: (University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

Jean's articles have been published in newspapers, magazines and an academic journal. She has served as Interim Chairperson of the National, Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission Foundation, on its Advisory Board and on the Board of Directors of its successor organization, the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Foundation. Over the years, she has helped organize and support programs in Miami, at HistoryMiami, the Jewish Museum of Florida, the Alper JCC and at local synagogues.

"For the first time, scholars, researchers, students, and documentarians will have access to source materials that reveal the story of the evolution of a true American war hero" commented Dr. Gary P. Zola, Executive Director Emeritus at the AJA . Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus in his forward to Jean Soman's book on Spiegel stated, "The war as revealed in these letters show that the children of Israel could succeed in the profession of arms...the new Jew who emerged from the fratricidal conflict in the fratricidal conflict in the U.S. was a complete American."

The AJA is very pleased and honored to present the Colonel Marcus M. Spiegel Digital Collection and to make it easily accessible by scholars, students and researchers throughout the world.

Interesting Facts About the Spiegel Family (from Jean Powers Soman):

As was typical for many immigrants in the midwest during this time, Marcus Spiegel became a peddler. While traveling in Ohio, he met Caroline Hamlin Spiegel, whose family were respected members of the Quaker community. After their marriage by a justice of the peace, they settled in Chicago where Caroline studied the Jewish religion and went on to convert in August of 1853, likely becoming the first person in Chicago to do so.

Spiegel and his regiment were on the transport City Belle on the Red River in Louisiana when it was ambushed by rebel forces on 3 May 1864, and he was shot in the abdomen. Twenty-four hours later, on the bloody banks of the Red River, he breathed his last and was buried along the shore of the river in an unmarked grave. Joseph, his younger brother and the regiment's sutler, was by his side when he died. Joseph was captured and remained in a Confederate prison camp in Texas until the war ended. He then returned to Chicago, where he opened the small dry-goods store that he and Marcus had planned to operate together. Eventually, after many years of hard work and ingenuity this store evolved into the Spiegel Catalogue Company.

In Chicago years after his death, Spiegel's niece, Hannah Solomon, founded the National Council of Jewish Women with the help of her first cousin, Lizzie Spiegel Barbe, the eldest daughter of Marcus and Caroline Spiegel.

About the AJA

The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, founded in 1947 by its namesake on the historic campus of the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, is committed to preserving a documentary heritage of the religious, organizational, economic, cultural, personal, social and family life of American Jewry. The Marcus Center contains over 25,000 linear feet of archives, manuscripts, nearprint materials, photographs, audio and videotapes, microfilm, and genealogical materials.

www.AmericanJewishArchives.org