



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE • July 2023

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

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 made 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 album on the shelf. That album, 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 future generations 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, writes "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 an author and co-editor, with Frank L. Byrne, of *A Jewish Colonel in the Civil War: Marcus M. Spiegel of the Ohio Volunteers*.

She is a founding member of the AJA's Ezra Consortium and has served as the Interim Chairperson of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission Foundation. Jean has also served on the Board of Directors of its successor organization, the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Foundation. She is also a lifetime member of the National Council of Jewish Women.

"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" stated 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 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.

The Spiegel Family- An American Story:

From: ***A Jewish Colonel in the Civil War: Marcus M. Spiegel of the Ohio Volunteers***, co-edited by Jean Powers Soman and Frank L. Byrne.

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 Company, which featured the famous Spiegel catalog.

Two months after her husband's death, Caroline gave birth to their fifth child. In February 1865, the young widow moved with her five small children from Ohio to Chicago, to be near the Spiegel relatives. Raising her family on a modest widow's military pension, she never remarried, remained true to Judaism, and raised her children in the Chicago Jewish community.

In Chicago, years after his death, Spiegel's niece, Hannah Greenebaum 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 Cincinnati 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