



AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES FINDING & USING MATERIALS AT THE AJA

What is the American Jewish Archives?

The American Jewish Archives (AJA) collects and provides access to original records (also called primary source documents) that were created and/or accumulated by a person, family, organization, or institution in the course of its "life" or daily business. Because these records usually cannot be replaced, security and preservation of the records play an important role in making them available to the public.

How to Use the AJA

- **Pick a Topic or Theme:**

- 1) Take a look at the AJA's "Topics for the Study of the American Jewish Experience." This is just a small fraction of the many research topics that will help you started.
- 2) Try to think in *specifics*. For example: Rather than focus on "Immigration," try to consider Immigration from 1800-1899, or immigration to San Francisco, or immigration of Lithuanians. The more narrow your theme , the more easily you (and the archivists) will be able to determine where to locate useful information.
- 3) You may want to search other sources to provide yourself with background material relating to your topic. Some suggestions (just to name a few):
 - *Encyclopedia Judaica*
 - The National Archives and Records Administration
 - Historical Societies
 - Historical Documents from your organization +/-or community
 - Published Documentary Source Readers such as:
 - *American Jewish History: A Primary Source Reader*. Gary P. Zola & Marc Dollinger. Brandeis University Press, Waltham, MA. 2014.
 - *The American Jewish Woman: A Documentary History*. Jacob R. Marcus. The American Jewish Archives or KTAV, 1981
 - *America's Historical Documents*. The National Archives & Records Administration.
<https://www.archives.gov/historical-docs>

- **Browse the documents that are available for educators.** Although the AJA has only begun to provide specialized resources for educators, there are many ways that educators can access and utilize documents for their classrooms:
 1. Browse the “Snapshots” section in the “Education Resources” section of the AJA website. These documents are divided by theme, but you can browse through each document as well. Once on the site, you can download +/- or print documents with summaries for use in the formal and informal classroom.

The AJA has many different types of records: documents, photographs, video, audio, microfilm and more!

Additional Ways to Access Documents & Lesson Plans:

- **Refer to the AJA’s online catalog or check with us**, or a combination of both, to begin your research. You will need to identify the name of the organization or individuals that created the records, and identify the unit of records that might contain the information that you seek. Please know that the professional staff at the AJA will be of great assistance to you. The AJA’s online catalog can be found under “researchers” on the front page of the AJA site, or at the following URL:
<http://prestohost54.inmagic.com/Presto/home/home.aspx>
- **Spend time, online or with an AJA professional**, learning about the records to locate the specific information that you seek. Archives and libraries are now starting to digitize more and more material, but due to the time and funding that requires, there is still less than 10% of Collections available digitally
- **For records not available online, request records and await their retrieval.** Records can be retrieved in person, or for a small fee, you may have records sent to you digitally.
- **PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT US!**

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AJA Website: www.AmericanJewishArchives.org



Topics for the Study of the American Jewish Experience

The list of topics below is by no means complete, but rather is to provide ideas and suggestions:

People

- Specific Individuals or Families
- Ethnic Heritage
- Women
- Genealogy

Places

- Where people emigrated from (i.e. Lithuania, Germany, Poland)
- Where people immigrated to (i.e. Cincinnati, San Francisco, New Orleans)
- Important Immigration sites (i.e. Charleston, New York, Galveston)
- Jews in the West, South, Midwest, North, & Northeast
- When and why did people immigrate to specific cities or areas of the United States?

Organizations/Institutions

- B'nai B'rith
- Anti-Defamation League
- American Jewish Committee
- Seminaries: Hebrew Union College, Jewish Theological Seminary
- How & why did Jewish organizations flourish (or not) in America

Politics

- The Jewish people in the political milieu
- Individual politicians
- Jews in the Military
- US politics and how it has affected the Jewish population in America

Business & Commerce

- The Jewish peddler
- Jews and the Department Stores
- Jewish merchants in the West (or other areas of the U.S.)

Religion

- Different denominations of Judaism: Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, Orthodox, Humanistic
- Religious practice in America (including holidays, life-cycle events, and observance)
- How did Judaism change and develop in America?

Arts & Culture

- Individuals who have been prominent in American arts and culture
- Jewish representation in American society (i.e. bagels, songs, “Jewish words and phrases (i.e. mitzvah, mensch etc.)
- Poems, paintings, writings of Jewish Americans

Civil Rights in America

- Jews and Civil Rights – How American Jews have contributed and participated in Civil rights for themselves and other minorities
- Anti-Semitism in America
- Black & Jews

Israel

- America’s role in the founding of Israel
- America’s response to Israel – in the past and today
- Zionism and Anti-Zionism in America

Another approach to topics is through the “Periodization” of American Judaism. This is one example from, *American Jewish History, A Primary Source Reader*, by Gary P. Zola and Marc Dollinger:

The Colonial Period – 1654-1776

The Revolutionary & Early National Period – 1776-1820

Jews in the Antebellum Period – 1820-1860

American Jews During the Civil War and Reconstruction – 1861-1879

The Gilded Age and the Progressive Era: 1880-1918

American Jews between the World Wars: 1918-1941

World War II & the Shoah: 1941-1945

American Jewish Life Post WWII: 1945-1965

Turning Inward – Jews and American Life: 1965-1980

Contemporary Jewish Life: 1980 - Present