

## INTERNET RESOURCES FOR JEWISH BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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### Directories, Biographical Dictionaries, and Encyclopedias

For many years, *World Biographical Index*, issued by K. G. Saur, the prominent German publisher of biographical and other scholarly reference books, has been one of the best online resources for Jewish studies scholars in need of retrospective biographical information. The index directs scholars to biographical articles culled from a variety of reference books and encyclopedias in Latin script published between 1781 and 1958. In addition to leading to the source articles, the entries for each person in this index contain names, pseudonyms, the years of birth and death, and occupation. Now, K. G. Saur is bringing online and making commercially available one of the most extensive and comprehensive collections of biographical information. The soon-to-be-completed *Jewish Biographical Archive (JBA) Online*, based on the microfiche edition of the *Jewish Biographical Archive*, will contain almost 100,000 entries from 133 sources describing 52,000 persons. Searchers will have a variety of search options including name, occupation, dates, and reference sources. This archive follows the basic concept of the K. G. Saur biographical archives on microfiche. It reproduces the entries from biographical reference books and

cumulates all of the entries for each individual. Each entry is a replica of the original source with a citation to the original source at its head.

While the “Who’s Who” types of biographies are useful for determining addresses, institutional

AN ENORMOUS NUMBER OF WEBSITES EXIST THAT ARE DEVOTED TO INDIVIDUALS AND PROVIDE EXTENSIVE BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES, PHOTOGRAPHS, CRITICAL ARTICLES, WEB LINES, AND BIBLIOGRAPHIES.

affiliations, and other basic information about contemporary Jewish scholars and leaders, they generally offer little in the way of critical assessment. The national biographies, on the other hand, usually offer an evaluation of the subject’s contributions. *American National Biography Online* is available by subscription and published by Oxford University Press under the auspices of the American Council of Learned Societies. Oxford University Press also produces the digital version of its *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and makes it available by subscription. The digital forms of these two resources supplement their print versions. Computer access to the information contained in these works significantly increases their utility and the service that they provide to scholars. The *Oxford*

*Dictionary of National Biography* offers better search options for locating Jews than the *American National Biography Online*. Although both products offer advanced search features which allow combinations of searches according to various criteria such as name, dates, occupation . . . [et al.], only the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* includes a search option for religious affiliation. *American National Biography Online* allows readers to focus their research in specialized collections, such as Black History. Strikingly, a separate collection for Jewish Americans is not included, although researchers can limit their search to “Jewish Clergy” or “Jewish Lay Leaders” or “Zionists” under the search box “Occupations and Realms of Renown.” Jewish studies faculty, scholars, and librarians may wish to raise the issue of this gap with the publishers.

*Modern Hebrew Literature—a Bio-Bibliographical Lexicon* [לקסיקון הספרות העברית החדשה] compiled by Yossi Galron, Jewish studies librarian at Ohio State University, is a work-in-progress ([library.osu.edu/sites/users/galron.1](http://library.osu.edu/sites/users/galron.1)). This free database provides lists of works and brief biographical data concerning authors writing in Hebrew since the 1960s.

Another project that serves as a biographical and bibliographical guide to Hebrew authors is the Hebrew author database maintained by the Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature and freely available on the Web (A directory to the authors can be found at: [www.ithl.org.il/authors.html](http://www.ithl.org.il/authors.html)). Entries include a short biography, a

list of books published in Hebrew, and a list of books in translation.

In addition to the above resources, several commercial biographical databases provide useful and reliable information about Jewish individuals. Two competing but complementary products are the Gale Group's *Biography Resource Center* and H. W.

Wilson's *Biography Reference Bank*.

Covering a larger number of individuals, *Biography Reference Bank* pulls content

from more resources—in particular, more periodical titles. While both of these products feature full-text articles from resources across a range of ethnic groups, disciplines, and subject

areas, neither includes a single biographical or subject biographical tool devoted exclusively to Jews.

The only way to locate biographies of Jewish persons in these two databases is to know who you are looking for. *Biography Resource Center* uses sources produced by the

Gale Group, the *Marquis Who's Who* series, and a number of periodicals. *Biography Reference Bank* includes many titles from

Oxford University Press, Greenwood Press, and Garland Publishing. This second group of publishers have produced print versions of many core works of Jewish biography, which should be included in the resources offered by *Biography Reference Bank*.

## Websites and Portals

The Jewish Music Webcenter ([www.jmwc.org](http://www.jmwc.org)) is a free website created and maintained by Judith S. Pinnolis, a reference librarian at the Goldfarb Library at Brandeis University. The site functions as a portal to academic, organizational, and individual sources in Jewish

music. Among many other things, it provides details about individual musicians and online biographies of Jewish composers and performers.

An enormous number of websites exist that are devoted to individuals and provide extensive biographical sketches, photographs, critical articles, web lines, and

**MOST INSTITUTIONS ARE ABLE TO DIGITIZE ONLY A FRACTION OF THEIR COLLECTIONS. ALTHOUGH AN INCREASING NUMBER OF DIGITIZED PRIMARY SOURCES ARE BECOMING AVAILABLE ELECTRONICALLY, TO UNDERSTAND THE FULL RANGE OF A REPOSITORY'S HOLDINGS, ONE SHOULD SEARCH ITS FINDINGS AIDS.**

bibliographies. Paul Celan Homepage ([polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/german/celan](http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/german/celan)) was developed by two students at the University of Wisconsin and is dedicated to the Eastern European poet and Holocaust survivor. The Franz-Kafka Website

([www.kafka.uni-bonn.de](http://www.kafka.uni-bonn.de)) was set up by the Germanistisches Seminar of the University of Bonn as a multimedia teaching project. The Saul Bellow Society website features a definitive annotated bibliography of Bellow's works and includes full-text access to the society's newsletter ([www.saulbellow.org](http://www.saulbellow.org)).

## Primary Sources: Digital Collections of Primary Sources

### 1. Archives: Finding Aids

Most institutions are able to digitize only a fraction of their collections. Although an increasing number of digitized primary sources are becoming available electronically, to understand the full range of a repository's holdings, one should search its findings aids. Many of these are available online, even if the primary sources themselves may

not be. Standards are being developed within the library and archival communities, which allow finding aids from many different repositories to be brought together and searched all at once. Two notable examples are: the California Digital Library's Online Archive of California ([www.oac.cdlib.org](http://www.oac.cdlib.org))

which has an extensive database of archival finding aids for archival and manuscript collections within California; and the Center for Jewish History's website ([www.cjh.org/collections/findingaids.php](http://www.cjh.org/collections/findingaids.php)), which guides users to more than one hundred electronic finding aids to archival collections held by the Center's five partners.

### 2. Archives: Databases and Websites

The Jewish Women's Archive (JWA) was founded in 1995. Its easily navigable website ([www.jwa.org](http://www.jwa.org))—searchable by type, time period, or topic—includes a variety of textual, video, and audio materials: oral history projects, biographical sketches, and primary sources. Many of its digital projects are created in partnerships with other institutions. In 2003, in collaboration with the Emma Goldman Papers project and headed by Goldman biographer Dr. Candace Falk, the JWA mounted an online exhibit containing a wide variety of primary resources, biographical, and contextual information ([www.jwa.org/exhibits/wov/goldman](http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/wov/goldman)).

*In the First Person: Index to Letters, Diaries, Oral Histories, and Other Personal Narratives*, produced by the Alexander Street Press, is a free resource that indexes more than 2,500 collections of oral history in English from around the world ([www.inthefirstperson.com/firp](http://www.inthefirstperson.com/firp)). It includes letters, diaries, memoirs,

autobiographies, and other personal narratives, providing citations, and in many cases links to full-text, and audio and video files that are freely available on the Web or via Alexander Street Press databases.

Searching in this database can be done in two ways: full-text searching allows users to look for specific words or phrases that appear in the actual texts; field searching utilizes indexed descriptive fields. An “All Subject(s)” search is a search of all the subjects in the database. This database uses two different types of subject headings: standard Library of Congress subject headings and non-standardized headings created by repositories. Forty-three subject headings are listed with the words “Jews” or “Jewish.”

The Alexander Street Press produces two other products available by subscription that contains material of interest to Jewish studies scholars. *North American Women’s Letters and Diaries* and *North American Immigrant Letters, Diaries, and Oral Histories* both include letters and diaries, oral histories, interviews, and other personal narratives. The collections also include biographies and an extensive annotated bibliography of the sources in the databases. The *North American Women’s Letters and Diaries* database includes 1,496 documents related to Jews. The “Find Authors” search screen includes a “religion” limit. The

collection includes letters by Rebecca Gratz, Emma Lazarus, Gertrude Stein, and other Jewish American women. Collections of oral, video, and textual collections of Holocaust testimonies are housed in universities, Holocaust museums,



Emma Goldman on a street car, 1917. From Emma Goldman Papers website. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov.

research museums, and also exist independently. Projects such as the USC Shoah Foundation Institute ([www.usc.edu/schools/college/vh](http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/vh)) and Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust: Testimonies (housed at Yale University, [www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/excerpts](http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/excerpts)) allow users to search their catalogues, access their collection, and view, listen, and read clips of testimony at their computers.

The Einstein Archives Online is a joint project of the Einstein Papers Project at the California Institute of Technology and the David and Fela Shapell Digitization Project at the Jewish National and University Library, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The site includes

digitized images of his manuscripts, a database of Einstein and Einstein-related archival items, and a finding aid ([www.alberteinstein.info](http://www.alberteinstein.info)).

The website, Sabato Morais Ledger ([sceti.library.upenn.edu/morais](http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/morais)), is produced by the Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image (SCETI) at the University of Pennsylvania. A Sephardic Jew born in Livorno, Italy, Sabato Morais (1823–1897) was a historian and founder of the Jewish Theological Seminary. The ledger’s contents can be browsed directly and searched through the catalogue index or by keyword.

### 3. *Online Diaries and Weblogs*

Thousands of affiliated and unaffiliated techno-savvy Jews are going beyond conventional print to share their stories, and record and comment on their day-to-day experiences in online diaries, blogs, and webrings. As published texts on the Internet, these genres are accessible to anyone with a computer. Their authors mix various forms of media such as audio, video, and photographs with text. Blogging tools enable readers to provide comments, cross-reference each other’s posting and recommend other sites of mutual interest.

Content can be published and syndicated using an RSS feed. Readers can then subscribe to the feed to automatically receive updates of new postings. New applications are emerging that make it easy for bloggers to share their stories in secret. The individuals creating these digital texts write about personal and intimate feelings and also about a wide variety of subjects.

Dr. Michael Keren argues that blogging “provides an exciting new arena for public discussion” but warns that it “suffers from the anonymity of the web” (“Online Life Writing: One Israeli’s Search for Sanity,” *Auto/Biography* 13, 2005). William O’Shea has described in the *Village Voice* (July 22, 2003) how blogs of Hasidic and Haredi Jews have opened a door into an otherwise closed and secretive world. The anonymity of the blogging world protects the authors from harassment and possible banishment from their

communities. Edward Portnoy warns, “like the blog medium in other languages, Haredi blogs appear and disappear, depending on the whim of the writer” (Modiya website, [modiya.nyu.edu/handle/1964/265](http://modiya.nyu.edu/handle/1964/265)).

The easiest way to look for blogs is on large sites where they are organized by “tags.” A tag is a keyword or category used to describe the subject matter or topic of a blog post, Web page, online photo, digital video, or audio creation. With the emergence of social networking and collaborative websites such as flickr.com, YouTube.com, del.icio.us, and the blogging websites, users are taking the initiative to organize and describe their digital creations themselves, thus doing the kind of work previously done only by professional librarians, indexers, and information architects. Researchers can search self-described collections of Jewish blogs such as

JewishBlogging.com, Israblog, and Jrants.com.

## Conclusion

The Internet offers an array of diverse biographical and autobiographical resources for Jewish studies scholars. Many of the subscription-based and for-fee resources come with a very high price tag and the fact that they exist does not mean necessarily that libraries acquire or subscribe to them. Many of the free resources lag in their currency or eventually disappear. This overview is not complete or comprehensive. The sites described here were chosen mostly for the variety of information that they provide, and their sophistication of design and search interface.

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**Heidi Lerner’s “Perspectives on Technology” column, with links to featured websites, now in Resources section of AJS website: [www.ajsnet.org](http://www.ajsnet.org)**

## Contribute to New Syllabi Directory on AJS Website

AJS is expanding the Resources section of its website to include a directory of syllabi in all fields of Jewish studies. Members are invited to contribute to the directory by emailing syllabi in MS-Word or pdf format to the AJS office at [ajs@ajs.cjh.org](mailto:ajs@ajs.cjh.org). The directory will be accessible to AJS members only.

The screenshot shows the AJS website homepage. At the top left is the AJS logo (Association for Jewish Studies) with a menorah. To the right are three images: a scroll, a building, and a group of people. Below the logo is a vertical navigation menu with links: Home, About Us, Membership, Conferences, Publications, Positions Listing, AJS Resources, Advertise & Exhibit, Giving Opportunities, and Contact Us. To the right of the menu is a section titled "About the AJS" with text describing the organization's history and mission. Below that is a section titled "WHAT'S NEW AT THE AJS:" with sub-sections for "Cahman Publication Subvention Grants" and "AJS 39th Annual Conference" (December 18-19, 2007, Sheraton Centre, Toronto, Ontario, Deadline for Submissions: May 1, 2007). Other links include "New Available Online:", "Call for Papers", "General Information", "Visiting Toronto", and "Sessions Seeking Participants".

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