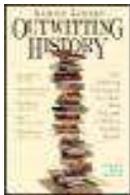


Librarian's Lobby

By Daniel D. Stuhlman

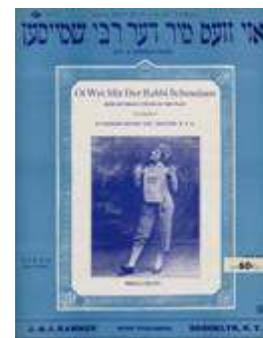
Visiting the National Yiddish Book Center

August 2007



In the October 2005 of *Librarian's Lobby* I wrote about Aaron Lansky's book, *Outwitting history*: the amazing adventures of a man who rescued a million Yiddish books.¹ As soon as I read this book about saving Yiddish books and the founding of the National Yiddish Book Center (<http://yiddishbookcenter.org>), I felt compelled to visit. In June of this year, my nephew, who lives 40 minutes away from Amherst, celebrated his bar mitzvah. This was my opportunity. I arrived early Friday morning and planned to visit the Center right after lunch. With directions in hand I went with another nephew from California. I am not used to driving in rural areas with curving streets. Even with directions, this was an adventure. The Center is on the campus of Hampshire College². The campus is so huge that from the street and entrance one can not even see a building. Compare that to the urban college campuses that I am used to. I must warn you some of the signage is misleading. The Center's building architecture is reminiscent of Eastern European wooden synagogues connected together.

Just the idea of seeing Yiddish books was nothing special for me. I've seen and cataloged thousand's of them. The building has a core collection with volumes that are for sale. There is also a collection of sheet music³ which includes songs from the Yiddish theater, folk music, and liturgical music. My nephew, a musician, examined all the sheet music. He had never seen Jewish sheet music. Many of the songs I had seen when I cataloged a large collection of sheet music. In fact I've been around Yiddish books so often, I never knew there was a preservation problem until I read Lansky's book. What struck me were the exhibits.



Exhibits included an audio-visual display from the U.S. Holocaust Museum on censorship and hate, artifacts on Yiddish publishing, recordings of Yiddish radio shows, and viewing of Yiddish films.⁴ The museum display included a panel on the Strashun Library. This 50,000 item core collection of YIVO in Vilna was saved from destruction and transferred by the U.S. Army to YIVO in New York in 1947. In 2000-2001 I worked on cataloging and inputting records into the library data base for more than 9000 of these items⁵. Just seeing this panel, made me feel as if my work had meaning outside of the YIVO Library catalog.

¹ Full citation: Lansky, Aaron, *Outwitting history*: the amazing adventures of a man who rescued a million Yiddish books. (Chapel Hill, NC : Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, c2004.)

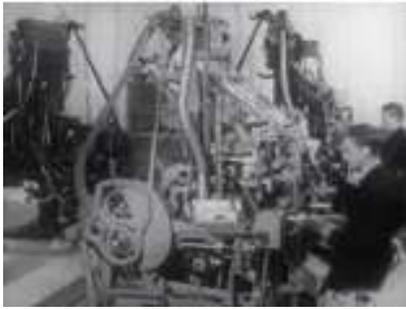
² Hampshire College in Amherst, MA is about 3.5 hours from New York City; 2 hours from Boston by car.

³ This picture is song, "Oi wet mir der Rabbi Schmeisen" from the musical *Yankele. Brooklyn: J. & J. Kammen, 1923* This image is reproduced with permission from the Brown University Digital Collection, retrieved on July 23, 2007 from: <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/repository/repoman.php>

⁴ A complete list of exhibits is on the Center's web site.

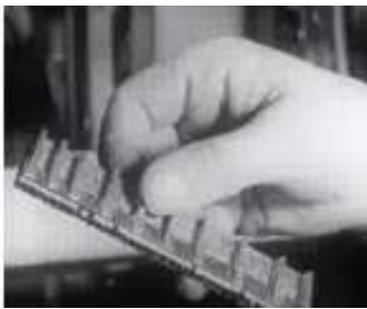
⁵ I put the records into RLIN (which later merged with OCLC) and then the records were downloaded to the library's data base.

Yiddish Linotype Machine



The most exciting artifact is a 1918-model Yiddish Linotype (serial number 23, 211) recovered from the *Jewish Daily Forward*. Yes, I was excited to see a Linotype machine. This particular machine set the type for thousands of daily issues of the *Forward* from its creation until 1991. The machine weighing any where from 3500 to 4500 pounds, depending on your source, had to be dismantled to remove it from the *Forward* building on East 33rd Street in New York City and transport it to the Center in Amherst. When the machine was transported, the *Wall Street Journal*⁶ published an article complete with a Yiddish headline. This is the Center's largest single artifact and they claim it is the only surviving Yiddish Linotype machine. Most people today have no idea how the Linotype machine revolutionized publishing and printing.

When movable type was invented, the individual letters were in cases. Typesetting shops would have drawers of type for each font and size. A typesetter would select and put⁷ the metal letters into a device to hold them. When a couple of lines were done the letters would be put on a table and the page assembled, line by line. When done with the printing process the letter were cleaned and placed back into the cases. This process was very time consuming and required manual dexterity. In 1884, Ottmar Mergenthaler, an immigrant German clockmaker working for a scientific instruments company in Baltimore, invented the Linotype machine. The Linotype allowed an operator sitting at a keyboard to compose lines of type from brass molds, or matrices. The keyboard had three sections, upper case, lower case and special characters. Pressure on a key caused levers to activate and molds to be moved into line. Essentially on the input end of the machine was an ingot of lead, tin, and antimony -alloy and the output was a line of type. The slugs were arranged into galleys for printing. The brass matrices returned automatically to their original position in a magazine until they were needed again. After printing, the type was melted down and the metal could be reused. The process was mechanical. This was called "hot type" because of the heat and melting process to make the type.



The Linotype machine, which Thomas Edison called "the eighth wonder of the world," solved several labor and logistical typesetting problems. Because the brass matrices (molds) were immediately reusable, there was no need for a large supply of

⁶ Angrist, Stanley W. "The Last Yiddish Linotype in America." *Wall Street Journal*. (Eastern edition). New York, N.Y.: Mar 5, 1992. pg. A12. One can retrieve the text of this article if your library subscribes to the full text option of Proquest. However, you can't see the Yiddish headline. All the Linotype machines have serial numbers and there is even a web site that tracks them. This Linotype, one of nine in the *Forward* offices, was replaced by one operator at a computer.

⁷ Pictures are from *Typesetting: Linotype* (Part I) Salesian Vocational and Technical Schools, Italy, 1959. Retrieved July 20, 2007 from *The Internet Archive*, <http://www.archive.org/search.php?query=mediatype%3Amovies%20AND%20collection%3Aprelinger%20AND%20subject%3A%22Communication%3A%20Typesetting%22>

type. Since every line of type was newly cast from an alloy of lead, tin, and antimony, printers always received a quality impression. In other words the type had an unlimited supply, did not wear out, or become full of debris. The Linotype also justified (lined up the right and left side of the column) each line of type automatically by sliding wedge-shaped pieces of metal between each word. The first 12 Linotypes were installed at *The New York Tribune* in 1886.

The Monotype, a machine similar to the Linotype, but it cast only one letter at a time was popular with book publishers because it could cast special symbols or non-Latin alphabets. Corrections could be made by changing a single letter rather than an entire line of type.

Many years ago I was once in a hobby shop in St. Louis and found some Hebrew letters for sale that were once used to print a Yiddish newspaper. I bought the letters for my name, דני. This picture shows the type that still has some ink and the groove to help the typesetter line up the letters.



shop in St. Louis and were once used to print my name, דני. This picture shows the type that still has some ink and the groove to help the typesetter line up the letters.

“Cold type” is the name for the method of photographic typesetting and later computer typesetting. There is no heat involved to melt metal. The first photo typesetting machines were patented about 1880, but did not become practical until after World War II when the graphic arts industry began to grow. By the mid-1980’s most newspapers converted to “cold-type.” The *Forward* was one of the few that continued to use “hot type.” When printing with “hot type” the paper was pressed directly on the type making slight indentions in the paper. “Cold type” used an offset press, the image is transferred from the printing plate, to a rubber blanket, and then to the printing surface which presses against the paper. Offset lithography enables high quality printing of text, pictures and other graphics. There are several kinds of offset presses used depending on the nature of the job. For example small print shops will print on single sheets. Newspapers and mass market paperback books will be printed on a web (a large roll of paper) fed press.

In 1974 H.W. Wilson Company invited a group of students to visit their printing and editorial office in the Bronx, NY. Wilson had arrays of Linotype machines setting type for their index products⁸. Each month an index was prepared and sent to subscribers. The slugs would be stored for the quarterly and yearly revisions. This was Wilson’s creative use of technology and logistics; they did not have to repeat the keyboarding. Of course this was made obsolete with computer aided indexing and typesetting. Today Wilson sells their indexing products as searchable data bases.

Fighting the Fires of Hate: America and the Nazi Book Burnings

Another exhibit room had a traveling exhibit produced by the U.S. Holocaust Museum, *Fighting the Fires of Hate*⁹. The online version of the exhibit may be found at:

⁸ Wilson produces indexes such as the *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature*, *Art Index*, *Social Science Index*, and others.

⁹ Here is the schedule for exhibit from the Holocaust Center’s web site: July 25, 2007 through October 1, 2007, Baltimore, MD, Enoch Pratt Free Library; October 13, 2007 through December 8, 2007, Highland Park, IL, Highland Park Public Library.

http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/traveling/details/index.php?type=current&content=figuring_the_fire_bookburning. This exhibit focuses on how the book burnings and censorship became potent symbols before and during World War II. By the use of clips from TV shows and movies the exhibit deals with issues of censorship, book burnings, and the roll of libraries. Before the popularity of television and long before the personal computer, books were important sources for the mass spreading of ideas. Libraries and librarians brought the issues of books and freedom of thought before the American people. The importance of books was given wartime currency in the slogan "Books Are Weapons in the War of Ideas."

One set of video clips included segments from TV shows *The Waltons*¹⁰, *MASH*¹¹, and *The Twilight Zone*.¹² Movie clips were included from *Fahrenheit 451*¹³ and *Pleasantville*.¹⁴ These clips are powerful because the exhibit brings them together. The heroes in these episodes point out the importance of accepting all points of view.

The online exhibit does not have the TV and movie clips. This is a powerful exhibit from many points of views. It shows the danger of censorship and book burning and shows the importance of libraries and librarians in the spreading and preservation of recorded knowledge. The exhibit is powerful; one should not miss it.

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¹⁰ *The Waltons* episode, "The Fire Storm" (First aired: 21st October 1976) John Boy wants to print parts of *Mein Kampf* in his newspaper to make people aware of the danger Hitler represents. Many in the community want to burn German books in protest to what the German did. John Boy argues that if they burn books, the people of Walton's Mountain and Germany are not so far apart. Buck Vernon, the book seller finds a German book and is ready to throw it in. John Boy takes the book and Mrs. Brimmer, who was born in Germany, starts to read it, "Am Anfang schiff Gott Himmel und Erde. Und die Erde war wüßt und leer...." "In the beginning God created heaven and earth..." After these words everyone felt a lump in their throat and realized what they have done and what they were burning: The Bible.

¹¹ Major Frank Burns wants to purge the camp of books he considers smut, while Hawkeye Piece fights and saves the books.

¹² The episode "The Obsolete Man" starred Burgess Meredith as a librarian, and may be viewed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=no2uvhgGQX4>.

¹³ In this movie, based on the Ray Bradbury novel, books are burned because they have no value in society. 451° F. is the temperature paper ignites.

¹⁴ Initially all the books in the town's library are blank. As the black and white characters become self-aware they become colorized and the words appear in the books. During the riot scene where armfuls of books are carried out of the library and burnt in the street, Mary Sue struggles when her boyfriend tries to wrest away her book. "This is like the only book I've ever read in my whole life and you're not going to put it on that fire!" She kicks him and runs away. No librarians appear in the movie.