

## Eye Opener

**Jewish Braille Institute  
"Sight" of Inspiration  
@Fall Conference  
by Hallie Cantor  
Acquisitions, Hedi Steinberg  
Library, Yeshiva University**

The power to see is something too easily taken for granted. This is why, upon awakening each morning, we Jews thank G-d for "opening our eyes."

Yet for many Jewish Americans, this blessing takes on a sad and special irony. An estimated 250,000 are visually impaired, many without access to Jewish texts or rituals. Luckily, help exists, right here in New York.

AJL members learned an "eye-opening" lesson about this "overlooked" but growing minority at the Fall Conference, held Wednesday, November 12<sup>th</sup>, at the Jewish Braille Institute of America. The Jewish Braille Institute (JBI), located in midtown Manhattan, is the first stop for anyone seeking materials for the blind or visually impaired. It services over 6,000 clients in New York City and 30,000 worldwide. The JBI also has affiliates in Israel, Europe, and the former Soviet Union. Its library contains 8,000 titles of Judaica – Bibles, devotional literature, novels, plays, poems, and non-fiction – in Braille and large print. All denominations are represented.

### Overview

Opening the conference was Dr. Ellen Isler, Executive Director of the JBI, who described the institute's uniqueness while offering an extensive tour of the facilities. Recently the JBI

(Cont'd on Page 6)

## From the (New) President

I feel very fortunate to have been elected to this position. It has always been a great pleasure to serve on NYMA's board and to work with such dedicated and inspired librarians. Thank you, Shaindy [Susan] Kurzmann, now the immediate past president, for two years of excellent programs. You will be a tough act to follow.

There are a couple of changes to report. Edith Lubetski, one of NYMA's founders and longest-serving members of the Board, has decided to step down. Luckily for us, Edith has promised to continue sharing her insights and ideas with us. It isn't possible to acknowledge Edith adequately for all that she has done for NYMA. Steven Bernstein, of Yale University, is now Recording Secretary. He has the honor of having submitted the minutes of a meeting in record-breaking time. And, I am most grateful to those Board members who have agreed to continue in their positions. We welcome new faces eagerly, and I invite anyone who is interested in serving on our Board or working on a particular project to let me know.

Those of you who were able to attend the Fall Conference on a chilly and rainy November morning were treated to a fascinating tour of the Jewish Braille Institute of America. Pearl Lam, Director of Library Services gave us an insider's tour of the various facilities, and Dr. Ellen Isler, Executive Vice President, spoke to us about the JBI's mission and current projects. We would like to thank Pearl Lam and Ellen Isler for their warm and gracious hospitality.

For the remainder of this programming year, NYMA's efforts will be devoted to the 39th Annual AJL Convention, and workshops and conferences will resume in the fall of 2004. I am astounded daily by the energy, hard work and ideas of my fellow Convention Committee members. Working together with the New Jersey and Long Island Chapters, we have already done an enormous amount to assure that this will be an exciting and inspirational Convention. We hope to entice everyone who works in Judaica librarianship to The New York Marriott at the Brooklyn Bridge from June 20-23, 2004.

I look forward to working with many more of you on events and projects which have not yet gotten underway. This should be the start of a great new term.

*Elizabeth F. Stabler*

## People of the Comic Book Superheros & Jewish Culture

(Adapted from Steve Bergson's article,  
Jewish Community Center, Manhattan)

Pow! Bam! *Chazak!*

Okay, maybe not *chazak*, but you get the point.

With a little help from the AJL, the Jewish Community Center of Manhattan was treated to a lively new exhibit that explored the Jewish contributions to a truly original American art form: comic books. The event, which took place Thursday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, at the JCC, was co-sponsored by the New York City Comic Book Museum and by [jewishsuperhero.com](http://jewishsuperhero.com), and moderated by Steve Bergson – comic librarian, archivist, and visiting AJL member from Toronto.

### Beyond the Golem

Jews were at the core of the comic book industry and used their artistic skills to create superheros who fought evil in the world. Currently, Jewish comic book artists are using this medium as a vehicle for Jewish identity by creating new Jewish superheros like Menorah Man and Shabbas Queen. On display at the Jewish Community Center were original art, covers, collectors' items and interactive multimedia.

Leading Jewish comic creators spoke about Jewish life and comic books. Danny Fingeroth (writer and editor, Batman), Jordan Gorfinkel (writer and editor, Spiderman), and Alan Oirich (writer and creator of the Jewish Hero Corps™) discussed what was uniquely Jewish about superheros and gave insight into this fascinating world. Steve Bergson opened the panel with the following remarks:

"The People of the Comic Book' exhibition at the Manhattan JCC is a celebration, a celebration of a people who have been persecuted – the Jews – and of an American art form that has also been persecuted – the comic book. In 1954, the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency hearings attacked the comics industry and particularly, horror comics, as corruptors of youth. Comics sales in the US declined for years to come and several American comics publishers went out of business. The surviving companies endured, experiencing the recovery period of the '60s.

"Meanwhile, in Canada, the act of buying or selling crime comics – which is to say, most comics on the market – was outlawed, the result of the passing of the Fulton Bill in 1949. That legislation is still in place, although it is ignored today, as it has been for decades. The immediate result had been the decimation of the Canadian comics industry – at a time when the more popular American comics continued to be imported.

### Superhuman Efforts

"By the time I started to read comics, in the '70s, the comics I came across were almost exclusively American, mostly about male

(Cont. on Pg. 7)

#### AJL-NYMA EXECUTIVE BOARD 2003-2004 CHAIRS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

##### President

Eitzaboth Stabler 212-744-1400 / Direct line: 212-607-9560  
[establer@omanuelnyc.org](mailto:establer@omanuelnyc.org) / [lizastabler@yahoo.com](mailto:lizastabler@yahoo.com)

##### Corresponding Secretary

Chaya Wiesman 212-774-8000, x7329 [chaya@ramaz.org](mailto:chaya@ramaz.org)

##### Recording Secretary

Steven Bernstein 203-432-7414 [steven.Bernstein@yale.org](mailto:steven.Bernstein@yale.org)

##### Treasurer

Julia Beck 212-960-1800, x162 [jbeck@mhny.org](mailto:jbeck@mhny.org)

##### Day/High School Workshop

Elana Gensler 516-432-8285 x117 [egensler@aol.com](mailto:egensler@aol.com)  
Boz Friedman 201-833-4307 [ramer1492@aol.com](mailto:ramer1492@aol.com)

##### Membership Outreach Coordinator / Past President

Shulamith Berger 212-960-5451 / [sberger@yu.edu](mailto:sberger@yu.edu)

##### Newsletter

Hallie Cantor 212-340-7723 / [hlcantor@yu.edu](mailto:hlcantor@yu.edu)

##### Publicity Coordinator / Past President

Rita Lifton 212-678-8092 [rlifton@jtsa.edu](mailto:rlifton@jtsa.edu)

##### Reference Workshop

Isa Rubin Cohen 212-678-8836 [irubin@jtsa.edu](mailto:irubin@jtsa.edu)  
Rachail Kurtz 718-377-1000, x186 [rachaillku@flathush.org](mailto:rachaillku@flathush.org)

##### Vice President / Cataloging Workshop Coordinator

Mariene Schiffman 212-960-5381 [schiffma@yu.edu](mailto:schiffma@yu.edu)

##### Graphics Coordinator / Immediate Past President

Shaindy (Susan) Kurzmana 201-684-7199  
[skurzman@ramapo.edu](mailto:skurzman@ramapo.edu) / [sbk36@hotmail.com](mailto:sbk36@hotmail.com) (Use both)

##### Past Presidents

Edith Lubetski 212-340-7720 [lubetski@yu.edu](mailto:lubetski@yu.edu)  
Marion Stein 718-343-2533 [marions@panix.com](mailto:marions@panix.com)  
Naomi Steinberger 212-678-8982 [nsteinberger@jtsa.edu](mailto:nsteinberger@jtsa.edu)

Committee chairs are not elected officers. We welcome volunteers; please contact the committee chairs.

NYMA News is published twice a year, Spring/Summer & Fall/Winter, by the AJL-NYMA Committee.

For questions, news, & comments, contact:

AJL-NYMA, c/o Hallie Cantor,  
383 Kingston Ave., #81,  
Brooklyn, NY 11213  
212-340-7723 / [hlcantor@yu.edu](mailto:hlcantor@yu.edu)  
Or: FAX: 212-340-7808

## – Convention 2004 Update –

☛ **ELANA GENSLER**, Convention Co-chair, is manager of the exhibits. Please contact her with any ideas for vendors.

☛ **SHULI BERGER, RITA LIFTON**, chairs of R & S Programming Committee, & **RACHEL GLASSER**, chair of SSC Programming Committee, have put together an astoundingly rich program of sessions. ☛ Serving with Shuli & Rita on the R & S programming committee are: **EDITH LUBETSKI, MARLENE SCHIFFMAN, SARA SPIEGEL, NAOMI STEINBERGER**, & as coordinators of cataloging sessions: **MARLENE SCHIFFMAN & MARCIA GOLDBERG**. ☛ **LYNN FEINMAN** is editor of the program booklets. ☛ **STEVEN BERNSTEIN** is working on the *bentschers* & the banquet. ☛ **LEAH ADLER** has capably taken over our treasury. ☛ **ROZ FRIEDMAN** is coordinating special programs for Avi Chai. ☛ **ESTHER NUSSBAUM** is arranging an Author's Luncheon no one will want to miss. ☛ **INA RUBIN COHEN**, liaison to the music librarians, will create a Jewish bookstore list for registration bags. ☛ **STANLEY NACHAMIE** has taken charge of the arrangements for the *minyanim*. ☛ **MARION STEIN** is our Borough of Brooklyn point person. ☛ **LESLIE MONCHAR** is roommate coordinator. ☛ **CHAYA WIESMAN** is in charge of entertainment for the Sunday Booklovers' Festival.

☛ **PEARL BERGER** continues to provide the committee with sound advice & helpful feedback. ☛ **MARIANA DROZ & TOVA FRIEDMAN** are in charge of registration goodies. ☛ **AVIVA ASTRINSKY** is arranging the Sunday evening program @ Center for Jewish History. ☛ **STEVEN SIEGEL** has put together a great selection of optional NYC tours & will be arranging transportation. ☛ **SHAINDY (SUSAN) KURZMANN** is working with caterers to provide four-star gourmet meals.

☛ **JOYCE LEVINE**, publicity chair, is doing all she can to broadcast the entire event. ☛ **SARA SPIEGEL**, AJL's Continuing Education & Professional Development chair, has arranged CEU offerings.

### And you? Care to . . .

Create graphics? Be a "Subway Monitor" for the Sunday evening program? Volunteer at the convention?

There are a number of committees still open, so if you would like to become a part of a memorable experience and contribute to the future of Judaica librarianship, please contact Elana or Liza. Please check your mail for the registration forms to be included in the next issue of the AJL newsletter. Or, you may download the forms and further information by clicking on the Convention page at the AJL's website, [www.jewishlibraries.org](http://www.jewishlibraries.org). There is an active Convention Listserve; please let Liza know if you'd like to join and be kept informed. She can be reached at e-mail: [lizastabler@yahoo.com](mailto:lizastabler@yahoo.com), or telephone: 212-744-1400 ext.360.

## Look What's Happening . . . .

### **Announcing**

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary has launched its new web site. Kudos to **Amy Helfman** and her team. Logon to [www.jtsa.edu/library](http://www.jtsa.edu/library).

### **Piece of History**

The front page of the *New York Times* Metro Section (Nov. 10, 2003), featured an article on a traveling exhibit that "traces kosher's history in America." It was co-curated by **Shulamith (a.k.a. Shuli) Berger**, Yeshiva University archivist, whose own collection of advertisements for mainstream kosher products from the 1920s to the 1940s was included. AJL members have been treated to Shuli's slide lecture on her collection. At last the public has had a chance to enjoy it as well.

### **Shalom Aleichem!**

The YIVO Library is pleased to announce the appointment of **Dr. Lydmila Sholokhova** as YIVO's Yiddish Catalog/Acquisitions Librarian. A graduate of The Glier Music College in Kiev (Cello, Performance), Dr. Sholokhova holds a Master's Degree in Music from the Lvov State Conservatory and a Ph.D. in Musicology from the Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of the Ukraine. She also holds a certificate (Advanced Level) in Yiddish from YIVO's Max Weinreich Center, Columbia University. From 1989-1994 Dr. Sholokova was a Reference Librarian at The National Library of the Ukraine (Music Division). AJL members may remember her as one of the IREX Librarianship Fellows who joined at the annual convention in Cleveland in 1997.

### **Write Place, Write Time**

Another year of *schmoozing*, eating, and inspiring took place at the second annual Jewish Children's Book Writer's Conference, held November 27, 2003, at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y. Co-hosted by Buttenweiser librarian **Steven Siegel**, who offered a tour of the library grounds, the conference once again addressed the concerns of both aspiring and established authors in the Jewish children's book world. Topics included the changing market and the joys of self-publishing. Fellow NYMA member **Rachel Glasser** shared the stage to deliver guidelines for the Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award. Participants left not only with door prizes but the chance to network and hone their craft.

### **Painful Past**

On the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kishinev Pogrom, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research hosted a mini-symposium and exhibition viewing, held Nov. 4, at the Paul S. and Sylvia Steinberger Great Hall and the Leo and Julia Forchheimer Auditorium Center for Jewish History. Commemoration of this event was co-sponsored by The YIVO Archives, The Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University, and Glucksman Ireland House at New York University.

### **Temporarily Out of Service**

**Julia Bock** has asked to be temporarily relieved of her duties as NYMA treasurer. Julia has been a wonderful, thorough and dedicated officer on the Board, with whom she has agreed to remain as a member-at-large.

### **Changes**

**Marion Stein** is now librarian at the Abraham Joshua Heschel High School.

### **Congratulations**

To **Hallie (Chaya Sarah) Cantor**, on her latest editorial achievement, *What a Mitzvah!*, Volume 2 of the *Rabbi Riddle* series, distributed by Feldheim.

### **Mazel Tov**

To **Steven Bernstein**, on his engagement to Ilana Plave.  
To **Sharon Hammer**, on the birth of her daughter Shoshana Golda.  
To **Edith Lubetski**, on the engagement of her son Uriel to Rachel Kimmel.

### **Refuah Shaleimah**

To **Hallie Cantor**, for her recent ankle fracture.

### **Correction**

Credit must be mentioned to the one who so capably put together the Spring 2003 conference on Jewish Americana: **Sara Spiegel**. Together with the Professional Development and Continuing Education Committee of AJL, she is continuing to produce and conduct similar programs throughout the country. *NYMA News* regrets the omission.

## IN MEMORIAM

**Scholar & Giant**

NYMA News regrets to announce the passing of Rabbi Abraham Karp, on November 24, 2003. He was the Joseph and Rebecca Mitchell Adjunct Professor of American Jewish History and Bibliography at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, as well as noted bibliographer and collector of Judaica Americana. Rabbi Karp is survived by his wife, Dr. Deborah Karp, and their sons, Dr. Hillel Karp and David Karp.

AJL member Zachary Baker (Reinhard Family Curator of Judaica & Hebraica Collections, Stanford University Libraries) wrote a beautiful note about Rabbi Karp on HaSafran and has given permission for it to be reprinted, below left. It has been edited where necessary.

The eulogies for the late Rabbi Abraham Karp elicit a variety of fond memories. Many of those who attended the 2000 AJL convention in Washington doubtless recollect the Feinstein lecture that Rabbi Karp delivered ["The Hebrew Book in the New World"] when he shared with us his encyclopedic knowledge of Hebrew printing in America. The venue for his lecture – the Library of Congress – was of course most appropriate, for it was there that the "From the Ends of the Earth" exhibition (which he helped to organize) took place in 1991.

Abe Karp was, not surprisingly, a habitue of rare book collections the world over. And whenever he visited the YIVO Library he would marvel at the treasures that he came across in the Vilna Collection, books that once belonged to the Strashun Library. He sometimes expressed wonderment that these tomes were ensconced in a Fifth Avenue mansion owned by Yiddish-speaking secularists who (in his view) doubtless lacked the inclination to appreciate them properly. We did our best to set him straight on that front.

And then there was his voice: deep, authoritative, steeped in erudition – truly a rabbi of the old school. Even an informal conversation with him had the air of an exercise in elocution.

In a purely personal vein, I once asked Abe if he, as rabbi of a large Conservative congregation in Rochester, New York, ever crossed paths with my paternal grandfather, Rabbi (or Reverend, which was his preferred honorific) Samuel Baker. He replied that he did, adding that he was impressed to encounter a graduate of the Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (class of 1912) tending to the dwindling flock of an Orthodox *shtiebel* over near Joseph Avenue, in what was once the city's Jewish neighborhood. And I, in turn, was touched by Abe's recollection of the elderly man who taught me how to read and speak Yiddish.

Just a few meandering thoughts.

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS**

Zachary's Baker's personal remarks about Abe Karp are beautifully expressed. I remember how generous Dr. Karp was to me when I wrote an article about Mordecai Manuel Noah, about whom he had a vast collection of original newspaper articles and pamphlet material. His enthusiasm for his subject was truly engaging. His sincere respect for the library profession was also noteworthy.

ESTHER NUSSBAUM,  
LIBRARIAN, RAMAZ UPPER SCHOOL

**CONDOLENCES**

With great sadness Congregation Emanu-El of the City of New York reports the death of Museum Curator Emerita, Senior Archivist, and AJL member REVA GODLOVE KIRSCHBERG, on Friday, August 22, 2003.

Among her many accomplishments, Reva was the artistic force behind the creation of the Herbert and Eileen Bernard Museum of Judaica at Emanu-El. Her enthusiasm for and knowledge in the areas of Judaica art, Reform Jewish history and genealogy will not soon be replaced.

ELIZABETH STABLER  
LIBRARIAN, CONGREGATION EMANU-EL

(Jewish Braille, cont'd from Pg. 1)

has responded to the immigration of Jews from Argentina. This means adding Spanish to the list of books already made available to the blind in different languages – English, Hebrew, Russian, Hungarian, Romanian, and Yiddish.

Like libraries everywhere, the JBI has to grapple with changing technologies, as analog recordings are going by way of digital, and everything is being preserved in digital format. The recent technological explosion has had an enormously beneficial impact on the blind, who now can not only rely on tapes, CDs, and DVDs, but download from computers.

Clientele includes not only those born (congenitally) blind, but those who have lost or had their sight diminished through diabetes, macular degeneration, accidents, or glaucoma. The elderly and aging baby boomers are especially affected. In addition, many suffer multiple problems, such as Parkinson's, a disease that makes holding a book, let alone reading one, difficult.

Yet, thanks to the value Jews place on literacy, the Jewish visually impaired are among the best educated of the disabled population, and for this reason, no Jew is left behind when it comes to synagogue service, or even a good novel. A wide range of materials – from liturgy to comedy – on virtually all topics related to Jewish interest are available. Probably no other religion or nationality has either provided extensive services or felt such a need.

The changing demographics have affected in other ways the services to the blind. Because fewer children nowadays are born blind, the need for Braille materials has declined: Braille, the series of raised dots for letters, is difficult to learn in later age, when the sense of touch has usually declined. Instead large-print or "talking books" are favored. The JBI has done much to further the Hebrew Braille code at the Central Library of the Blind in Israel. This code, however, has additional problems of its own. Because Israelis read without the *nikudot* (vowels), the system is not an easy exchange. (There is no Braille in Cyrillic.)

Nevertheless, no one Jewish and blind is denied rightful access to either Jewish books or heritage. The JBI has embraced its new role of outreach with a fervor. From Florida, where many Spanish-speakers now resides, to Germany, a haven for Russian immigrants, the JBI realizes that wherever there are Jews, there are readers. The JBI will provide field workers to "feel out" the territory, determine the number of needy patrons, and actually teach them how to use audio books.

Dr. Isler escorted the AJL crew through closed but sunny carrels filled with tapes and Braille Judaica. Because of the number of dots needed, Braille books are significantly larger than regular, even folio, editions. Copies of materials are made, if needed.

(Cont. on Pg. 7)

## Helping Hand

### Same Vision, Additional Service @Jewish Heritage for the Blind

In contrast to the Jewish Braille Institute, the Jewish Heritage for the Blind, located in Borough Park, contains neither library nor recording studio. However, it provides equally valuable services.

The Jewish Heritage for the Blind in fact relies on the JBI for materials and will even refer people there. Like the JBI, the Jewish Heritage for the Blind distributes Jewish works, including its own publications, for all backgrounds and denominations. A Sephardic *machzor*, for example, has been made available, as have Braille Artscroll books for children, and the Orthodox juvenile magazine *Olomeinu*. Again like the JBI, the Jewish Heritage for the Blind provides outreach for this additional population.

"Our greatest need is the large-print books," said the publications manager, who asked to be identified only as Renee G. These benefit not only the blind, but the learning disabled, who make up a significant part of the clientele. Many grateful principals, resource teachers, and parents of children with special needs call in for materials. One of its current projects is the distribution of books in Hebrew Braille to children in Israel, where, given the current economic and political crises, services for the blind and handicapped have been curtailed.

The reasons for this project go beyond the practical. The Jewish Heritage for the Blind strongly believes in equipping the blind and handicapped not only with reading materials, but with spiritual support and inclusion. Simply, the Jewish disabled are considered just as much a part of *khal Yisrael* (the Jewish people) as everyone else. Recently, the Jewish Heritage for the Blind had a *Sefer Torah* completed in honor of the visually handicapped people. A heartwarming *hachnassat Torah* celebration followed, welcoming the Torah Scroll to the congregation.

Indeed, something far beyond the naked eye is revealed. Through the Jewish Heritage for the Blind and other services, a number of Jews can share with their sighted brethren the joys of Jewish literacy.

For information about the Jewish Heritage for the Blind, call (800) 995-1888. Web site: [www.jhftb.org](http://www.jhftb.org).

-H. Cantor

(Jewish Braille Institute, cont'd from pg. 6)

She held up a copy of Genesis, the first book of the Torah, which instead of black Hebrew script was a seemingly white matrix of dots. "White fire on white fire," remarked Yale librarian Steven Bernstein.

### Live at JBI

AJL members were given a special treat: a chance to drop in on the JBI recording studio, where several recitations were in progress. Within recording booths, guides tested for the right inflections, while actors articulated texts for "talking books" in different languages. A distinguished-looking gentleman delivered before the AJL audience a riveting passage from a murder mystery.

As effortless as it looks, this ability to read well out loud goes beyond having a pleasant or professional voice. According to Lisa Anna Kirsch, studio director, the reader must have a knack for grabbing the listener's attention while keeping out of center stage. (Radio announcers do especially well in this line of work.)

Everything, books and magazine articles, are read and recorded – even scholarly works, along with footnotes!

Although the talent pool is comprised mainly of actors and entertainers – the lounge is wallpapered with publicity stills – auditions are frequently scheduled and are available to anyone who would like to try his or her own vocal chords. Several AJL members, in fact, approached Ms. Kirsch afterwards to express interest. Occasionally authors themselves, like Cynthia Ozick or Oliver Sacks, will record their own works. Sadly, although East European language recordings are made available, Yiddish is the most lacking, because of the absence of native actors or readers.

Tapes are transferred onto a special tape machine that is sent to subscribers via by the Library of Congress in Washington. These tapes, as well as all LC tapes in general, are available to JBI subscribers. *JBI Voice*, recorded every month, is a sort of blind Jewish version of *Reader's Digest* that contains selections of articles on Jewish topics, many from prominent Jewish magazines like *Commentary* or *Moment*. In one of the floors below, a Computer Braille machine scopes materials in Optical Braille Recognition. A loyal volunteer staff, some of whom are themselves legally blind, arrange and ship *haggadaot*, *siddurim*, and *bentschers* to those who would otherwise feel excluded from a Seder or service.

"We also have *machzorim* in Braille and large print," added Pearl Lam, the library director. "They are sent out to Jews who need them." This may also mean Jewish children in public, private, and parochial schools who have special needs. Nowadays, much is available on a Braille computer disc, which has a translator program. This need for a program has grown, as the average age of certified Braille translators is much older.

### Added Attractions

Resources extend far beyond the library walls. Cultural events in Manhattan and elsewhere are recorded. The JBI Cultural Series offers the best in Jewish drama, music, and lectures to the blind and visually impaired each month. Brochures and newsletters are filled with JBI services and activities. Much is made available to not only help the blind and visually impaired, but to make them feel welcome. Although no signs proclaim a "drop-in" place – it is in

fact nestled among a row of brownstones – the JBI provides extensive communal service and atmosphere. Staff is friendly, knowledgeable, and dedicated.

Although open to the public, the JBI is restricted in membership. To be eligible, one must be certified visually impaired or physically handicapped by an ophthalmologist or other professional. Membership, however, is free of charge. In spite of its affiliation with the Library of Congress, the JBI receives no funding: its \$3 million yearly budget relies solely on contributions from individuals and foundations.

The conference ended with a brief question-and-answer session by Ms. Lam, who also presented a four-minute video of the Jewish Braille Institute. This video was designed to showcase the JBI to the outside world and to point out its uniqueness. To the "naked eye" – those of us fortunate enough to have our sight – this library would appear in many respects an inspiring novelty. But to those who would be forever lost in darkness without it, the Jewish Braille Institute is a virtual lifeline – and a blessing.

*The Jewish Braille Institute of America is located at 110 East 30<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10016. Telephone: (212) 889-2525. Web site: [www.jbibrary.org](http://www.jbibrary.org).* ✧

(Comic Books, cont'd from pg. 2)

superheros and devoid of Jewish characters. When I did come across Jewish characters in comics, those comics stood out, in my mind, from all of the rest.

"By the '80s, I began to read such graphic novels as *A Contract with G-d*, *A Life Force* and *Invisible People* - all written and illustrated by Will Eisner, who, last year, was the recipient of the National Foundation of Jewish Culture's Lifetime Achievement Award. In 1986, I read Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and was thrilled when I learned it had won a Pulitzer Prize - the only graphic novel to do so to date.

"Upon becoming involved in the convention planning for the Association of Jewish Libraries in 1996, I saw an opportunity to promote the small number of comic books and graphic novels with Jewish content that I knew of at that time – about 25 items. I posted a message to *Hasafra*, which resulted in replies telling me about Jewish comics stories I hadn't read or even heard about.

"Slowly, I expanded my list and tried to read or purchase Jewish comics that were missing from my collection. As I learned more about how to do research in library school, I began to apply those techniques to finding more Jewish comics. I consulted Michigan State University librarian Randall Scott and visited his library, searched the Grand Comics database, read dozens of Usenet postings and participated in eBay auctions.

"My collection of two dozen Jewish comics items has swelled to over 600 in just seven years. That doesn't include the hundred or so items on my list of wanted comics that are either hard to find or expensive to purchase. Though most comics involve superheros and are published here in the U.S., my personal collection is diverse enough to include non-superhero comics and graphic novels and has items from England, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Japan, Israel and Canada.

(Cont'd on Pg. 8)

(Comic Book, cont'd from Pg. 7)

"When you consider that over 600 Jewish comics were published during each of the six decades since comics became popular in the 1940's, and when you consider the over-representation of Jews working in the comics industry – particularly during its Golden Age – it seems a bit surprising that most comics readers – and most Jews – seem unaware of the Jewish contribution to this art form and unaware of the depictions of Jews in comics stories.

#### Incredible Bulk

"However, events during the last five years have made up for lost time. This Jewish comics exhibition is the fourth of its kind held in the U.S. Michael Chabon's best-selling novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, about two Jewish comics creators of the Golden Age, won a Pulitzer Prize in 2001, and a French-language anthology of essays about Jews and comics, titled *la Disapora des bulles : bandes desinees et judeites*, is expected to be published this summer.

"The subject of Jews and comics has been discussed in the press, sparked by the announcement that the fictional superhero The Thing is Jewish. *Hadassah* published a cover story about Jewish superheroes last summer and *Reform Judaism* has recently published two parts of a three-part article about Jews in the comics

industry. The subject of Jewish comics was discussed on the Jewish Digest Radio Show in Montreal and on Fanboy Radio in Texas. Another indication of the growing interest in this branch of literature is that the *jewishcomics* discussion forum that I started two years ago now has 67 members."

Heroic record, worthy of any Superman. He may not be faster than a speeding bullet, but Mr. Bergson soars, taking both his love of comic books and its dissemination to greater heights. From Woman of Valor to Wonder Woman – when it comes to Jewish lore and librarianship, the sky is the limit.

*The Comic Book exhibition will be on display until March 11 in the Laurie TischSussman Gallery in the Community Lobby of the JCC. It is free and open to the public. ☆*

#### REMINDER

Those of you who haven't sent in your NYMA membership renewals, please do so as soon as possible so that you can remain on the NYMA mailing list and receive NYMA News.

Elizabeth Stabler  
Ivan M. Stettenheim Library  
Congregation Emanu-El  
One East 65<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10021