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IN THIS ISSUE

Documentation of Jewish Records Worldwide:
An IAJGS Strategic Initiative
by Marlis Humphrey

"Almost everyone says that their 'brick walls' come from unavailable or missing records," according to a 2016 survey of AVOTAYNU readers. In an exciting decision that promises to change the face of genealogical research, the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) has committed itself to an ambitious project to create and maintain an ongoing, online comprehensive catalog of collections of Jewish genealogical information worldwide, wherever they may be found. Dubbed "Documentation of Jewish Records Worldwide (DoJR)," the crowdsourced, collaborative project is headed by Marlis Humphrey, with Stanley Diamond and Sallyann Sack.

Jewish genealogy depends upon information about individuals and their relationships to one another in countries around the world. As the field has matured, easily accessi-

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ble collections of data have been identified, indexed and made available to genealogists. In recent years, additional, less obvious, and often less available, sources of information have come to light (and some collections undoubtedly remain unknown), but the Jewish genealogical world has no current, full range enumeration of these collections. Many are what Sack termed "second-tier" records in her 2016 editorial (AVOTAYNU, Fall 2016). While more effort has been put into making "first-tier" records accessible, even these collections are sometimes misfiled, misleadingly titled, misplaced or hidden. DoJR is designed to fill that gap. Perhaps the closest analogy is to WorldCat, the worldwide library catalog; think of DoJR as a sort of "JCat."

This article details the project objectives, describes methods for accomplishing its goals and suggests ways in which the Jewish genealogical community at large can participate and contribute.

What Exactly Is the DoJR Project?

The project will develop an online catalog of information about record collections of Jewish genealogical value. The catalog will serve two primary purposes, as a:

• Resource for researchers using records, the catalog will be searchable at the town level to identify sets of records currently known to be available, the size and format of the collection, its location, status and other information that researchers need to know.

• Resource for those engaged in processing record collections (i.e., individuals, groups of volunteers or organizations working to make the collections searchable and accessible through digitization, indexing and translation/transcription [DIT] of records). The catalog will provide information useful in prioritizing collections of interest and eliminating unnecessary duplication of effort on the same collections.

Here is the current project description, which we expect will undergo modification as it is shared with interested parties and leaders in the Jewish genealogical community for feedback.

Need/Mission. Experience and a steady stream of announcements of new discoveries demonstrate that many records useful for Jewish genealogical research remain unknown, or their potential merit is insufficiently described. The DoJR will address this omission through international collaboration that maximizes the benefits and minimizes duplication and waste in making records accessible.

Goals. To create a collaborative online catalog of all existing Jewish genealogically relevant record collections, and to inspire widespread interest in the creation of the catalog and its use as a tool for subsequent participation in the DIT processing of these resources by the broadest number of organizations and individuals. It is such processing that renders the records searchable and accessible. Catalog entries will both identify the record collections and will describe them in sufficient detail to meet these goals.

Catalog Users. The project involves three groups of interested parties – record users, record processors and record custodians (holders of the records collections). Examples of:

• Record users include individuals researching family history and academics researching demographics and Jewish history (including the Holocaust).

• Record processors are individuals, groups, or organizations that want to prioritize future DIT projects and/or to financially support such projects.

• Records custodians are Jewish and non-Jewish archives, repositories, libraries, museums, historical societies, organized genealogy groups, holders of family trees, historians, academics, synagogues, funeral homes, cemeteries and individuals holding private collections.

A specific organization or individual may be involved in more than one category of interest. Any of the interested parties may add or edit entries in the catalog or may search the catalog.

Catalog Entries. Each record collection entered in the

catalog will include a content description of the records available within the collection. The description might include:

• Title, author, publisher, date published, unique local resource identifier, format, media type, language

• General description of the contents

• Size (how many files, records, individuals, pages, bytes, playback duration of a recording)

• Genealogical richness of the record collection (what fields of information are included for an individual, what percentage of the records have genealogical Jewish names in them)

• Additional other attributes for their potential use in supporting genealogical research

• Geographical area covered by the records

• Time period covered by the records

• Location of collection — physical and/or online

• Organization or individual in custody of the records and their contact information

• Instructions to access the collection and any notes on restrictions

• Repository(ies) and/or person(s) most familiar with the records and their contact information

• Current state of accessibility of the records, e.g., original record only, digitized, indexed, original language or translated language/transcribed

• Plan to process the collection, its status (underway or scheduled to start date) and contact information for the owner of the work plan

• If funding is being solicited to support the work plan and contact information

We plan that the catalog can be browsed, searched, sorted, and filtered by various descriptive elements as listed above, and a summary of entries of interest can be printed or downloaded.

Scope. The project will include Ashkenazic, Sephardic, Mizrachi and all other Jewish records and non-denominational collections with significant numbers of Jewish records relevant to genealogical research. Record collections may be in a variety of formats such as books, journals, file folders, or letters (paper or digital files); photos or other images (analog or digital); audio recordings (analog "tape" or "vinyl records" or digital); or video recordings (analog "tape" or digital).

In the spirit of collaboration and crowdsourcing, the project will be a community-wide, global effort, and will seek participation from large for-profit and non-profit organizations such as Ancestry, Family Search, JewishGen, MyHeritage, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem, national archives, small, district research groups and individual record holders.

The catalog will not store records, nor indexes of records. It will store descriptions of record collections. Figure 1 depicts the full cycle of steps needed to make a record collection available to researchers. The DoJR's purpose
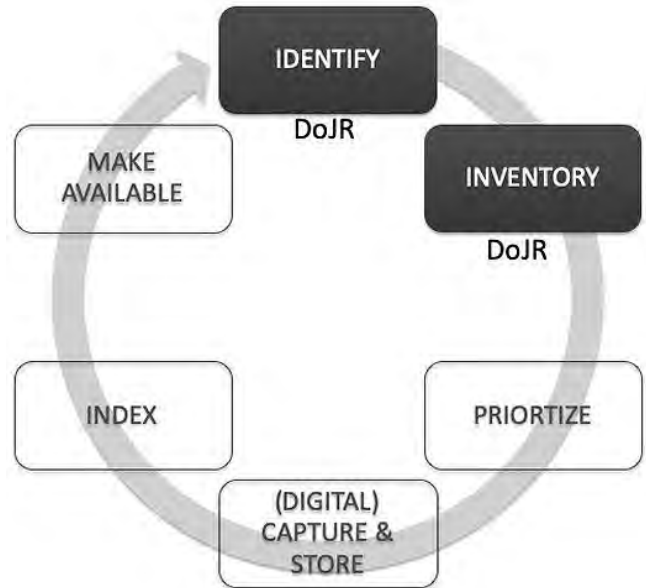

Figure 1. Full cycle of steps needed to make a record collection available to researchers.
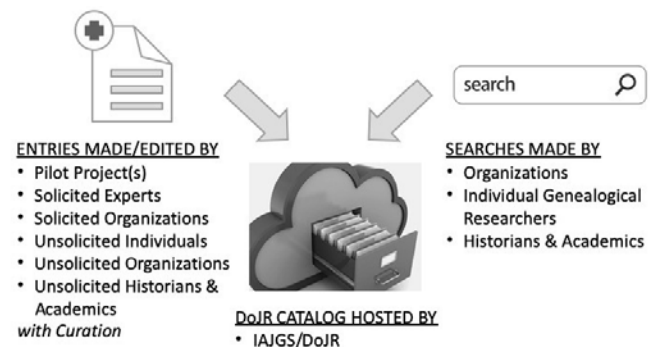

Figure 2. Functional Model

addresses only the first two steps in the cycle enabling others to perform the subsequent steps.

This is a long-term project, an integral part of the evolution of Jewish genealogy. By its definition, the DoJR is a journey without a foreseeable end.

How Does It Work?

The Functional Model diagram (Figure 2) depicts the catalog as a master registry in the internet-based cloud. The diagram shows that the catalog is accessed by individuals and organizations making and editing entries about collections known to them, and by individuals and organizations that search the catalog's contents for information about entries of interest to them.

The Operational Model diagram (Figure 3) summarizes the three purposes of the catalog: identify collections for researchers; prioritize collections for DIT and funders of such projects; and eliminate redundancy of DIT labor and funding. The Operational Model also lists the tasks to implement the DoJR Project, fund raising, awareness and en-
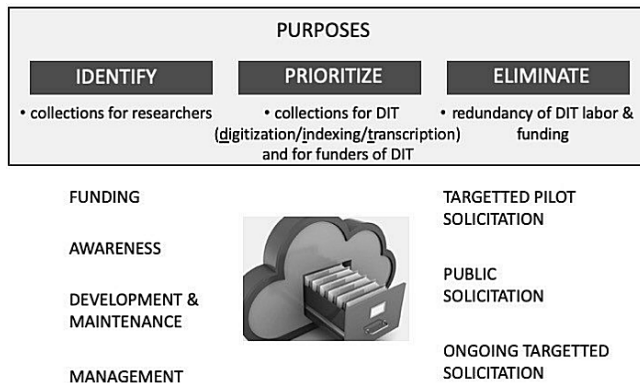
PURPOSES

IDENTIFY	PRIORITIZE	ELIMINATE
• collections for researchers	• collections for DIT (<u>d</u>igitization/<u>i</u>ndexing/<u>t</u>ranscription) and for funders of DIT	• redundancy of DIT labor & funding

FUNDING

AWARENESS

DEVELOPMENT & MAINTENANCE

MANAGEMENT

TARGETTED PILOT SOLICITATION

PUBLIC SOLICITATION

ONGOING TARGETED SOLICITATION

Figure 3. Operational Model

gagement of those affected by the project and the community at large, development and maintenance of the website and database, management of the project, targeted pilot solicitation, public solicitation to contribute catalog entry data and ongoing targeted solicitation to contribute catalog entry data.

The catalog will be accessible on the DoJR website. Relevant organizations will be encouraged to provide a link to the DoJR website.

The catalog will be built using the most current international standards recommended by archivists in order to simplify the addition of entries from other existing catalogs, as well as the exporting of DoJR entries for use by other organizations whose purpose is to make Jewish genealogical records accessible.

Is DoJR Really Needed?

Does the Jewish genealogical world really need the DoJR? Is it worth the effort? Will it provide a useful and valuable service? The planners consulted leaders of two organizations that are highly successful in making records accessible to genealogists, working with archives and making accessible millions of records relevant to Jewish genealogy, FamilySearch and JRI-Poland. We asked if they believe that the problem is real, would it be useful and possible to solve? If they answered positively, then the project would bear further investigation.

David Rencher, Chief Genealogical Officer of Family Search and his team reviewed the DoJR abstract, as did Stanley Diamond, JRI-Poland Founder and President. We asked, "As successful as you have been in identifying records relevant to Jewish genealogy, is there still a significant job to be done to identify additional collections, or are most of the important record collections already known?" Both men agreed that, even in the most organized archive, and certainly among private holdings, many important record collections still are unidentified, hidden, misfiled or titled in a misleading/erroneous manner. In support of their views, both leaders shared several recent examples of previously unknown but important collections being discovered. Rencher and Diamond further agreed that:

• Not only is the DoJR Project needed to help researchers know what is available for their town of interest, but

• It will help those engaged in the process of making more records available, make more well-informed decisions and non-redundant allocation of resources and

• With good planning and a concerted community-wide effort, the project definitely can succeed.

Next Steps

The DoJR Project leadership will soon conduct two pilot projects to test the partnership engagement process (working with both archive management and researchers), logistics, catalog data collection workflow and sufficiency of the catalog description data elements.

Concurrently, leadership will invite genealogical leaders and the Jewish genealogical community generally to offer input and support in developing this most useful resource. Leadership will convene several roundtable discussions, bringing together experts to exchange ideas and knowledge on such topics as Catalog Use (collecting functional, user interface and user experience requirements); Catalog Technology (identifying and evaluating architecture, standards and technology component sourcing options); and Catalog Awareness (developing community engagement and crowdsourcing participation).

The results of the pilot projects, roundtable discussions, leaders and community meetings and survey (see Call to Action below) will be incorporated into the project launch.

Call to Action

Let us change the face of genealogical research together! We invite interested readers and organizations to:

• Review the DoJR Project Abstract at https://bit.ly/DoJRAbstract

• Submit feedback about the Project at https://bit.ly/DoJRSurvey

• Subscribe to receive DoJR email updates at https://bit.ly/DoJRSubscribe

More involvement and participation will produce a more useful resource. Help spread the word to fellow researchers, societies and organizations. Participate in Facebook and email discussion groups, share in meetings and conferences and encourage attendants to use the links above to share their thoughts and knowledge about Jewish genealogically relevant record collections and to become involved as we together create this crowdsourced, collaborative, comprehensive catalog of both online and offline record collections.

About the DoJR Executive Committee

The Documentation of Jewish Records Worldwide (DoJR) Project, formed as an initiative of the IAJGS 2017 Strategic Plan, established a founding Executive Committee whose objectives are to define the merits and scope of the project; develop an operational, management and funding model; conduct one or more prototype/pilot projects; solicit

feedback from the various interested groups and leaders and launch the project. The three members of the Executive Committee are:

Marlis Humphrey (Lead), DoJR Executive Committee Chairman, is an accomplished business executive with experience in strategic planning, marketing, technology, project management and non-profit board governance. She is the immediate past president of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) and developed the organization's strategic plan and roadmap. Humphrey is President of the Florida State Genealogical Society (FSGS) and recipient of the FSGS 2014 Distinguished Service Award. She is a past member of the JewishGen Board of Governors and was co-chair of the IAJGS Boston 2013 conference. Humphrey holds a MS in Management of Technology and a BA in Russian Language.

Stanley Diamond is a successful entrepreneur turned genealogist. He is founder and Executive Director of Jewish Records Indexing–Poland (JRI–Poland), a founding board member of the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy and founder and president of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Montreal. Diamond was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal of Canada (Civil Division) for his work in establishing and directing JRI–Poland. He is a recipient of the IAJGS Lifetime Achievement Award, a past member of the JewishGen Board of Governors and consultant to "Who Do You Think You Are" and "Finding Your Roots" television series episodes on NBC, CBC, PBS and BBC.

Sallyann Amdur Sack, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist, is the only genealogist listed in *Jewish Women in America*; founder and first president of the Jewish Genealogy Society of Greater Washington; co-founder and co-owner (with Gary Mokotoff) of AVOTAYNU, the International Review of Jewish Genealogy, which she edits; and co-founder (with Neville Lamdan) and first chairman of the board of the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy. Dr. Sack was one of the founders and a past president of the Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (today, IAJGS) and recipient of its Lifetime Achievement Award. She has chaired or co-chaired seven of the annual IAJGS conferences and has authored or co-authored seven Jewish genealogy books and has initiated and led numerous genealogy projects.

**About the International Association
of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS)**

IAJGS is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization formed in 1988 as an organization of Jewish genealogical societies worldwide to provide a common voice for issues of significance to its members, to advance the genealogical avocation, and to coordinate such activities as the annual International Conference on Jewish Genealogy. Objectives of the IAJGS include collection, preservation and dissemination of knowledge and information relevant to Jewish genealogy, to provide opportunities for sharing Jewish genealogical information and to promote public access to genealogically relevant records.

Marlis Humphrey, DoJR Chairman, is an executive experienced in strategic planning, marketing, technology, project management and non-profit board governance. She is the Immediate Past President of the IAJGS, President of the Florida State Genealogical Society and a past member of the JewishGen Board of Governors. Humphrey holds MS Management of Technology degree and a BA Russian Language degree. Humphrey lives in Melbourne Beach, Florida.