



Simon Schama, historian and author of the BBC's five-part series *A History of the Jews*, has called the YIVO Institute the "embodiment of the collective memory of the Jewish people of Eastern Europe." The core of this memory is the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Collections. The project to preserve and digitize these materials will ensure their survival for generations to come; it will globally stimulate and disseminate new research and new knowledge; and, moreover, it will enable us to recover the memory of Jewish life in Eastern Europe and Russia shattered by the Holocaust.

This project is one of the essential undertakings of the Jewish people today for building Jewish identity and the Jewish future in America and around the world.

**Jonathan Brent**  
Executive Director

### CONTACT INFO

For more information, contact  
Irma Friedman, Director of Development:

[ipfriedman@yivo.cjh.org](mailto:ipfriedman@yivo.cjh.org)  
212.294.6156

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# THE EDWARD BLANK YIVO VILNA COLLECTIONS PROJECT

Newsletter · Summer 2017

## About the Project

"THESE MATERIALS ARE HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS"

During World War II, the Nazis looted YIVO's archive and library and other Jewish libraries in Vilnius, Lithuania. The Jews who were forced to sort the materials for the Nazis risked their lives to smuggle some of the rare treasures to hiding places in the Vilna Ghetto. Much was destroyed, but soon after the war some of the materials were recovered by YIVO (by then relocated to the United States) with the help of the U.S. Army. Other items were recovered and rescued from the Soviets by a Lithuanian librarian, who hid them for over 40 years until they were rediscovered in 1988.

The Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Collections Project, launched in 2015, is a \$5.6 million, 7-year landmark digital initiative that has inspired funders, scholars, and lay people around the world. Our teams in Lithuania and New York are completing the processing, conservation, and digitization of these collections ahead of schedule.

This project reunites YIVO's divided prewar library and archival collections and remnants of the famed Strashun Library through a dedicated web portal. It is a partnership between the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, the Lithuanian Central State Archives, and the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania.

YIVO has raised **\$5.1 million**  
out of **\$5.6 million**

### DIGITIZATION PROGRESS THROUGH JUNE 1, 2017



**9,340**

books digitized  
(1,616,390 pages)

[Project goal: 11,700 books]



**411,336**

pages of archival  
documents digitized

[Project goal:  
Est. 1 million pages]

**OVER 2 MILLION PAGES DIGITIZED**

## News & Updates

### YIVO Visits Vilnius, Lithuania

On May 22-23, 2017, a delegation from YIVO attended the festive opening of a new Judaica Division at Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania in Vilnius. Executive Director Jonathan Brent, Director of Archives and Library Lyudmila Sholokhova, and Director of Digital Initiatives Roberta Newman were honored guests and presenters at the two-day celebration, which also included a lecture on the history of Jews in Vilna by Professor Samuel Kassow (Trinity College). The new division is headed by Lara Lempert, YIVO's archivist in Lithuania for the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Collections Project. The event was attended by representatives of the Lithuanian government, the American Embassy, and Jewish cultural organizations. An added attraction was the opening of an exhibition on the Strashun Library collection, which YIVO is digitizing in partnership with the National Library. (On June 5, the Strashun collection was officially added to UNESCO's Memory of the World registry.)

While in Vilnius, the YIVO delegation also visited its other partner for the Vilna Collections project, the Lithuanian Central State Archives, and discussed the possibility of future joint projects with the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, the Jewish Community of Lithuania, and the Vilnius Yiddish Institute, as well as other cultural agencies and organizations in Vilnius. A special highlight of the trip was a visit to Vilnius University, where the delegation was presented with an honorary degree for Noah Prilucki (the esteemed Jewish historian

## STAFF SPOTLIGHT



### Jessica Podhorcer – Project Archivist

Podhorcer has a B.A. from Brandeis University, where she majored in History and minored in Judaic Studies. She is proficient in Yiddish with a working knowledge of Hebrew and German. Her previous archival experience includes working at the JDC Archives and the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People. As part of the Vilna Collections project, she has processed collections such as Yiddish Literature and Language, Lithuanian Jewish Communities, and YIVO's Administrative Records.

who also served as YIVO's last director in Vilna) for the Recovering Memory project, which honors students and staff who were expelled from the university during the Nazi and Soviet occupations of Lithuania. ■

## Selected Artifacts · New Discoveries from the Vilna Collections



- Wild Animals I Have Known: A Yiddish Translation of an American Classic**  
 Between WWI and WWII, secular Jewish education was legalized in Poland. New schools, run in Yiddish, fostered a new generation of Yiddish readers. Many original Yiddish works were published for children, as were Yiddish translations of children's literature in other languages. These booklets, published in 1920 by Dos Bukh (The Book) in Bialystok, Poland, are translations of chapters from British-American author Ernest Thompson Seton's 1898 *Wild Animals I Have Known*, the most popular of his many books of animal fiction. The Yiddish translations were sponsored by TSYSHO, the Central Yiddish School Organization of Poland, Lithuania, and White Russia.

Cover of Ernest Thompson Seton's *Zilberflek (Silverspot): The Story of a Crow*. Translated by S. Kantor. Bialystok: Dos Bukh, 1920. (YIVO Library)

- Artifacts of Nazi Looting: Fragments of Records of the ERR**  
 Among the YIVO documents at Lithuania's Central State Archives are items that were not part of YIVO's prewar collections, but rather are artifacts of the looting of those collections. On February 20, 1943, YIVO's original building—located at 18 Wiwulskiego Street, Vilna—was transformed into a sorting center by the Einsatzstab Rosenberg (ERR), the Nazi special task force that looted Jewish cultural treasures. Fragments of its records were found among the recovered documents, including a report on the sorting and packing of Jewish newspapers and a request to move the building's furniture into the Vilna Ghetto.

Stamp of the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) found on some books taken from the Strashun Public Library by the Nazis.



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- Ms. Deborah Waroff

\*AS OF JUNE 15, 2017

