

## Letter from the Director



JONATHAN BRENT

"This groundbreaking discovery of Eastern European Jewish artifacts by YIVO researchers illuminates the richness of European Jewery prior to the Holocaust. The unearthing of these nearly 200,000 Yiddish and Hebrew documents which were hidden from the German authorities during World War II will keep alive the memory of Jewish life that the Nazis so ruthlessly tried to destroy. I want to express my gratitude to YIVO for its work in preserving Jewish history and culture. New York City is fortunate to be home to such a distinguished educational institution dedicated to Jewish scholarship."

—CONGRESSMAN JERROLD NADLER

These precious artifacts remind us that preserving culture is the work of a community, both Jews and non-Jews, working together to save the spirit and memory of a people.

This monumental project will preserve and digitize these materials and ensure their survival for generations to come; it is an essential undertaking of the Jewish people today for building Jewish identity and the Jewish future in America and around the world.

**Jonathan Brent**  
Executive Director & CEO

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# EDWARD BLANK THE YIVO VILNA COLLECTIONS PROJECT

Newsletter · Winter 2018

## 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. In 2017, an additional 170,000 documents were discovered, containing rare and unpublished works.

The Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Collections Project, launched in 2015, is an \$8.6 million, international 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, the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, and the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences.

YIVO has raised **\$5.4 million**  
out of **\$8.6 million**

**DIGITIZATION PROGRESS  
THROUGH DECEMBER 15, 2017**



**11,063**

**books digitized**  
(1,884,506 pages)

[Project goal: 12,200 books]



**440,225**

**pages of archival  
documents digitized**

[Project goal:  
Est. 1.1 million pages]

**OVER 2 MILLION PAGES DIGITIZED**

[VILNACOLLECTIONS.YIVO.ORG](http://VILNACOLLECTIONS.YIVO.ORG)

# YIVO DISCOVERS MORE THAN 170,000 DOCUMENTS THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN DESTROYED DURING THE HOLOCAUST

**"The documents uncovered in this discovery are nothing less than priceless family heirlooms, concealed like precious gems from Nazi stormtroopers and Soviet graverobbers... May they serve us today by strengthening our identities, and recommitting to 'Never Again'." — DANI DAYAN, Consul General of Israel in NY**

A trove of lost Jewish materials thought to have been destroyed during the Holocaust was discovered this year. The new Vilna Discovery contains never-before-published literary manuscripts from famous Yiddish writers, as well as numerous religious and communal works. A watershed moment for understanding the dimensions of Jewish history, it marks a new chapter in the dramatic story of Nazi looting during the Holocaust, when the Germans sought to destroy not just the Jewish people (in Lithuania approximately 90 to 95% of the Jewish population was murdered) but also their memory and culture.

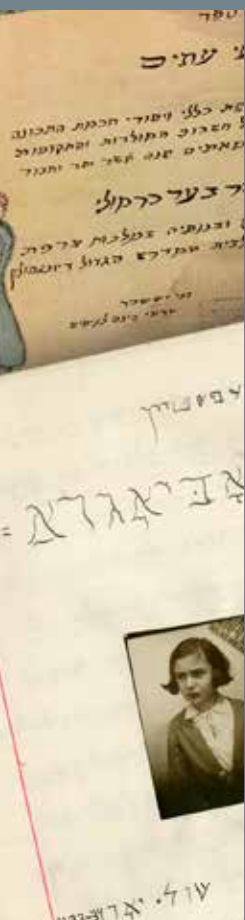
Consisting of more than 170,000 pages, these materials were first hidden from the Nazis by the Paper Brigade during WWII and subsequently preserved for decades by Antanas Ulpis, a Lithuanian librarian who saved the documents from the pulping mills and

stored them in secret in St. George Church to help preserve both the history of Lithuania and the memory of the Jewish people. He did so at the risk of his life and the well-being of his family and is an unsung hero of the Holocaust.

"This discovery reminds us that preserving culture is the work of a community, in this case of Jews and non-Jews working together to save the spirit and memory of a people," said Jonathan Brent, Executive Director and CEO of YIVO. "These newly discovered documents will allow that memory of Eastern European Jews to live on, while enabling us to have a true accounting of the past that breaks through stereotypes and clichéd ways of thinking."

**Help us preserve your history by supporting this project.**

**Donate at:**  
[VILNACOLLECTIONS.YIVO.ORG/DONATE](http://VILNACOLLECTIONS.YIVO.ORG/DONATE)



## Highlights of the new discoveries include:

- Lost poems, manuscripts and fragments by Chaim Grade, one of the leading Yiddish writers of the twentieth century.
- Letters by Sholem Aleichem, whose writings inspired *Fiddler on the Roof's* character Tevye the Dairyman.
- Yiddish postcard written by Marc Chagall to Khaykl Lunski, librarian of the Strashun Library in Vilna, 1935.
- Poems written by Paper Brigade members Abraham Sutzkever and Shmerke Kaczerginski, including a booklet of ghetto poems, in Sutzkever's own handwriting.
- Yiddish theatre scripts: Peretz Hirshbein, *Miriam* (1910), in "German," with stamps by Russian censor. Sherlock Holmes, translated/ adapted by the head of the Lemberg Yiddish theater, Norbert Glimmer (1883-1926). Both items from the YIVO theater museum.

## Digitization is only the first step...

The first edition of the project search portal will launch in January 2018 with a sampling of the thousands of books and documents that the project has catalogued, conserved, and digitized both in New York, and in Lithuania. Scholars and researchers around the world will have free online access to these unique materials.

The search portal is only one facet of YIVO's plans to bring these treasures of Jewish history to as broad an audience as possible. Two online exhibitions, on the Strashun Library and on Yiddish theater between the World Wars, will also launch in 2018. These exhibitions are prototypes for a more extensive Online Museum that will include galleries and narratives on a broad range of topics. Educational resources will accompany the exhibitions, designed to bring artifacts, books, and documents into school and university classrooms.

In March 2018, YIVO, in partnership with the new Judiaica Division of the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, will hold a two-day conference in Vilnius for thirty Lithuanian high school teachers. This pilot program is focused on workshops in which the teachers will brainstorm on how materials from the project might be integrated into their classrooms, and is expected to serve as a model for similar projects in the United States, Europe, and Israel.

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\*AS OF DECEMBER 15, 2017

