This has been a remarkable time for the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Collections Project. Work is underway in Vilnius to catalogue and begin to process the newly discovered collections—170,000 new pages of literary manuscripts, memoirs, theatrical scripts, religious texts, information about the social and political life of ordinary men and women from across the Jewish world, but also exceptionally important texts from the Vilna Ghetto and German Nazi communications collected in the immediate aftermath of the Shoah.

The richness and breadth of this collection—in both New York and Vilnius—has inspired the idea of creating the first online, digital museum of East European and Russian Jewish culture so that these materials—1.1 million pages and 12,200 books—can be appreciated and understood by the widest audience possible around the world. Galleries on many different topics—Yiddish literature, Yiddish theater, The Bund, Education and Religious life, for example—will be constructed out of these digitized materials by leading scholars. The selected materials will be translated into English and integrated with sound, video, photographic, and other materials into state of the art digital galleries making them accessible not only to scholars but to the general public as well.

We are therefore extraordinarily grateful to YIVO’s Emeritus Chairman of the Board, Bruce Slovin, for his inspired act of generosity in making a gift of $3 million for the purpose of constructing the YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum. It is through such generosity and farsightedness that YIVO may now begin to realize the dream of its founders as a truly global institution of the Jewish people of Eastern Europe and Russia.

Jonathan Brent
Executive Director & CEO
YIVO Receives $3 Million Gift to Name and Construct the YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum

YIVO is thrilled to announce a $3 million gift from Bruce Slovin to name and construct the YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum. This gift was given in honor and in loving memory of Mr. Slovin's wife, Francesca. Selected documents from the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Collections Project—YIVO’s landmark digitization and preservation initiative—will be translated into English to be featured in galleries, reflecting the entire spectrum of Jewish life in Eastern Europe and Russia.

“I have decided to make this gift as a sign of my appreciation for the leadership of YIVO and to support the creation of this online museum. This museum will provide access to YIVO’s meaningful and important archival treasures which are instrumental in preserving the history and culture of the Jewish people,” said Bruce Slovin.

In March 2018, YIVO took the first step toward demonstrating the significance of the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Collections as a teaching tool with a two-day conference for Lithuanian teachers, co-sponsored by the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania. Many of the documents and books in the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Collections relate directly to the Jewish life that flourished in Lithuania before World War II. They not only document everyday Lithuanian Jewish life but also have the potential to illuminate the important role played by the Jewish minority in Lithuanian history and society. This story was suppressed in Soviet times and is only now beginning to be grappled with in the public arena—and in classrooms.

The conference, held in Vilnius in the National Library, attracted the participation of 30 high school teachers from all over Lithuania, who attended workshops and presentations by scholars and educators. Representatives of other cultural organizations, such as the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum and the Centre for Studies of the Culture and History of East European Jews (Vilnius University) were also invited to present their educational projects to the attendees.

The conference is envisioned as only the first step in a multi-year initiative in Lithuania in continued partnership with the National Library.

On Sunday, March 11, 2018, Senator Dick Durbin received YIVO’s Founders Award for his role in preserving the nearly-destroyed legacy of the rich and vibrant Jewish culture in Vilnius, Lithuania, at a reception hosted with the Consulate General of the Republic of Lithuania in Chicago. Senator Durbin was instrumental in his support and assistance in discussions with the Lithuanian Government as YIVO developed the Project in its initial phase.

Over 200 people attended a presentation by YIVO Executive Director Jonathan Brent on Sunday, March 11, 2018 at the Ezra-Habonim, the Niles Township Jewish Congregation in Skokie, Illinois. The presentation focused on the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Collections Project, and in particular the 170,000 recently-discovered items that had been thought destroyed by the Nazis during the Holocaust. “Ezra-Habonim, the Niles Township Jewish Congregation is the perfect spot for this important lecture,” said Rabbi Jeffrey Weill, spiritual leader of the synagogue when they came to Chicago after World War II.

Jonathan Brent Discusses the Project at Ezra-Habonim in Skokie, IL

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We are extraordinarily grateful to the Slovin Foundation for their special gift to name and construct the YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum.