

# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



When we began planning the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections project in 2014, many skeptics told me categorically that it would be next to impossible to find archivists sufficiently trained and fluent in Yiddish and other languages to work with the materials.

Today, aside from the digitization of the documents, perhaps the most important achievement of the Project has been the training of an entire cadre of new, young archivists and conservators in New York and in Vilnius to work with the Yiddish, Polish, Russian, German and Hebrew documents. These enthusiastic

## CONTACT

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and committed young archivists and conservators have literally touched YIVO's past and now have become an important part of our renewal as an organization and the renewal of our mission in America.

Through this project, YIVO has revived its function as a vibrant teaching and training institution that explores the past of Jewish history in Eastern Europe and helps ensure that that history has a future.

**Jonathan Brent**  
Executive Director & CEO



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## THE EDWARD BLANK YIVO VILNA ONLINE COLLECTIONS

Winter 2020  
NEWSLETTER

### About the Project

"THESE MATERIALS ARE HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS"

During World War II, the Nazis looted YIVO's archive and library, along with other Jewish libraries in Vilnius, Lithuania. The Jews who were forced to sort the materials for the Nazis risked their lives to smuggle these rare treasures to hiding places in the Vilna Ghetto. Much was destroyed, but some of the materials were returned to YIVO (who had by then relocated to the United States), with the help of the U.S. Army. Other items remained in Vilnius to be 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 In 2017, approximately 200,000 additional documents were discovered in Lithuania, including rare and unpublished works.

The Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections project, launched in 2015, is a \$7 million, international landmark digital initiative to process, conserve, and digitally reunite YIVO's divided prewar library and archival collections through a dedicated web portal. These materials include newly-discovered Holocaust documentation and the remnants of the famed Strashun Library.

This project 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.

It has inspired funders, scholars, and laypeople around the world.

DIGITIZATION PROGRESS THROUGH  
NOVEMBER 30, 2019

OVER 3 MILLION PAGES DIGITIZED



**100%**

**books digitized**

Nearly 40% available online

[Project goal: 12,500 books]



**Nearly 50%**

**archival documents digitized**

[Project goal:

Est. 2 million pages]



**Nearly 50%**

**images of books and documents available online**

[Project goal:

Est. 4.1 million images]

YIVO has raised **\$5.9 million** out of **\$7 million**

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

# NEWS & UPDATES

## Jonathan Brent Speaks at YIVO Archival Documents Exhibition in Lithuania

On September 19, YIVO Executive Director and CEO Jonathan Brent spoke at the exhibition, "Documents of the YIVO Archive," in the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in Vilnius, Lithuania. The exhibition featured YIVO materials that have been housed at the Wroblewski

Library since 1948 and are being preserved and digitized as part of the YIVO project. They were on public view for the first time since the end of World War II. This exhibition of YIVO materials represents a wide spectrum of topics, from medical records to pogroms in Ukraine to the record of YIVO documents turned over to Nazis.

## New President of Lithuania Visits YIVO

On September 26, the newly elected President of the Republic of Lithuania, H.E. Gitanas Nausėda, and First Lady Diana Nausėdienė visited YIVO. Their visit highlights the important ties between Lithuania and YIVO and acknowledges how Jewish history and culture shaped the identity of the countries of the world, including Lithuania. The President and First Lady viewed an array of materials from YIVO's collections, including the *Pinkas* of Rabbi Elijah ben Solomon Zalman's synagogue.



PHOTO: ROBERT DAČKUS

Known as the Vilna Gaon, Rabbi Elijah was the most significant religious leader of his generation. This visit followed Mr. Brent receiving the Cross of the Knight of the Order for Merits to Lithuania in July, recognizing the cooperation between Lithuania and YIVO and the preservation of Lithuania's prewar Jewish archives.

## 780,000 Digitized Pages Available Online

Approximately 800,000 of the expected 2 million pages of documents have been digitized as part of the project. At present, 780,000 pages from 31 collections are available to view online. These collections contain an array of material from YIVO administrative records when YIVO was located in Vilna, Yiddish theater and literature, Jewish community council records, and the personal papers of historical figures like Simon Dubnow and Shalom Schwarzbard. A full list of the available collections can be found at [vilnacollections.yivo.org/Collections-Online](http://vilnacollections.yivo.org/Collections-Online).

## National Library of Lithuania Completes Book Scanning

In July, the Martynas Mažvydas National Library completed scanning all books in its collections that are part of the project. A total of 4,608 books were scanned, of which 2,339 are currently available at [vilnacollections.yivo.org](http://vilnacollections.yivo.org).

## FEATURED ARTIFACT



### Russian Military Decorations

Among the artifacts found in the Collections are a series of Russian military decorations that were collected by Elias Tcherikower. The **Cross of Saint George**, the highest military decoration awarded to lower ranks of military personnel for bravery and courage, had four classes. Classes 1 and 2 were made of gold, while classes 3 and 4 were made of silver.

The **Medal for Bravery** and **Medal for Diligence** were used during Nicholas II's reign (1896-1917). The Medal for Bravery, which had four classes, was awarded to lower ranks of soldiers in auxiliary troops, volunteers, and border troops. The Medal for Diligence was awarded to individuals who contributed to the welfare of the Russian Empire. The medals were made from gold, silver, or other metals.

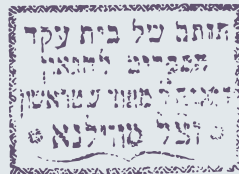


The **Jewish star medallion** was likely given to A.O. Ziprinski in recognition of his services. It is inscribed with "From the Jewish Warriors of Odessa" on one side, and "A.O. Ziprinski, December 17th, 1919" on the other.



### YIVO Library Contributes to the Footprints Project

The YIVO Library has joined the international group of libraries and private collections contributing to the project, *Footprints: Jewish Books Through Time and Place*. *Footprints* explores the journeys of Jewish books and the history of their ownership. A portion of Matityahu Strashun's private collection, digitized for the Vilna Online Collections project, opens up a trove of information for this kind of research. In addition to the Strashun stamps, there are numerous inscriptions and stamps of other important collectors, libraries, societies, schools, and synagogues that previously possessed these books. YIVO's contribution will bring to light the names and related stories that otherwise would remain hidden between the covers of the books.



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\*AS OF DECEMBER 1, 2019

