



NEWS

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American Jewish Archives Set to Launch Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise Digital Archive on the 190th Birthday of the Architect of Reform Judaism in America

*Digital archive is a milestone achievement for scholars,
researchers and students of American Jewish history*

CINCINNATI, OH:--- The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives announces that the Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise digital archive—a freely accessible comprehensive electronic edition of the 19th century Rabbi's correspondence and extensive published writings—will launch on March 29th, 2009, Wise's 190th birthday.

Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900) was the leading force behind the rise of American Reform Judaism in the late nineteenth century. He played a central role in the founding of three major Reform Jewish institutions that still exist today: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations in 1873 (now the Union for Reform Judaism, the parent body of Reform synagogues); the Hebrew Union College in 1875, the Reform movement's rabbinical seminary based in Cincinnati, Ohio; and the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1889, the Reform rabbinical association.

The new digital archive consists of approximately 3,300 items captured in nearly 20,000 digital images. The collection documents the life and work of the architect of Reform Judaism in America.

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“Isaac Mayer Wise was unquestionably one of the most significant and influential American Jewish leaders during the last half of the nineteenth century,” said Dr. Gary P. Zola, Executive Director of the AJA and Associate Professor of the American Jewish Experience at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. “For more than a half century, his creative and ambitious hand touched virtually every aspect of Jewish communal life, and therefore his collected writings shed light on the story of American Jewry itself. This digitized archive will now comprise the lion share of his copious writings and be readily available to interested patrons around the world. For those who are interested in the history of American Jewish history, this project may be rightfully described as a milestone event.”

Funding for the nearly two-year digital archiving process was provided by the JRS Dryfoos Charitable Lead Trust in New York.

The entire archival staff of the American Jewish Archives was involved in this project—which began eighteen months ago. “This was a team effort in every sense,” said Dorothy Smith, Coordinator of Archival Activities and Technology at The Marcus Center. “Staff members brought their ideas to the table. We wanted it to be an interactive site and so what’s particularly new and exciting to us is that the Wise Digital Archive’s website features a place where users can send us their feedback and participate in discussion threads with others who visit the site. We are asking for feedback and discussion and we are eagerly awaiting the launch of the archive so that we can get those conversations going.”

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The on-line archive includes:

- Extensive correspondence both to and from Wise [504 items];
- Articles published by Wise in numerous books and periodicals [132 items];
- Full-length books by Wise that include poetry, fiction, essays and theological treatises [19 items];
- Hebrew Union College reports documenting the first quarter century of the academic institution while Wise was its president [238 items];
- The weekly editorial pages from *The American Israelite* covering the years 1854-1900 when Wise was the editor [2382 items];
- Photographs of Wise;
- Selected essays by scholars about Wise's life, writings and historical impact.

The digital archive will go "live" on the internet on Monday morning, March 29 at 9:00 a.m. Eastern Time. **(A press release announcing the web address of the digital archive will be sent on March 28.)** Fisher Design in Cincinnati developed the web design and along with the AJA staff, determined the most user-friendly ways in which the data would be displayed on the screen. "Even after the site goes live, more documents—including books, monographs and periodicals—will be digitized and added to the archive," continued Zola. "It is also quite possible that we will hear from people who have additional Isaac M. Wise letters and correspondences that will become part of this remarkable online resource."

For more information, or to arrange an interview, please contact Joyce Kamen at 513.543.8109.

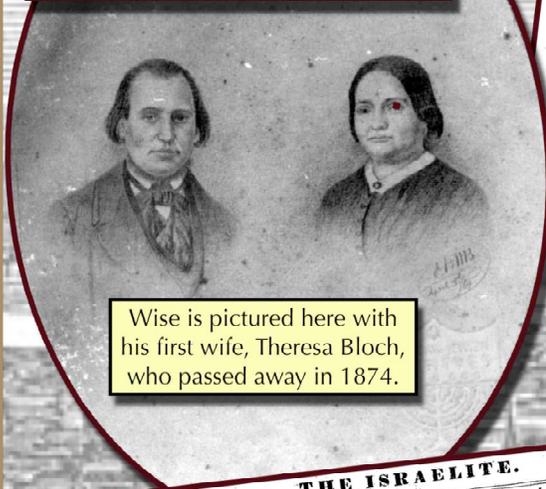
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The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, founded in 1947 by its namesake on the Cincinnati, Ohio, campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, is committed to preserving a documentary heritage of the religious, organizational, economic, cultural, personal, social and family life of American Jewry. The Marcus Center contains over 15,000 linear feet of archives, manuscripts, nearprint materials, photographs, audio and videotapes, microfilm, and genealogical materials.

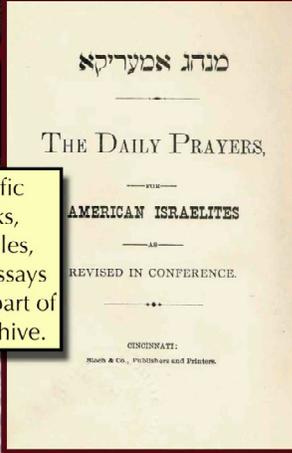
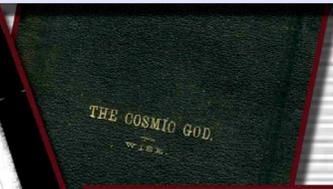
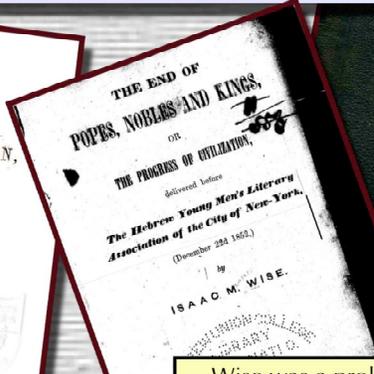
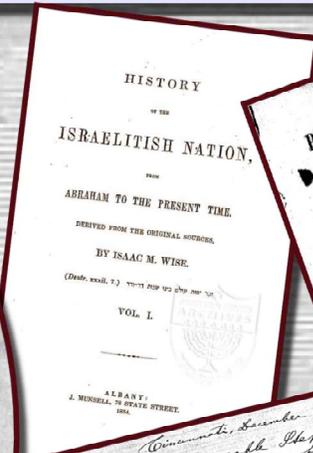
The Rabbi Isaac M. Wise Digital Archive

Going Live on March 29, 2009

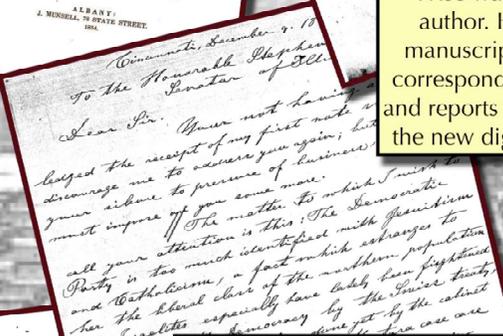
Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900) was the leading organizational genius behind the rise of American Reform Judaism in the late 19th century. He played a central role in the founding of three major Reform Jewish institutions that still exist today: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations [1873], now the Union for Reform Judaism, the parent body of Reform synagogues; the Hebrew Union College [1875], the Reform movement's rabbinical seminary; and the Central Conference of American Rabbis [1889], the Reform rabbinical association.



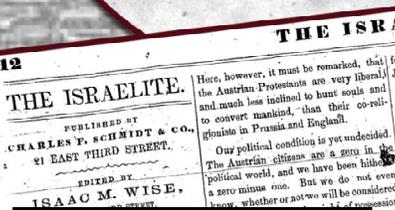
Wise is pictured here with his first wife, Theresa Bloch, who passed away in 1874.



Wise was a prolific author. His books, manuscripts, articles, correspondence, essays and reports are all part of the new digital archive.



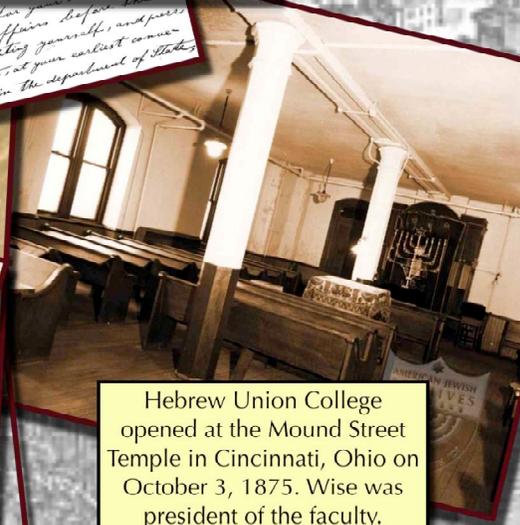
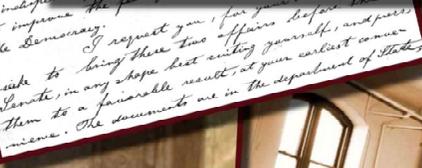
Hundreds of Wise's handwritten correspondences are transcribed and posted on the site—like this letter to Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas.



Wise's journal, "The Israelite", became "The American Israelite" in 1874.



Wise's love letters to his wife Selma Bondi are part of the digital archive.



Hebrew Union College opened at the Mound Street Temple in Cincinnati, Ohio on October 3, 1875. Wise was president of the faculty.