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▲ Archives

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Are you interested in the Hebrew Sunday School Society, created by Rebecca Gratz? Would you like to uncover the history of Woodbine, New Jersey, the Jewish agricultural community founded by Baron de Hirsch? Do you want to explore one hundred years of JEWISH EXPONENT issues? Are you curious about the lives and experiences of Jewish community leaders?

Then you need only explore the treasure trove of diaries, business records, photos, personal recollections, minutes of social service agencies, etc., which reside in the Jewish Archives.

At a ceremony at Sullivan Hall on Temple University's main campus, Temple President Ann Weaver Hart and Dean of University Libraries Larry Alford were among those paying tribute to Mrs. Merves and to Carole La Faivre-Rochester, current president of the Philadelphia Jewish Archives Center's board.

As a symbol of the Jewish Archives collection, La Faivre-Rochester turned over a page from the 1924 hand-written Yiddish diary of Israel Chanin,

written by a young Philadelphian after immigrating from Lithuania. Dr. Hart handled the plastic-encased sheet of paper with reverence.

The collection is now part of Temple's Urban Archives, the nation's premiere archives documenting the social, economic and physical development of the Delaware Valley in the 19th and 20th centuries.

And the scope of the Jewish Archives is second only to that of New York's.

Professor Laura Levitt of Temple's religion department spoke about the great boon to departments ranging from religion, to Jewish studies, to women's studies, to urban studies.

Highlights of the Philadelphia Jewish Archives Collection include the records of the first Jewish orphanage established in America, the Jewish Foster Home and Orphanage Asylum, founded by Anna Allen; and the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society, a genealogical treasure trove for those researching the arrival of Jewish families to America.

But Mrs. Merves' work is not done. Now she has embarked on a fundraising campaign in order to endow the archivist position at this priceless collection.

▲ Viewpoint

from Page 5

Palestinians being made homeless in Jerusalem? President Obama has declared that Israelis (that is, Jews) have no right to evict two families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah, a predominantly Arab neighborhood in Jerusalem. Actually, Obama has said that Israelis shouldn't build anywhere near the Palestinians, neither in Jerusalem nor in the West Bank. What's up with that?

Sheikh Jarrah is as good an example as any of the misperception about Palestinian "rights" to the land. Seth Frantzman, in his recent article, "Terra Incognita: East Jerusalem's Lost Years," outlines the history of the neighborhood, putting the situation into its proper context. "What is today called Sheikh Jarrah, in the 19th century included two Jewish neighborhoods known as Nahalat Shimon and Shimon HaTzadiq. The latter commemorated Simon the Just, a Jewish high priest from the 4th century AD and was purchased by Jews in 1876. Nahalat Shimon was built by Sephardic and Yemenite Jews in 1891. Sheikh Jarrah was primarily a Jewish neighborhood in the late 19th century and remained so up until 1948."

Muslims began building in the neighborhood around the same time as the Jews. By the end of the 19th century, Sheikh Jarrah was a "cosmopolitan neighborhood that included the American Colony compound, St. George's Anglican Cathedral, an ancient Muslim mosque commemorating a soldier of Saladin and the 'Graves of the Kings,' a site with graves of various Jewish figures, which had been acquired by a Jewish family and given to the French government in the 19th century."

Frantzman continues: "In December of 1947 fighting broke out between Jews and Arabs in Jerusalem. Initially the leading Muslim families asked Arab fighters from outside the city to leave their neighborhood, and the Jews [residing] there, in peace. By March 1948, however, Arabs from a unit called "al Shabab" (The Youth) invaded the neighborhood [Sheikh Jarrah] and set the Jewish synagogues and houses on fire,

causing the residents to flee. In April, the Hadassah Convoy massacre, where 79 Jews were murdered, took place in the neighborhood."

Other Jewish neighborhoods in east Jerusalem were destroyed in Israel's War of Independence, including parts of Silwan (David's City), where Yemenite Jews had settled in 1882, and the Old City's Jewish Quarter, which was razed in 1948 by the Jordanians.

After 1948 East Jerusalem was occupied by Jordan, dividing Jerusalem into Jordanian controlled East Jerusalem and the modern, Jewish West Jerusalem. The Western Wall, Judaism's holiest site, was closed to Jews. The Christian population of East Jerusalem during Jordanian occupation dropped from about 30,000 to 11,000. The U.N. settled Palestinian refugees in East Jerusalem, including in the disputed houses in Sheikh Jarrah. Beginning in 1956, Jewish graves on the Mount of Olives, Judaism's most storied gravesites, were destroyed. Some 38,000 grave stones were removed and used in construction by the Jordanians.

Frantzman's conclusion: "In fact, none of the rampant destruction of Jewish sites in Jerusalem was condemned by the U.N. during the period of Jordanian rule. Had the international community cared then as much as it does now, perhaps the disputes would not have come about. If people understood more about the period of Jordanian rule and the dynamic Arab changes of Jerusalem, one might better understand the actual history of the city, rather than focusing merely on Israeli actions and Palestinian victimization."

Both Goldman and Frantzman point out the emphasis by the media on Palestinian victimization, with little mention of Jewish victimization and Jewish rights. Jews have an ancient history in Israel. Even in the modern period, Jewish claims often precede those of the Palestinians. The Palestinians will never have their own state unless they are willing to recognize that Israel is the Jewish state. That's the real story about the Palestinians.

Stephen Kramer resided and worked in the Atlantic City area until 1991, when he moved to Israel with his wife, Michal Langweiler, and two sons. He can be reached at Sjk1@jhu.edu.