

# Vanderbilt Holdings

Collections and collectibles

## An Unlikely Home

*The Judaica Collection spans 4,000 years of faith, history, commentary and customs.* By RAY WADDLE, MA'81

**T**HE MINDLESS, MURDEROUS book burnings in Nazi Germany might have towered even higher if Jewish scholar Ismar Elbogen had not escaped Berlin with his books in 1933.

But he did, leaving the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums (Academy for the Science of Judaism), where he had taught since 1902, to find refuge in America. He joined the faculty at Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City as a renowned expert in Jewish liturgy until his death in 1943. Soon enough, his professional library of books—a legacy of religious tradition and survival, the sort of books so offensive to Nazism—was making one more sojourn, this time to a permanent, if unlikely, home.

The Vanderbilt University library.

In early 1945 the Elbogen collection—2,200 volumes, mostly in German and Hebrew—became the foundation stone for a remarkable amassing of books that has preoccupied the University for nearly 60 years.

The Mary and Harry Zimmerman Judaica Collection, as it is now called, is housed at the Divinity Library within the Jean and Alexander Heard Library system. Counting more than 20,000 titles today, the Judaica Collection contains the most signif-

icant gathering of books and journals on Jewish faith and culture by any Protestant theological school in the South.

“It provides access to a whole world,” says Jack Sasson, the Mary Jane Werthan Professor of Jewish Studies and Hebrew Bible at Vanderbilt Divinity School. “There are very

nurture a noted Judaica collection? Vanderbilt’s Judaica testifies to a central principle of the Divinity School, a commitment to the view that Christianity is built on the religion of Judaism, not as a replacement of it.

“The Divinity School embraces faith that finds its origins in the Hebrew Scriptures,” says James Hudnut-Beumler, dean of the Divinity School. “Knowing something about how that other branch of biblical faith grew and developed is important to us.”

The Zimmerman Judaica Collection, the dean points out, is also a pillar of support for a new phase in Vanderbilt’s life: Formal degree programs in Jewish studies recently have been launched—an undergraduate degree program last fall, and a graduate program this year.

The Judaica Collection contains encyclopedias of Jewish history, journals, microfilm, and books on every facet of Jewish life and learning—in English, Hebrew, German, Yiddish and other languages—covering some 4,000 years of faith, history, commentary and customs.

A stroll through the eight aisles of books reveals the array of titles, from *Civilization of the Ancient Near East* to the *Journal of Aging and Judaism*; from *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls* and *Confronting Anti-Semitism: A Practical Guide to A Treasury of Jewish Anecdotes* and *Straight Talk: My Dilemma as a Modern Orthodox Jewish Woman*.

few people in the Divinity School who don’t use it sometime or another.”

Why would a divinity school that trains students for Christian ministry build and



But a centerpiece of the collection is the correspondence between two seminal German Jewish thinkers of the 20th century, Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber. Several boxes of letters focus especially on their collaboration to translate the Hebrew Bible into German, which Buber finished after Rosenzweig's death.

Even more valuable to scholars is another Judaica possession—the manuscript of Rosenzweig's masterwork, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (*The Star of Redemption*), which includes hand-scrawled drafts he wrote on small postcards from the trenches of World War I (he was in the German army) and sent home to his mother.

How did these various books and artifacts find their way to Vanderbilt? A sense of urgency about Judaism's perilous place in the world, a web of human connections and pivotal donations, plus a little serendipity, yielded breakthroughs in every decade since the 1940s.

**Left: Damascus Keter (1260) from *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts*; this page: correspondence and a manuscript page from the Rosenzweig Collection. The profile portrait is Franz Rosenzweig; the round portrait, his father.**

The initial Elbogen acquisition, in 1945, was fueled by the energies of Frederick Kuhlman, then director of the Joint University Libraries. Even as the Nazi mass murder of European Jewry was reaching catastrophic proportions, Kuhlman declared the urgency of combating hate and ignorance with enlightenment, edu-

her own right, active in Jewish society and causes.

The Teitlebaums and the Elbogens actually had met in Europe back in the 1930s. That consolidated the deal: The two women, now widows, had a personal point of contact, according to the *Concise History of the Judaica Collection*. The result was Teitlebaum's \$6,000 donation to buy and bring Elbogen's library to Vanderbilt.

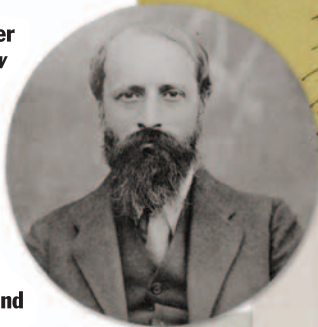
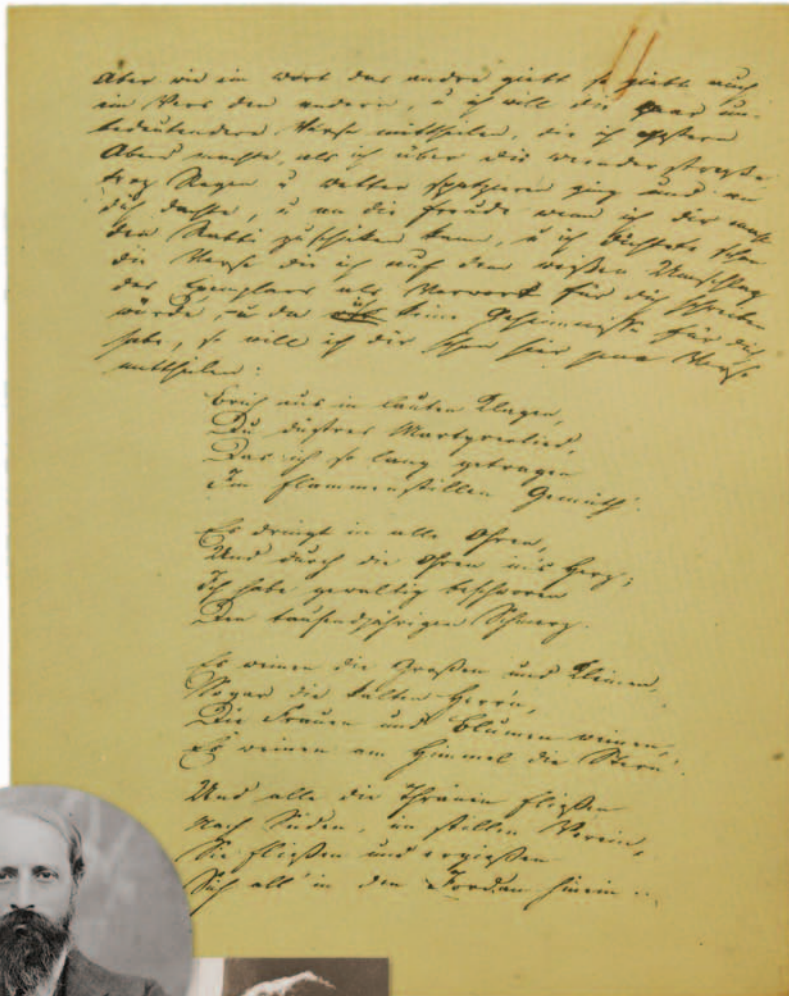
Other bids for more books got under way, in a gathering climate of shock at the Jewish Holocaust. Kuhlman scanned for other collections to buy, building contacts with booksellers and other universities. A book-buying fund was established honoring Lee J. Loventhal, a Nashville businessman, member of the Vanderbilt Board of Trust, and a promoter of education. Mary Jane Werthan, a relative of Loventhal's and later the first woman on the Board of Trust, was pivotal in this effort.

In 1949 the hiring of Samuel Sandmel as Vanderbilt's first Jewish literature professor intensified momentum for a Judaica collection—and signaled the University's post-war openness to Jewish studies. Sandmel guided purchase decisions made with Loventhal funds.

Sandmel had been hired by Vanderbilt Chancellor Harvie Branscomb, who had arrived in 1946 from Duke University. Notably, Branscomb, a Methodist trained in New Testament studies, believed Judaism should be taught as a living religion with historical connections to Christianity; he brought Sandmel from Duke.

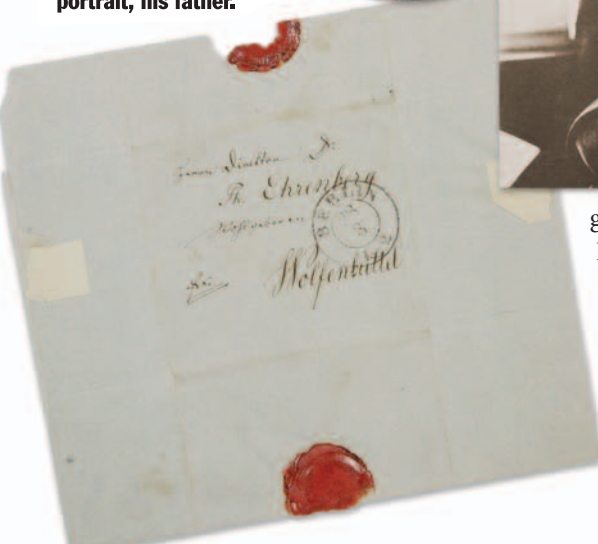
One significant acquisition at this time: 160 works on the Jewish philosopher Philo, including six books that were about 400 years old. The Philo books were given by stockbroker and bibliophile Howard Lehman Goodhart in 1951.

After Sandmel left in 1952, his successor,  
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cation, and new centers of Jewish learning. It was time for Vanderbilt and the South to provide a sanctuary for Jewish thought, he argued.

When the late Elbogen's library came available in 1943, Kuhlman assiduously cultivated Nashvillian Sarah Lowenstein Teitlebaum to make the necessary donation. Teitlebaum was the widow of Henry Teitlebaum, a business leader in the small Nashville Jewish community. Sarah Teitlebaum was a local personality in



### **Vanderbilt Holdings** *continued from page 25*

Lou Silberman, would give steady attention to the Judaica Collection for the next 28 years, until his retirement. In 1963, during Silberman's tenure, local philanthropist Manuel Eskind established the Leah Belle Levy Eskind Memorial, a Judaica Collection fund in memory of his wife.

The Judaica Collection entered a new phase in 1988 with its biggest gift yet—\$500,000 from Nashville businessman Raymond Zimmerman. His donation, honoring his parents, Harry and Mary, allowed the collection to expand its holdings on several fronts. Zimmerman specified that the collection be made accessible such that grade-schoolers and international scholars alike could explore its offerings at their own pace.

"That's the strength of Vanderbilt—it's nondenominational to the extent that it welcomes everyone," says Zimmerman, who now lives in Boca Raton, Fla. "My parents loved Vanderbilt, and this is certainly a fitting memorial to their memory."

In 1991 the Zimmerman Judaica Collection consolidated its identity and expanded its reach when it acquired the collection of the late scholar Nahum N. Glatzer, who taught at Brandeis University and was an editor at Schocken Books. His materials—some 6,000 books—include the correspondence relating to Buber and Rosenzweig, as well as the *Star of Redemption* manuscript.

For decades, even on campus, the Judaica Collection was hardly known at all, housed in a small corner of the Divinity Library for years. Not anymore. After the library remodeling in the mid-1980s, it was placed in a larger and well-lit space just off the library reading room, where it stands today. The move became symbolic of a higher profile, a more intentional presence in the life of a university and divinity school reaching back 4,000 years across time.

### **Hannah's Story** *continued from page 37*

gery, doctors affix a metal halo onto a patient's forehead, screwing it into the skull, and a second halo around the neck. Using a CT scan, they locate the site of the tumor, compare it to an MRI scan, and chart its exact coordinates via computer. Then they secure the halo to the table and target 100 beams of radiation directly onto the tumor, killing any cell growth at that site. The Huths would arrive at VCH at dawn on March 1, Hannah would undergo the radio surgery, and they would return home at 7:30 that night.

Still, says Beth, "No one could have prepared us for watching our child go through something like that. No matter how good the doctors and staff are, you can't imagine seeing your child hooked up to that halo with screws drilled into her head. It's unbelievably traumatizing."

Because the staff had to monitor her vital signs closely, they couldn't simply "knock Hannah out" with anesthesia. During the long ordeal, she woke up five or six times, crying that she was hurt and asking her mother, "Why is this happening to me? I never did anything wrong!"

Beth sat in a wheelchair, holding her daughter in her arms, trying to soothe her, as Hannah grew increasingly uncomfortable under the weight of the halo. At 4:30 that afternoon, after being fully anesthetized, Hannah finally went in for her radio surgery. Today the doctors are optimistic that the procedure worked.

Most of Hannah's questions since then, Beth says, have been about whether the tumor will come back, asking her parents if it's gone for good. "As a parent you cannot answer that question," she laments. "I can't say anything that's going to give her some closure."

On the way home from surgery, Hannah apologized for crying so much. Beth responded, "Honey, don't be sorry about crying. You could cry buckets and I'd carry them away."

Hannah said, "I just don't want to be a baby."

"Honey," Beth told her, "you're bigger than me."

A few days later, Hannah began coloring again. She had been talking to her family about dreams, and so she drew a big beautiful picture of a hospital with people in the windows. Above it she wrote this title: "I Wish That No One Would Be in the Hospital." Hannah's dream is that all sick children will one day be well.

Aside from stomach pain and headaches, the biggest aftereffect of Hannah's radio surgery was a large green, black and yellow bruise near a puncture site from the halo, which made Hannah look like she had a black left eye.

On March 4, three days after her surgery, Hannah asked if she could go back to kindergarten for a couple of hours. Rising at 6 a.m., she selected a fancy skirt and a shirt with sparkly flowers, an outfit, she insisted, befitting her first day back. When she walked into school, her friends crowded around her.

"What happened to your eye?" they asked.

"I had surgery on Monday," Hannah answered.

"Oh," they said, "do you want to come color with us?" And that was that.

For most people a hospital is a place to fear, a place to avoid. For Hannah Huth, however, Vanderbilt Children's Hospital is an incontrovertible fixture in her routine. Given that, she goes there with bravery and with grace. She accepts that there exists an unspoken connection between visiting the hospital and hanging out with her friends, playing with her cat, teaching neat stuff to her little sister, coloring beautiful pictures, and waking up in the morning excited about all those things that are important in the life of a little girl.

—Lisa A. DuBois