Index to Florida Jewish History in the *American Israelite*

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Scope

The "Index to Florida Jewish History in the *American Israelite*" facilitates access to information about Jews in Florida published in the *American Israelite* from 1854 (the year the *American Israelite* began publication) to 1900. This influential weekly was founded in Cincinnati by Isaac Mayer Wise as the *Israelite,* but its name was changed in 1874 to the *American Israelite.* In addition to historical and theological articles, this source contained news from all over the Jewish world. Information on Jewish communities in the United States is particularly abundant.

The "Index" includes brief abstracts of all references to Florida Jewry in the *American Israelite* through the year 1900. Articles, advertisements, betrothal announcements, lists of contributions and donations, correspondence from Florida, and miscellaneous reports that refer in any way to Florida or Floridians are covered. The only comparable work is Robert Singerman's (1976) index to Western States Jewish history in the *American Israelite* for the same period (1854–1900).

The "Index to Florida Jewish History in the *American Israelite*" was designed as a tool for research in the "prehistory" of Florida Jewry. Florida's Jewish population did not exceed 772 in 1880 (UAHC, 1880), but increased to 3,000 by the year 1900 (*The American Jewish Year Book,* 1900).

The Indexing Process

Every relevant item found in the *American Israelite,* including advertisements, was abstracted, and all the names mentioned in the newspaper were keyed in special fields to be sorted later for the creation of the indexes. Each abstract was given a title, generally derived from the names of the cities and towns mentioned in the article (see Figure 1). Because many of the abstracted items did not have a distinctive title, assigning the geographic name as the title was presumed to be of help to the user of the "Index" trying to find articles dealing with a given place.

When browsing through the various indexes, the title appears next to every name, along with publication date, page, and column. Generally, there is a relationship between the title and the entries in the personal names index; in many cases, the title (i.e., place) indicates that the person was from that place. This is not always true, however, because people from one place are occasionally mentioned in relation to another place. For example, an article that mentions a person from Tallahassee visiting Jacksonville, will be assigned the title "Jacksonville" if the item deals mainly with the latter city. A relation between [geographic] title and proper name is found more frequently in the indexes of congregations and organizations/societies.

Since the scope of the "Index" is limited to Florida Jewry, only Florida place names were indexed, while other places mentioned in the text were omitted. All of the personal names mentioned in correspondence and reports of Florida communities were indexed, including people from out of state, on the assumption they were associated in some way to the Jewish communities in Florida. Most of the societies and organizations indexed are local, though a few are national organizations to which Florida Jews made contributions, e.g., the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Method

All the data gathered from the *American Israelite* was abstracted and processed using the computer programs PFS:File and PFS:Report, which generated a list of the abstracts, arranged by date, and four indexes: Personal Names, Places, Congregations, and Societies/Organizations.

PFS:File is a computer program that allows the creation of customized forms. For this project, the indexing form was divided into eight fields: title, date, page: column, abstract, names, places, congregations, and organizations/societies (see Figure 2). The first four fields were created to facilitate location of an item in the *American Israelite.* These fields are printed in the bibliographic portion of the "Index," i.e., the section containing the abstracts. The other four fields (personal names, places, congregations, and organizations/societies) were created for the purpose of indexing the abstracts. A sample of a complete record is given in Figure 3.

Each personal name, place, congregation or organization in Florida mentioned in the text of the *American Israelite* was keyed in the appropriate field. To sort these fields and to create the separate indexes, the PFS:Report program was used. This versatile program sorts and prints tabular reports from the information stored in a

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Title: Jacksonville
Date: 1882/02/10
Page: p. 257:1
Abstract: A congregation was established. Appeals for donations to build a synagogue. M. A. Dzialynski—Pres., S. Benjamin—Vice Pres., Geo. W. Markens—Secretary—Ahavath Chesed, Congregation of the State of Florida. Committee on Donations: J. D. Bucky—Jacksonville, B. M. Baer—Jacksonville, M. M. Bellisario—Jacksonville, L. Furchgott—Jacksonville, S. Ritzewoller—Jacksonville, S. Benjamin—Ocala, T. H. Benjamin—Micanopy, J. R. Cohen—Tallahassee, M. Endle—Gainesville, W. Fox—Leesburg, B. L. Lillienthal—Palatka, W. F. Sylvester—Ellaville.

Figure 1. Sample abstract from the "Index to Florida Jewish History in the *American Israelite*."

PFS:File, according to the user's specifications. The program also gives the option of printing an alphabetical report from keywords in a defined field. This option was used in each of the above-mentioned four fields, thereby creating the four name indexes.

The use of the keyword specification has its constraints, however. A keyword, as read by the program, is considered from its first letter to the first space after it, which means that personal names have to be written without a space between the last, first, and middle names (see Figure 4). In the three other indexes (places, congregations, and organizations/societies), compound names were written with a dash between the various elements of a name to get around this problem.

The database is stored on a hard-disk. Though the programs used do not have the capability to perform Boolean searches on combinations of index terms, there are ways to narrow a search while online.

The "Index" will be published in paper form and will contain five sections: abstracts, arranged by date; personal names index; places index; congregations index; and organizations/societies index.

Summary

The "Index to Florida Jewish History in the *American Israelite*" is a tool designed for reseachers of Florida Jewry, local historians, and genealogists. It provides access to a hitherto hidden source of information. The database contains over 550 abstracts. The four indexes enable the user to search on specific proper names—of persons, places, congregations, and societies.

The "Index" facilitates retrieval of information about Jewish life in Florida during the second half of the nineteenth century, a time when the Jewish press in Florida was non-existent. From the references to Florida in the *American Israelite,* one can readily find information on the localities that had a Jewish population, the growth of Jewish communities, the establishment of communal institutions, and the involvement of Florida Jews not only in building Jewish communities, but also in political life on the state and municipal levels.

[*Editor's note:* It is hoped that this article may inspire other Jewish newspaper indexing projects. There is a vast amount of valuable information buried in newspapers that could be made accessible to researchers through computer-assisted indexing. We invite reports of Judaica indexing projects.]

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Title:
Date:                                    Page:
Abstract:




Names:




Places:



Congregation:
Society:
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F1-Help	Esc-Main Menu	F10-Continue

Figure 2. The form designed for the creation of the database.

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Title: Pensacola
Date: 1900/12/13                          Page: p. 3:3
Abstract: At Temple Beth El, Rev. Dr. I. E. Wagenheim gave two sermons which
attracted much attention. One was given at the Elks' Memorial.




Names: Wagenheim,I.E.,Rev.




Places: Pensacola



Congregation: Beth-El
Society: Elks-Memorial
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FLORIDA	Form 645	Page 1
F1-Help	Esc-Main Menu	F10-Continue

Figure 3. A completed form from the database (a record).

References

American Israelite (Cincinnati, 1854-   ). (Available on microfilm. Can be borrowed or purchased from the American Jewish Periodical Center, Cincinnati.)

The American Jewish Year Book, 5661 [1900–1901]. Philadelphia, 1900, p. 623.

Herbsman, Yael. Index to Florida Jewish History in the *American Israelite* (to be published in the Summer of 1989).

Singerman, Robert. Index to Western States Jewish history in the *American Israelite* (Cincinnati), 1854–1900. Cincinnati, 1976. Microfiche.

[UAHC] The Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Statistics of the Jews of the United States. Philadelphia, 1880, p. 55.

Yael Herbsman is a Cataloger at the University of Florida Libraries, with responsibility for Hebraica and Judaica. She is also the compiler of the "Index to Florida Jewish History in the American Israelite." *Formerly on the staff of Haifa University Library, Ms. Herbsman served as co-editor of the "Index to Hebrew Periodicals (1979)," and was in charge of the Erets Yisrael database.*

Personal Names			
Names	Title	Date	Page
Ortleib, Mrs.	Jacksonville	1888/09/21	p. 8:34
		1888/01/13	p. 9:2
Osky, J.	Jacksonville	1893/06/15	p. 5:7
Otlinger, Mrs.	Jacksonville	1900/05/10	p. 2:5
Ottensoser, L.	Ocala	1887/05/20	p. 6:2
		1887/05/20	p. 7:1
		1892/09/08	p. 6:3
Ottensoser, L., Mrs.	Ocala	1892/09/08	p. 6:3
Ottinger, Lena	Quincy	1900/10/25	p. 7:4
Ottinger, RosalieLeon	Quincy	1900/10/25	p. 7:4
Pallok, M.	Jacksonville	1882/12/15	p. 201:3–5
Parker, Jacob	Florida	1885/03/20	p. 6:4
Parkhill, C.B., Hon.	Jacksonville	1896/12/10	p. 6:4
Peck, A., Mrs.	Pensacola	1890/08/28	p. 3:4
Peck, Minnie	Pensacola	1890/08/28	p. 3:4
Perry, E.A.	Florida	1885/01/02	p. 2:1–2
Peyser, Charles	Ocala	1892/09/08	p. 6:3
Philipson, Dr.	Ocala	1898/06/09	p. 6:2
Pincus, A., Mrs.	Jacksonville	1889/03/14	p. 2:1–2
		1893/08/24	p. 3:4

Figure 4. A page from the Personal Names Index.