



The Edward Blank
YIVO Vilna Online Collections



NEWSLETTER |

SUMMER 2021 |

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

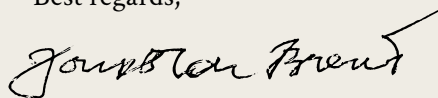
Dear Friends,

Ashkenazi Jewish history remains a vibrant, vital element in our present reality, in scholarship, in both Yiddishkayt and general culture, and for the future of the Jewish people around the world. The historical memory preserved in YIVO's Archives and Library helps us know who we were, what we are, and what we can be. **The Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections Project (EBYVOCP)** is essential to this effort. Bringing it to its completion in January 2022 will fulfill the deepest needs of our people to retain a living—and therefore complex—connection to our past. We deeply appreciate the commitment of Edward Blank, our many supporters, and our dedicated team. More than 4 million pages of books, artifacts, and documents are being made available for online viewing at vilnacollections.yivo.org.

We are pleased to feature Research Fellow Ruby Landau-Pincus' observations on the project in our newsletter. Ruby is exploring Ashkenazi civilization from new perspectives based on her exposure to the collection. Another article highlights Zygmunt Turkow, founder of the Warsaw Yiddish Art Theater and husband of Ida Kaminska, a legendary star of Yiddish theater. Eastern European Jewish history and the performance arts are brought to life via scrapbooks, theater posters, and letters rescued from Nazi extinction. Finally, we feature an article profiling Elias Tcherikower, one of YIVO's founders and a notable historian and political activist.

Please enjoy our Vilna newsletter—there is much more to come later this year. Wishing you a happy summer of reading!

Best regards,



JONATHAN BRENT
Executive Director & CEO

CONTACT

For more information, please contact the YIVO Development Department:

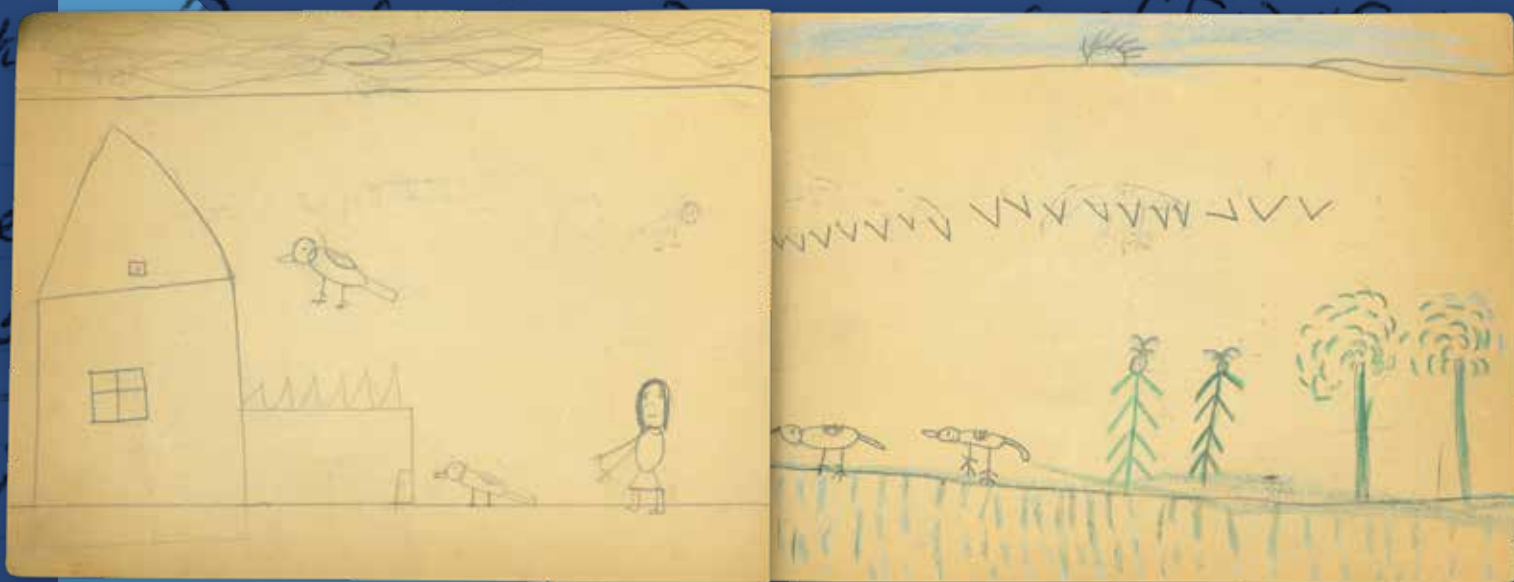
- ▶ **212.294.6156**
- ▶ **mcohen@yivo.cjh.org**

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COVER:

Cover of *Der koter in shtivl* [Puss in Boots], translated into Yiddish by Al. Olshvanger. Berlin: A.G. Syrkin, 1924. Part of the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections.



Drawings from a young boy's sketchbook, now being processed as part of the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections Project. Poland, ca. 1930.

WHAT I LEARNED AS A RESEARCH FELLOW ON THE PROJECT

RUBY LANDAU-PINCUS, *Kronhill Pletka YIVO Research Fellow*

I didn't really know what to expect when I started my work with YIVO. I'm a Yiddish Studies major at Columbia University, having fallen into the major track somewhat accidentally, taking one Yiddish class to satisfy a language requirement and liking it a bit too much. When I originally applied to the research fellowship program that brought me to YIVO, I didn't really think I would get in, as my knowledge of Yiddishkeit at the time was severely lacking. Luckily, at YIVO, you can't help but learn on the job. On my first day there, my friends in the program and I began our work on the Vilna Collections, having been given the seemingly simple task of tracking which languages were present in various folders of materials. As I quickly discovered, our task was not so easy, as languages would often switch three or four times within a single piece of mail. I was struck by the realization that both the sender and the recipient were likely fluent in all of the languages used in the letter. My own wonderment at this was the result of a lie that I believe many young American Jews such as myself have been fed: that prior to coming to America or Western Europe, all Jews lived solemn, provincial, and un-

educated lives. My work with the Vilna Collections woke me up from that belief and showed me the reality of the situation. I read through records kept by Jewish booksellers who shipped materials all around the world. I found the sketchbook of a young boy, which included a drawing of his house, and of his family at a lake. Most of his drawings had birds in them, and I thought about those birds for days, reminded of similar drawings from my own childhood. Some of the documents I worked with had been folded into narrow rectangles, and I got the sense that this was to smuggle them in shoes or clothing seams. The Vilna Collections are not only a testament to our past, but how hard we have always worked to hold onto it. In the age of the internet, that means digitization. As I now work to transcribe images of records of posters in the Vilna Collections, I am continually amazed by how relevant many of them feel to today, like debates about zionism, or pleas to get inoculated against cholera. The Vilna Collections have me constantly learning and reevaluating my notions about the history of Jewish people, and for that I am eternally grateful. ■

FEATURED ARTIFACTS



ELIAS TCHERIKOWER (1881-1943)

Elias Tcherikower was a founding member of YIVO in Vilna, a member of its Executive Committee, and Chairman of YIVO's Historical Section from 1925-1940. In addition to this, Tcherikower was a historian and political activist. During the course of his career, Tcherikower was involved in a project to collect and publish documents on pogroms in the Ukraine; took an active role in the 1926-1927 defense of Shalom Schwarzbard; was involved in the 1934-1935 trial in Berne, Switzerland, regarding the Protocols of the Elders of Zion; and contributed to and edited many Russian and Yiddish periodicals, anthologies, and encyclopedias.

Found in Tcherikower's collection, which is being digitized as part of the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections Project, is his personal writing set. Most likely these mahogany, European-made writing tools traveled with him from Berlin (1929-1933) to Paris (1933-1940) to New York (1940-1943). The set contains seven items including an inkwell, pen stand, pen rest, and letter opener. ■

YAKOV SKLAR, *Archival Processing Manager*



ZYGMUNT TURKOW (1896-1970)

The Yiddish actor and director Zygmunt Turkow was born and raised in Warsaw, where he got his start on the stage and went on to co-found—in partnership with his wife at the time, actress Ida Kaminska—the influential dramatic troupe “Varshever Yidisher Kunst-Theater” (Warsaw Yiddish Art Theater; circa 1924-1928). This scrapbook spans Turkow’s earliest experiences in theater. The first clipping, dated 1913, from the daily Yiddish newspaper *Der Moment*, tells of a Hanukkah program presented by students at Krinski’s commercial high school, which the 17-year-old Turkow was then attending. Describing the students’ Hebrew-language production of Longfellow’s poetic drama “Judas Maccabaeus,” the writer relates that Turkow “masterfully performed the difficult role of the traitor Jason.” Also reflected in the volume are Turkow’s participation in Nahum Zemach’s amateur Hebrew-language troupe “Habimah” during its sojourn in Warsaw; his graduation from a private Polish drama school; and performances of the “Artistishe Vinkele” (Artistic Corner), an amateur Yiddish theater group he helped to organize. After acting for a time on the Polish stage, in 1917 Turkow joined the Yiddish troupe led by Abraham Isaac Kaminski and his wife, the renowned actress Esther Rachel Kaminska. On later pages



of the scrapbook are reviews of productions in the early 1920s co-starring Turkow and Ida Kaminska, the Kaminskis’ daughter, whom he had married in 1918. This scrapbook is in YIVO’s Esther-Rachel Kaminska Theater Museum Collection, RG 8, which is currently being processed and digitized as a part of the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections Project. ■

VIOLET LUTZ, *Project Archivist,*
Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections

PROGRESS THROUGH
JUNE 15, 2021

LEFT TO RAISE:

\$445,000

to meet our **\$7 million** goal

OVER 3 MILLION
pages digitized



100%

books digitized

50% available online

[Project goal: 12,500 books]



Over 80%

archival documents digitized

[Project goal: Est. 1.5 million pages]



Over 70%

images of books and documents
available online

[Project goal: Est. 4.1 million pages]

Dear Friends,

The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research is on the verge of completing a historic seven-year, \$7 million initiative in January 2022. Thanks to the farsighted generosity of our board member Edward Blank, combined with support from foundations and YIVO members, the **Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections Project (EBYVOCP)** is reuniting YIVO's pre-World War II library and archival collections, digitizing these materials and making them accessible to people the world over. Comprising 2.5 million pages of original books, artifacts, records, and documents held in New York and Lithuania, the EBYVOCP is a towering achievement. This unparalleled collection sheds new light on prewar Ashkenazi Jewish history and culture, benefiting scholars, students, and the global public now and for generations to come.

Thank you for caring and sharing in our mission, whether by enjoying our classes and programs, accessing materials online at www.yivo.org, volunteering your translation skills, or making a gift to advance this extraordinary project. YIVO is grateful to our many donors who have lent their support, helping our outstanding archival team led by Stefanie Halpern to conserve, catalog, and digitize myriad fragile materials, enabling them to exist for all time. The reunited collection gives us a fresh, expanded picture of Jewish daily life and intellectual life in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust when Jewish civilization was pushed toward extinction.

We have nearly reached our goal and ask you to consider supporting this historic initiative, providing scholars, researchers, members, supporters, and individuals around the globe access to this prestigious collection. There are so many highlights among this collection: the autobiographies of Jewish youth, records from the Yiddish Actors Union in Poland, and the papers of Elias Tcherikower, a co-founder of YIVO. Currently, our archivists are identifying and repairing rare documents reflecting Eastern European Jewish life from the 1830s to the 1930s and Vilna, Poland, between World War I and World War II.

To make a gift in support of the EBYVOCP, please visit the project website (vilnacollections.yivo.org/donate) or contact me at mcohen@yivo.cjh.org / **212.294.6156**. We welcome your contributions to this important work.

Thank you for being part of our YIVO community and lighting the way to knowledge.

Warmly,



Melissa Cohen

Chief Development Officer

OUR DONORS*

We greatly appreciate and acknowledge the following donors for their generous support of this project:

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BENEFACTORS \$100,000+

Anonymous (2)

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* as of JUNE 15, 2021



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.



LOCATED IN
THE CENTER FOR JEWISH HISTORY

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New York, NY 10011-6301
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The Edward Blank

YIVO Vilna Online Collections

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ABOUT YIVO

The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research is dedicated to the preservation and study of the history and culture of East European Jewry worldwide. For nearly a century, YIVO has pioneered new forms of Jewish scholarship, research, education, and cultural expression. Our public programs and exhibitions, as well as online and on-site courses, extend our global outreach and enable us to share our vast resources. The YIVO Archives contains more than 23 million original items and YIVO's Library has over 400,000 volumes—the single largest resource for such study in the world.

Currently, YIVO is not open to the public.

We continue to monitor the situation closely and follow New York State and City guidelines. The health and safety of our patrons and staff is our primary concern. YIVO is located at the Center for Jewish History, and is working closely with their team on reopening plans. If you need to reach YIVO staff, please refer to the e-mails listed below.

CONTACT

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Administrative Hours

Mon–Thu 9:00am–5:00pm

Fri 9:00am–4:00pm

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