



YIVO INSTITUTE
FOR JEWISH RESEARCH

יידישער וויסנשאַפֿטלעכער אינסטיטוט - ירוּאָ



Courtesy YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

YIVO Institute for Jewish Research Launches New Online Museum with Interactive Exhibition Exploring East European Jewish Life in the 20th Century

The **YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum** Presents its
First Digitally Native Exhibition

Beba Epstein: The Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Girl

NEW YORK—Updated August 25, 2020—The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research announces the inauguration of its landmark **YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum**, available free of charge to the global public at museum.yivo.org. A broad-ranging educational initiative, the YIVO Cernia Slovin Online Museum's inaugural interactive exhibition ***Beba Epstein: The Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Girl*** explores East European Jewish life in the 20th and 21st centuries through the true story of one teenage girl. The exhibition, developed by YIVO in consultation with scholars and Beba Epstein's family, delivers an exciting leap forward for digital museums in an experiential format. Karolina Ziulkoski, the museum's Chief Curator and a Webby award-winning interactive designer, has combined innovative technology with engaging storytelling to showcase rare materials from YIVO's archive of more than 23 million documents and artifacts. This is the **first public presentation of Beba's own childhood autobiography from the 1930s**.

"The launch of the YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum initiates an exciting new chapter in YIVO's history by dramatically expanding our ability to fulfill YIVO's historic mission through digital means," said **Jonathan Brent, Executive Director and CEO**,

YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. “YIVO is increasingly using digital technologies and online learning to provide wide-spread public access to the treasures in our collections. The YIVO Cernia Slovin Online Museum will transform the ways audiences of all ages and backgrounds think about and connect with Jewish history. Much of this priceless original material had never before been available to the general public.”

“Beba Epstein lived through extraordinary times, but as her autobiography shows, she was also a regular fifth-grader who loved her summer holidays and spending time with her family. By making her firsthand account and other rare contemporaneous materials available to viewers with the click of a mouse, we hope to inspire empathy and instill understanding that discrimination can alter the course of a single life and whole communities’ fate, and no one is immune from it,” said **Karolina Ziulkoski, Chief Curator, YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum.**

Beba Epstein: The Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Girl was developed from its inception as a digitally native project. Rather than following an object-based approach, the exhibition is divided into ten chapters that span Beba’s life, using interactive storytelling to unite over 200 artifacts from YIVO’s archives. Within the exhibition, users are able to explore various depths of information at their own pace.

Beba Epstein’s autobiography, the centerpiece of the exhibition, was written when she was a fifth-grader before the start of World War II. It was discovered in May 2017 at the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania among 170,000 pages of previously unknown YIVO materials thought to have been destroyed by the Nazis. These materials are now part of the **Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections** project, a major initiative launched in 2015 through the generosity of **Edward Blank and Family.**

Additional materials available for viewers to explore in *Beba Epstein: The Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Girl* include videos of Jewish family life in Eastern Europe in the early 20th century, several notebooks from Jewish schools including Beba’s primary school, and rare documents like the record book of the study house of the 18th Century Vilna Gaon, the most influential rabbi of his time.

Through Beba’s story, the audience will learn about many aspects of Jewish life in Eastern Europe including family dynamics, the school system and curriculum, leisure activities, immigration, as well as antisemitism and the Holocaust.

The YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum was established in 2018 with a generous \$3 million gift from Bruce Slovin in memory of his late wife Francesca Cernia Slovin for the purpose of telling the story of Jewish life in Eastern Europe and Russia through YIVO’s world-renowned archival and library collections. Future exhibitions planned for the YIVO Cernia Slovin Online Museum will span the history of East European Jewish life over four centuries, drawing from the expansive YIVO archives to create a variety of English language experiential exhibitions.

About the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research was founded in Berlin, Warsaw, and in Vilnius (Vilna) in 1925 with the support of leading intellectuals such as Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud. Its mission is to document, study, and preserve Ashkenazi Jewish civilization in all its aspects, from culture and history to language, literature, and political movements. YIVO's headquarters were relocated to New York City in 1940 in response to WWII. Today, YIVO is renowned for its role as a research institute, educational center, and cultural organization, with a library of over 400,000 volumes in addition to its unparalleled archive with over 23 million documents and artifacts. YIVO is dedicated to digitizing and preserving its collections for current and future generations worldwide. YIVO also keeps this heritage alive through its countless public and educational programs, which are conducted in person and digitally for a global community.