



Yiddish Book Center Preserves and Expands Reach of More than 1.5 Million Yiddish Books from Across the World Through Rescue, Digitization, Translation, and Partnerships

(Amherst, MA — June 6, 2019) - For nearly four decades, the Yiddish Book Center has uniquely positioned itself at the crossroads between cultural center, library, and museum—pioneering a diverse range of groundbreaking initiatives that broaden understanding of and accessibility to Yiddish and modern Jewish literature and culture. Through the rescue, preservation, digitization, and redistribution of over 1.5 million Yiddish books from around the world, the Center celebrates and regenerates the literature and culture. The Center’s translation initiative and educational, public, and artistic programming broaden, challenge, and inform the traditional understanding of the literature the Center has rescued, from stories by acclaimed authors such as Sholem Aleichem, Chaim Grade, and Isaac Bashevis Singer to lesser known writers such as Blume Lempel, Rachmil Bryks, and Yenta Mash; from rare and unexpected finds—including original book illustrations by Marc Chagall and Diego Rivera—to Yiddish detective novels and artbooks; to works that shape our understanding of contemporary social issues in new and surprising ways.

“The over 1.5 million books we’ve recovered represent the Jewish people’s first sustained literary and cultural encounter with the modern world. They provide a window into the past thousand years of Jewish history, a precursor to modern Jewish writing in English, Hebrew and other languages, and a springboard for new creativity,” explains Aaron Lansky, founder and president of the Yiddish Book Center. “Through a range of bibliographic, educational, and cultural programs, we’re working to share these treasures with the wider world.”

“As we approach our 40th anniversary we’re seeing the impact of the Center’s work realized in so many exciting ways,” says Susan Bronson, the Yiddish Book Center’s executive director. “From our humble beginnings rescuing Yiddish books, our programs now include a translation initiative to train a new generation of Yiddish translators, educational and public programs with offerings for all ages, an ambitious international oral history project capturing hundreds of hours of first-hand stories, our own publishing venture, and more. Our work is broadening awareness of Yiddish and modern Jewish culture for new generations.”

The mission of the Yiddish Book Center to recover, celebrate, and regenerate Yiddish and modern Jewish literature and culture across generations and around the globe is shaping the contemporary landscape in new and interesting ways. At a time when renewed interest in Yiddish culture is opening the literature and language up to new audiences through theatrical productions such as the Yiddish *Fiddler on the Roof* and the Tony Award-winning play *Indecent*—based on a work by Yiddish writer Sholem Asch—, the Center’s work is central to fostering new and deeper levels of engagement and understanding through innovative initiatives and programs including:

- The 2012 launch of a translation fellowship that has successfully trained 60 literary translators to date and resulted in the publication of newly translated works through the Center’s own imprint, which was launched in early 2019. This initiative will bring new works to publication through the

Center's imprint, subvention to academic presses, and publishing contracts with a range of publishers.

- The critical, on-going rescue of books placed in peril—including the recent recovery of 4,000 books from Australia and 1,000 books from South Africa—ensures that these works can continue to be preserved and redistributed for future generations.
- The development of an award-winning website that provides free access to more than 12,000 Yiddish books through the Steven Spielberg Digital Yiddish Library, as well as free online access to archival recordings of lectures and interviews with Yiddish writers, and short stories and Yiddish books read aloud by native Yiddish speakers, to the continuing work developing the Universal Yiddish Library. The site also encompasses the Center's Wexler Oral History Project, which features a growing collection of around 1,000 in-depth interviews with a range of leading cultural figures, such as Leonard Nimoy, Ed Asner, Jackie Hoffman, Elliot Gould, to descendents of Yiddish writers.
- The development of wide-ranging educational programs, including the Great Jewish Books Summer Program for high school students, the seven-week Steiner Summer Yiddish Program for college students, the year-long Yiddish Book Center Fellowship Program for recent college graduates, immersive week-long workshops for twentysomethings, and fellowships and programs for translators and educators.
- The establishment of the world's first museum dedicated to Yiddish language and culture, which features permanent and visiting exhibits committed to illuminating cultural stories, artwork, and artifacts, as well as vibrant public programming—including film screenings, talks, and concerts, such as a recent collaboration with Carnegie Hall for its festival *Migrations: The Making of America* and the Center's own annual *Yidstock: The Festival of New Yiddish Music*.
- A growing and actively engaged alumni association comprised of more than 1,000 people around the world—including scholars, educators, translators, actors, curators, and writers—who have participated in educational programs at the Center over nearly 40 years and who have gone on to pursue careers related to Yiddish and modern Jewish culture.

The Yiddish Book Center was awarded the National Medal for Museums and Libraries, the nation's highest medal conferred on a museum or library for its pioneering work digitizing the literature and making it fully accessible.

The Yiddish Book Center's initiatives are wide-ranging and continue to increase the breadth, scope, and reach of the non-profit as it looks towards the next 40 years. The Center's weekly podcast, *The Shmooze*, offers new ways of engaging with Jewish thought-leaders; Yiddish literature, language, culture, and news; and the publication of *Pakn Treger*—the Center's English language magazine—, which features articles, profiles, and news related to Yiddish culture and spotlights key figures who helped shape Yiddish and Jewish cultural production.

About the Yiddish Book Center

The Yiddish Book Center is a nonprofit organization working to recover, celebrate, and regenerate Yiddish and modern Jewish literature and culture. It was founded in 1980 by its current president, Aaron Lansky, then a 24-year-old graduate student of Yiddish literature. In the course of his studies Lansky realized that

untold numbers of irreplaceable Yiddish books – the primary tangible legacy of 1,000 years of Jewish life in Eastern Europe – were being discarded by American-born Jews unable to read the language of their own Yiddish-speaking grandparents. Nearly forty years later, the organization has rescued more than a million volumes, established and strengthened Yiddish holdings at 700 university and research libraries around the world, and posted the full texts of 12,000 titles online, making Yiddish one of the most accessible literatures in the world. In 2014, the Yiddish Book Center was awarded a National Medal for Museums and Libraries, the nation's highest medal conferred on a museum or library, at a White House ceremony.

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