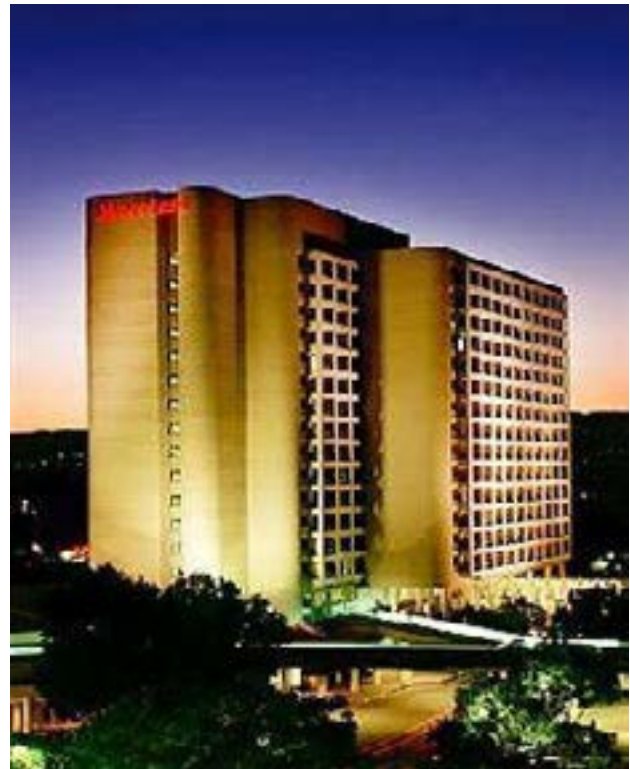




AJL ANNUAL CONFERENCE LOCATION: JUNE 2019
WARNER CENTER
MARRIOTT

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June 17 - 19, 2019

The Warner Center Marriott is located in the popular suburbs of the San Fernando Valley, in the city of Los Angeles. It is ideally situated near public transportation and shopping, with a multitude of dining options nearby. More importantly, Woodland Hills has a vibrant Jewish community waiting to meet with Judaica librarians from around the world.



Most of our conference will be held within the beautiful conference center inside the hotel, but we do have special optional tours planned offsite.

I will be sending you updates, along with Lisa Silverman, AJL's National Conference Chair, detailing the programs and special events we are planning for you. Please feel free to contact me with any requests or suggestions you may have.

Best wishes for a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Jackie Ben-Efraim, 2019 Local Conference Chair

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Visit the AJL Web site at <http://www.jewishlibraries.org>.

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From Gophers to Apps: Twenty-Five Years of Change on the Jewish Internet

BY DIANNE ROMM

The best indication of how much things have changed on the Internet is the fact that most people reading this article probably do not understand what the second word in the title means.

When I first started exploring the Internet in the early 1990s, what you saw on the screen was green lettering on a black background with a blinking cursor in the shape of a solid rectangle. Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) had not yet been invented, so there were no links to click on. There was no graphical user interface (GUI), so there were no icons to click on. Every command had to be typed into the computer, often using rather arcane terms.

So, what were those gophers? As I wrote in 1996 in the first edition of my book, *The Jewish Guide to the Internet*: “Gopher is a play on words. Developed at the University of Minnesota, whose mascot is a gopher, this Internet tool burrows through the system and provides the user with a menu of choices for information. In other words, the gopher acts as a “go-fer” to retrieve information.”

In the beginning there were four major Jewish gopher sites: *Jerusalem One* (later called *Virtual Jerusalem*), *Shamash*, the *Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, and *Chabad*. Under the guidance of Zvi Lando, Teddy Kollek, the mayor of Jerusalem, launched *Jerusalem One* on Yom Yerushalayim in 1993. *Shamash* was created by Avrum Goodblatt as part of New York State’s Education and Research Network (*NYSERNet*). *Virtual Jerusalem* has disappeared and *Shamash* has withered on the vine, but The [Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) and [Chabad](#) have transformed themselves into rich and extensive resources.

In the early days, displaying text in Hebrew was difficult and often required downloading and installing additional software to resolve the problem. Terms in the first edition of *The Jewish Guide to the Internet* such as newsgroups, telnet, and listservs are heard much less frequently today, so much so that my spell checker does not even recognize the last term. In 1991 the World Wide Web made its first appearance on computer screens outside research institutions. The first edition of the book has an illustration of a URL and a description of its components to familiarize readers with this new innovation.

With the introduction of HTML and the World Wide Web, the Internet boomed. In the second edition of the book, published in 1997, gophers and URLs co-exist, but this edition is almost twice as long as the first. By the third edition of the book in 2002, gophers had given way to URLs. While many Jewish groups had begun creating web sites, they were relatively uncommon. As an example, I created a web site for my synagogue. It won an award, not for its design but for its simple existence.

The relatively manageable number of Jewish web sites also prompted individuals to develop directories of them categorized into subjects. It was this period that saw the creation of Matthew Album’s A-Z collection that eventually became [Maven](#), Dov Winer’s [Jewishnet](#), Jacob Richman’s [collection of Jewish and Israeli sites](#), and Andrew Tannenbaum’s *Judaism and Jewish Resources* (defunct). Paralleling the rise of general directories such as that of Yahoo, Jewish groups also created collections of materials. Examples include iGuide, [HaReshima](#), Sabranet and NU? from the Jewish Agency, as well as Israeli based Hebrew language sites such as Israel Online, Nana, Tapuz and Walla.

As more people gained access to and became comfortable with using the Internet, the pace of change increased to the point that I began posting first updates and then the entire text of my book online. More than 25% of the original entries had disappeared and were replaced with new ones. Recently, I relaunched the site, which is available at <https://www.jewishinternetguide.com/>. Where I once would note if a site was searchable and whether you could listen to audio material on it, today such capabilities are taken for granted. The tidal wave of Jewish web sites made many individuals abandon the idea of trying to create directories for them. Today, the increase in other technological tools such as social networking sites and apps that Jewish groups create and use make the idea of trying to identify them and categorize them a seemingly impossible task.

In addition, our way of looking at information online has changed in many ways. First, organizations learned the bitter lesson that creating a web site is one thing, but keeping it current is far more challenging. When web sites were the only tool available, groups provided access to many

resources such as bibliographies, links to other relevant sites and archives of their publications on them. All of these resources require maintenance. In the wake of the rise of other tools such as Facebook and Twitter, many organizations decided to post static information about themselves on their web sites and information that might change, such as upcoming events, on their social networking sites. Therefore, in many cases, organizations removed resources such as bibliographies, links to other relevant sites and archives of their publications from their web sites to avoid 'link rot.' For librarians, this trend has resulted in the loss of access to material because social networking sites as a platform do not lend themselves to archiving collections of material. Facebook may be easier to set up than a traditional web site but given its organizing principle as time rather than subject, relying on it results in lack of access to rich resources such as archives that are difficult to house on such a platform.

The second change I noted earlier – the move away from categorized information. This change coincides with the demise of resources such as the Yahoo Directory and has resulted in far fewer directories and curated collections of links. Whereas in the 1990s, the idea of having a printed directory seemed quite reasonable, by the twenty-first century, such notions were abandoned along with printed telephone books.

At the same time, we are also witnessing a move away from text in favor of photos in what the *New York Times* has described as the 'post-text' era. It used to be a rule of thumb for those designing a web site that people would not scroll down the page, just as newspaper editors knew that major stories had to be located 'above the fold.' Today, what you often see on a web site is just one large picture with any text at all located at the bottom of the page. Again, the end result is less access to resources such as archives.

Another change is the homogenization of web sites. When creating web sites using HTML was the only option, individual sites were quirky. However, today, with the rise of tools such as Weebly, Wix, and Wordpress, the last of which powers 25% of all web sites, they have become more cookie cutter and predictable. Their content is as well. For example, sites such as that of the Egyptian synagogue [Ahava ve Ahva](#) in Brooklyn that features recordings of its liturgy for the holidays have given way to the mass-produced sites created by the Jewish Federation for its communities throughout North America.

An additional change is one I have noticed on Israeli web sites. Many Israeli sites that once had at least some information in English have abandoned the English. Do they think that their sites have no appeal to those who do not speak Hebrew? Is translating the text into English too much work for too little return? Do they believe that in the age of Google Translate providing an English version of any part of their web site is not necessary? It is a puzzling change and one that merits investigation because it has implications for how Israelis see their relationship with the wider Jewish world.

Finally, one of the most exciting developments in the world of Jewish resources is the move to digitize collections. Libraries and other organizations worldwide are not only providing information that they own a particular item, but are also giving audiences everywhere the opportunity to actually read the book, hear the recording or watch the video these groups own. Once again, we are at the point where these digitized Jewish collections are small enough to tempt individuals like me to try to collect and categorize them. As their number increases, this too may prove to be an overwhelming task. However, we should make the effort, because there are wonderful treasures lying in the most unexpected places. For example, who would imagine that the Illinois Institute of Technology houses a digitized [collection of interviews](#) with Holocaust survivors recorded in Europe in 1946?

As a step in this direction, I have created a website entitled Jewish Digital Collections (<http://www.jewishdigitalcollections.com/>) whose goal is to provide access to the vast array of digitized Jewish materials online. The site currently includes more than 350 collections divided into a variety of categories. It also contains links to the wonderful library guides that university librarians worldwide have created for their students in Judaic studies classes (<http://www.jewishdigitalcollections.com/jewish-studies-guides.html>).

The history of the Jewish Internet is an interesting topic worthy of attention. Its development tells us a great deal about how the Jewish community has reacted to the technological changes of the last 25 years.

[Editor's note: Diane Romm is the author of *The Jewish guide to the Internet*, Jason Aronson, Northvale, NJ, 3rd edition, 2002. See also <https://www.jewishinternetguide.com/about>]

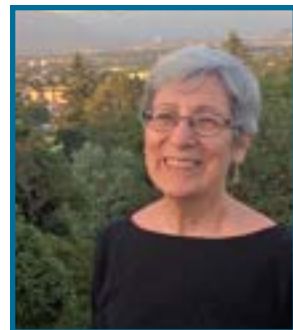
Chapter Chatter

AJL ONTARIO

AJLONTARIO.ORG

On behalf of AJL-Ontario, Anne Dublin gave a lecture entitled "The Bricha: The Jewish Underground Railroad" for Holocaust Education Week in Toronto on Nov. 5, 2018. The theme of HEW this year was "Illuminating the Shadows: Untold Stories of the Holocaust".

The Hebrew word "bricha" means "flight" or "escape". The Bricha was the illegal underground organization in post-World War II Europe that helped Jewish Holocaust survivors escape to DP camps in Germany, Austria, or Italy, and ultimately to Palestine. Anne spoke about the history of the Bricha, the often harrowing journeys of the refugees and their guides, and the final dismantling of the organization in 1948 when the State of Israel was established.



Scholarship Committee Report

SUBMITTED BY SARAH BARNARD, SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE MEMBER

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The AJL Newsletter (Irene Levin-Wixman z"l, founding editor) was published in print from 1979 to 2010 by the Association of Jewish Libraries to inform members about AJL activities and issues related to Judaica libraries. As of January 2011 it is split into two separate electronic publications - the AJL News and the AJL Reviews. Receipt of these publications is one of the benefits of membership. Please see the AJL website at <http://www.jewishlibraries.org> for membership rates.

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All links to online resources were checked for accuracy on November 28, 2018.

We cannot be responsible for broken links to those resources in the future.

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