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PRESERVING THE LCAAJ ARCHIVE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

The Language and Culture Archive of Ashkenazic Jewry Archive was donated to Columbia University Libraries in 1995 by Dr. Marvin Herzog, Atran Professor Emeritus of Yiddish Studies at Columbia University, in order to ensure its continued existence in the future. At that time the tapes were the only record of the interviews since no verbatim transcriptions had been made.

Approximately 5,700 hours of interviews had been recorded on 2,552 reels of tape produced in various countries between 1959 and 1972, at a variety of speeds under widely varying conditions. More than twenty different brands and sizes of tape stock were used, including both acetate- and polyester-backed tape. Acetate tape is a very impermanent medium, with an average functional life of 20 years, after which it begins to suffer edge curl, cracking and flaking, and binder decomposition, leading to loss of the recorded signal. Polyester tape is also impermanent, suffering from sticky shed and other failures, and tapes may stretch or break during playing or storage. With both tape stocks splice adhesives may leech to other portions of the tape, and many tape types are subject to print through. Once deterioration begins, it cannot be stopped or reversed. The only solution is careful re-recording to lose as little as possible of the sound quality.

In 1997 the Preservation Division of Columbia University Libraries initiated a project to re-recording all of the tapes; the project will finally reach completion in June of 2005. This major preservation project was assisted by funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the New York State Program for the Conservation and Preservation of Library Research Materials, and smaller grants from five private foundations. The work adhered to internationally recognized preservation practices and technical standards. The sound was transferred through analog re-recording onto high-quality, low noise, two-track 1.5 mil polyester tape at 15 inches per second to preserve maximum audio fidelity. In order to keep the archival copies as true to the original recordings as possible, no manipulation of the original signal such as noise reduction, filtering or other signal-processing techniques was undertaken. The project simultaneously created digital copies in Wav format stored on CD-Rs. The original tapes, new preservation master tapes, and CDs are all tracked through a database that indicates when each was recorded, where it is housed, and other relevant information.

The original tapes and the new preservation master tapes have been transferred to Columbia's off-site facility, the Research Collections and Preservation Consortium, where materials are kept secure in a cool, dry environment designed to promote maximum longevity. The CD copies are available to researchers at listening facilities provided in Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscripts Library. Researchers may also purchase copies of CDs. For more details see the online site at Columbia, which includes a description of the project to preserve the LCAAJ

Archive as well as instructions for access to the recordings at Columbia:
<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/projects/digital/lcaaj/index.html>

CONCERNS FOR SOUND PRESERVATION

It is recognized internationally that historic audio recordings are endangered. Simply put, historic sound recordings will not survive without intervention to assure their preservation. All of the analog media used to hold sound suffer from deterioration that is rapid in comparison to paper. Equally important, a substantial portion of the world's heritage of unique audio recordings is hidden from researchers. Intellectual control, whether in manual or electronic form, is often lacking. Even where it exists, intellectual control may still be seriously inadequate due to the difficulty of describing the content of media that have no convenient title page and cannot easily be played. There is a similar and equally debilitating lack of information on the property rights that govern who may copy or distribute, or even have access to, audio materials.

The costs of preserving historical audio materials are high, as are the costs of providing intellectual control and physical or online access. Analog recording formats are all obsolete or obsolescent, and the same is true of the equipment needed to play them. Re-recording is, therefore, a necessity, but providing it is not simple. Few institutions own equipment capable of playing their audio collections, let alone capable of high-quality re-recording, and a limited number of technical experts is skilled in this field. Because many manufacturers have ceased making high-quality analog tape for preservation re-recording, future projects to preserve sound will be purely digital. Current best practice for preservation quality recommends creation of Wav files recorded at least at 96 kHz, 24 bits, with no sound manipulation in the master copy, accompanied by metadata that documents when and how the recording was made. Unlike high-quality analog recordings that remain stable for decades if stored properly, digital recordings require regular back-up procedures and periodic migration to newer formats or they will become inaccessible.

As scholars, librarians, and archivists plan for enhanced uses of important audio resources like LCAAJ, it is imperative that they also develop plans for the long-term preservation of the sound. These irreplaceable assets must remain available for future generations.

THE ROLE AND FUTURE OF EYDES

EYDES plays an important role in providing access to the LCAAJ archive by making it easy for people to discover the existence of the materials and easy for them to hear the sound on the Internet, so that it is no longer necessary for interested parties to travel to Columbia in order to work with the interviews. Online presentation and specially tailored educational, searching, and other features significantly enhance the value of the original sound recordings for scholars and for members of the general public who want to learn more about Yiddish and European Jewish culture. By incorporating these features EYDES creates a new research and teaching tool wrapped around the interviews and any other sound recordings that are added over time. As such, issues of sustainability and preservation for the EYDES site must be addressed so that it

remains available as long as it is of use to students and scholars.

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