



Claims Conference ועידת התביעות
The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany

International Shoah Archivists Working Forum

Participant Information

General Information

Name and address of institution/archive:

YIVO Archives
YIVO Institute for Jewish Research
15 West 16th Street
New York, NY 10011

Internet address of web site, if applicable:

www.yivo.org

Brief description of archival collecting scope in regard to the Holocaust (please indicate any focus on specific geographic areas, topics, or time periods):

The YIVO Institute has collected original documentation on the Holocaust since the period of World War II. Descriptions of individual collections in the YIVO Archive pertaining to the Holocaust or to the destroyed civilization which existed prior to the Holocaust, can be found in the published Guide to the YIVO Archives, compiled and edited by Fruma Mohrer and Marek Web, published in 1998 by M.E. Sharpe.

Documentation on the Holocaust includes collections of Eyewitness Accounts of the Holocaust Period [several series]; original records of the Lodz Ghetto, the Warsaw Ghetto, the Vilna Ghetto, and documents from many other localities in Poland, Germany, Czechoslovakia, the Baltic States, France, Belgium, Portugal, and other countries. There are also records of various Nazi agencies. The records of Displaced Persons Camps in Germany, Austria and Italy as well as photographs from the DP camps, cover the immediate postwar period. Records of Immigration organizations document the flow of immigration from Europe to the Americas and elsewhere from the period of Nazi persecution to the period after the war.

Documents relating to the 1000 year civilization destroyed during the Holocaust are dispersed throughout the YIVO Archives, especially in the Vilna Archive, which is the salvaged portion of the original YIVO Archives discovered in Germany after the war by the American army and returned to YIVO in 1947. The Vilna Archives contains over 50 separate collections reflecting the everyday life of Jews in prewar Europe and includes documentation on the political, economic, religious, cultural, intellectual and organized life of Jews.

The estimated 22,000,000 documents, photographs, sound recordings, films, manuscripts, in the YIVO Archives, cover four main fields of research:

Yiddish language, literature and culture.

European history with focus on East European history.

The Holocaust and its aftermath

Jewish life in the United States with emphasis on the migration period.

While one of these four fields, The Holocaust and its Aftermath, directly pertains to the period of the war, and the documents in this category were generated primarily on European soil, the other categories as well, are relevant in this description, as they contain large groups of documents pertaining to the history and everyday life and culture of the destroyed communities as well as to the efforts of Jewish organizations to rescue refugees fleeing from Nazi persecution.

The collections in the YIVO Archives pertaining to the American Jewish experience are full of documents pertaining to the reaction to the Holocaust, as in the poems of H. Leivick or in the manuscripts and correspondence of intellectuals, historians, playwrights, and political and communal activists. Other documentation includes records of Jewish political organizations such as the Board of Deputies of British Jews or the American Jewish Committee, which monitored closely and reported on the situation of Jews worldwide, including during the period of the Holocaust. Photographic Collections, Sound recordings, art works and artifacts, cover both the culture of Jews in the prewar period as well as the Holocaust period, its aftermath and events and phenomena of commemoration.

While the geographic scope covered by the YIVO Archives is wide ranging, the richest group of materials pertaining to Poland, Nazi Germany, and France.

A total of not less than 350 to 400 linear feet of original handwritten, typed or printed documents pertain directly to the Holocaust and consist of materials generated on European soil. This figure does not include large groups of microfilms, such as the 1000 microfilm reels in the YIVO Migration Archive [a large proportion of which pertains to the period immediately preceding the war, the war itself and the immediate post war period and which includes survivor records]. The figure also does not include documents dispersed throughout the entire YIVO Archives which cannot be quantified easily because they are found in various mixed subject collections. The figure excludes the special collections housed in the YIVO Archives such as the photo collections, the sound records, the art works and artifacts and also does not include the archival documentation on Jewish life and culture before the war.

Documentation on Jewish life and culture before the war cannot be easily quantified because it is found almost everywhere in the collections of the YIVO Archives. It can be estimated that dispersed through the YIVO Archives' 10,000 linear feet of documents, are numerous documents pertaining to the subject of Jewish culture before the war. The proportion of these documents to the whole Archive can be roughly estimated at about 50%.

Microfilming and Digitization

Total estimated number of pages of Holocaust-relevant archival records (for purposes of estimating, please assume that 1 meter=10,000 pages and 1 foot=3,000 pages):

Estimated number of pages of original records:

materials directly pertaining to Holocaust: about 1,200,000 [not counting microfilm collections or special collections]

Documents pertaining to the destroyed Jewish life and culture: about 9,000,000 documents [rough estimated]. This estimated does not include the special collections.

Estimated number of pages of these original records that have been microfilmed:

about 70%, of which the bulk were filmed in the 1950s and are in poor condition

Estimated number of pages of these original records that have been digitized:

The photographic collection People of a Thousand Towns contains 15,000 photographs of prewar Eastern Europe, and is now available on the Internet free of charge to the public.

Estimated number of pages of records microfilmed and/or duplicated from elsewhere:

Although YIVO does not, as a matter of policy, collect collections from elsewhere, concentrating instead on original materials, a portion of its holdings exist primarily in microfilm format. These include organizational case files from Lisbon [both HIAS and JDC] as well as certain organizational records such as the Records of the National Refugee Service. The bulk of these types of microfilm reels are from the YIVO Migration Archive which has a total of about

1000 reels. A substantial portion of these 1000 reels pertain either to the period immediately preceding the Holocaust or to the period of the war and its aftermath.

Estimated number of pages of these records microfilmed :

About 700,000 frames or microfilmed pages

Estimated number of pages of these records microfilmed and/or duplicated from elsewhere that have been digitized:

Conservation of Individual Items of Particular Significance

If there are specific original archival materials in your collection that are of major historical significance and of exceptional intrinsic value that are in urgent need of conservation, please list them:

The records in YIVO's ghetto collections are fragile and require preservation and conservation.

If you know of specific original archival materials in collections other than your own that are of major historical significance and of exceptional intrinsic value that are in urgent need of conservation, please list them:

Acquisitions

If your archive is actively acquiring Holocaust-relevant archival records, please briefly describe your acquisitions program, including an estimate of the average number of pages acquired annually and the sources for such acquisitions (private donors, other repositories, etc.):

YIVO receives memoirs, eyewitness accounts, personal papers and artifacts from donors on a regular basis. These new accessions are reported in the YIVO newsletter twice a year.

If your archive has an exchange program with other archives, please briefly describe it:

Does a list of your institution's microfilming and other acquisitions projects already completed and/or currently in progress exist? If so, in what form is it and how can it be accessed?

Lists of institutional microfilms are currently available in-house only. A retrospective conversion of YIVO Archives microfilm collections is planned in the future.

Cataloging

Briefly describe your current cataloging practices:

Archival collections are arranged and described according to the principles of provenance. Collections of mixed provenance are also described in archival finding aids. A small number of YIVO finding aids are online in EAD format. Two collections which pertain to the Holocaust, the Shanghai Collection and the Wolf-Mowshowitch papers are being posted to the Internet at present.

Estimated proportion of Holocaust-related collections in your archive that are already adequately cataloged and in what language(s):

The bulk of YIVO's Holocaust collections, generated on European soil, were identified. The format of many of the catalogs are obsolete, or in Yiddish. A retrospective conversion project, to update the YIVO Archives catalogs is an important objective of the YIVO Archives.

Has your archive developed a controlled vocabulary for the cataloging of its collections? If so, please describe briefly. If not, please explain:

The YIVO Archives collections are posted into RLIN, the Research Libraries Information Network, which subscribes to national authority standards for cataloging and indexing. The Cornell University History Survey, which surveyed in the YIVO collections in 1989, migrated descriptions of the YIVO Archives collections into RLIN and indexed the collections and assigned Library of Congress as well as local subject headings. The YIVO Archives collections are also described, on the collection level only, in a database called MINARET which conforms to marc format. This database is being migrated to Aleph, an oracle based database base software system. YIVO Archives follows marc format and uses marc fields for collection level descriptions. During the preparation of the Guide to the YIVO Archives, a controlled vocabulary was established in the Index to the Guide.

Are the cataloging records accessible in an electronic format? If so, are they accessible to the public (if the electronic catalog is available on the Internet, please provide the Internet address)?

Collection level records are available in electronic format in Minaret and will also be available in 2004 online via the Center for Jewish History OPAC, Online Public Access Catalog. Finding aids will be posted on the Center Finding Aids Library. Photographic records at YIVO have electronic catalog records for a large proportion of the Photo Archives which is separated physically from the paper records.

Is there more detailed information such as finding aids, survey notes, or other descriptive tools available for the collections in your archive? If so, please describe (if available on the Internet, please provide the Internet address; if not available on the Internet, please attach an example). Is such more detailed information available to the public?

YIVO Archives has finding aids, or at least folder listings for a large proportion of its collections, although many of the finding aids are 'legacy' or premodern in format and require retrospective conversion in order provide wider accessibility to the YIVO Archives.

Accessibility

Briefly describe your current policies regarding access to your collections.

YIVO Archives collections are open to qualified researchers by appointment with an archivist. Certain collections were donated with restrictions. These are primarily collections containing private case files which were generated in a relationship of confidentiality between the social service agency and the client.

Does your archive duplicate archival collections for other repositories? If so, please explain under what circumstances:

The YIVO Archives provides upon request duplicates of collections for other institutions, on condition that these reproductions be open to the public and serve the public interest and on condition that these surrogate collections will not be further reproduced for sale, commercial or otherwise, except for small groups of photocopies. As a matter of general policy, the YIVO Archives provides microfilm copies of entire collections, to institutions only and not to individuals. Portions of collections, such as individual reels, are made available to individuals via YIVO reproduction services.