

Gala Yiddish Celebration Scheduled For June 9



Sharon Kleinbaum and Aaron Lansky pause while unloading rescued Yiddish books at the National Yiddish Book Center's Amherst headquarters. (Photo by Michael Zide.)

The National Yiddish Book Center will hold a gala celebration of Yiddish culture on Sunday June 9, from 1 - 5 P.M. in its library annex, 100 Lyman Street, Holyoke, Massachusetts. The event will commemorate the fifth anniversary of the Yiddish Book Center, a non-profit organization which has rescued 350,000 discarded Yiddish books and sparked a worldwide resurgence of Yiddish culture.

The National Yiddish Book Center was founded in June 1980 by a handful of young graduate students and scholars. "It was an idea whose time had come," said Joseph Marcus, President of the Center's Board of Directors. At that time most Yiddish books had been out of print for 50 years or more, and tens of thousands of volumes had been abandoned or destroyed. When the Center issued an urgent appeal for unwanted Yiddish books the response was enthusiastic. "Volunteers organized campaigns in their own communities and sent books from as far away as Nome, Alaska and Beverly Hills, California," said Sharon Kleinbaum, the Center's 25-year-old Assistant Director. "More than 1,000 additional volumes continue to arrive each week at our Amherst headquarters!"

The Yiddish Book Center's Holyoke "Annex," site of the June 9 festivities, is located in a renovated mill building and houses the largest collection of Yiddish books ever assembled. According to Aaron Lansky, the Center's 29-year-old executive director, the Massachusetts organization is the only comprehensive source of Yiddish books anywhere in the world. The Center produces regular catalogues of used and out-of-print Yiddish books. Volumes have been distributed to students, scholars and university libraries in 20 countries on five continents.

As recently as 1939, Yiddish was the spoken language of more than 11 million Jews worldwide. Almost half of these Yiddish speakers were murdered in the Nazi Holocaust. Later, on August 12, 1952, Soviet leader Josef Stalin ordered all the major Yiddish writers of the Soviet Union rounded up and executed on a single night. In the United States and Canada, pressures of assimilation quickly worked to separate American-born Jews from the culture of

their parents and grandparents.

Despite these catastrophes, a new generation of young people has been turning to Yiddish in unprecedented numbers in recent years. Courses in Yiddish language and literature are now offered at more than 60 colleges and universities throughout the United States and Canada. In just five years the National Yiddish Book Center has helped fuel this revival, providing urgently needed texts and sponsoring a wide range of cultural and educational programs. In addition to its catalogues of Yiddish books, the Center offers available titles in English translation, sponsors regular classes in Yiddish language and culture, operates a speakers bureau, and presents an annual Summer Program in Yiddish Culture.

"We've come a long way in five years," says Lansky, "but there's still so much to be done. Forty years after the Holocaust we're trying to reclaim a culture that was stolen from us and rework it into the fabric of our daily lives." Lan-

sky says that the event on June 9th will celebrate both the success of the Yiddish Book Center and the current revival of Yiddish culture. The festivities, which are free and open to the public, will include exhibits, multi-media presentations, singing, speakers, refreshments and dancing to a live klezmer band. Doors will open at 1 P.M., with a formal program scheduled for 2:30. For directions and further information contact the Yiddish Book Center at 413/253-9201.

JERSEY CITY, N.J. (WNS) — A 15-foot bronze monument, depicting an American soldier carrying a death camp survivor to freedom, done by Nathan Rapaport, has been moved from its Peekskill, N.Y. foundry to its final location at Liberty State Park in Jersey City. The sculpture was lowered into place on a granite pedestal beyond the Plaza of Flags area of the park. Gov. Thomas Kean originated the idea that it be placed in the park about 1,000 feet from the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. Official dedication ceremonies will be held May 30.

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