

## **Maine Jewish Museum Expands Heritage with Longstanding Historical and Genealogical Resource**

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The Maine Jewish Museum has adopted Documenting Maine Jewry, bringing together the premier organizations devoted to preserving and celebrating the state's rich Jewish history.

Dawn LaRochelle, the museum's executive director, says she is "humbled and honored to be entrusted with this treasure trove of Maine Jewish history, which we will ensure remains vibrant and vital for generations to come."

Documenting Maine Jewry curates the largest repository of information about Jewish individuals, families, businesses, institutions, and communal organizations, past and present, with ties to the Pine Tree State. Its website ([www.mainejews.org](http://www.mainejews.org)) provides registered users with access to more than 40,000 biographical records, along with over 10,000 photographs, newsletters, and other documents. Members of the public can also access over 7,800 headstone images, a nearly comprehensive collection that encompasses all of Maine's Jewish cemeteries.

"The data on MaineJews.org is invaluable for genealogists, historians, and others who care about the past, present, and future of Jewish life in Maine," according to Rabbi Dr. David Freidenreich, the Colby College

professor who has served as Documenting Maine Jewry's coordinator for the past six months and who will become the museum's historian-in-residence. "Very few states boast a resource of this nature. I'm confident that the Maine Jewish Museum will steward it well for the benefit of future generations."

The Maine Jewish Museum will redesign and modernize the MaineJews.org website to safeguard its large and growing collection while providing a smooth user experience. Museum staff, in collaboration with students and volunteers, will collect oral histories and personal narratives that capture the rich variety of Jewish life in Maine. Staff will also craft museum exhibitions and digital stories that place individual and local experiences within their broader historical contexts.

The Maine Jewish Museum is in the early stages of refreshing its historic exhibitions. "We want to focus on the 'story' in 'history,'" explains LaRochelle. "Our museum has a unique responsibility to tell stories that define and humanize members of Maine Jewish communities, past and present. Documenting Maine Jewry will help us make these stories come alive."

Documenting Maine Jewry was founded by Dr. Harris Gleckman, whose original goal was to compile information regarding Jewish cemeteries in the Portland area. Over the past 20 years, his efforts expanded to encompass the entire state and many facets of Jewish life: religious, cultural, communal, occupational, and civic. Gleckman designed

MaineJews.org as a collaborative history, one to which every registered user can contribute. Popular features include the headstone images, which provide opportunities for virtual cemetery visits, and “mystery photos,” unlabeled images of people whom users help to identify.

Bob Hirshon, President of the Board of the Maine Jewish Museum, has announced that a fundraising campaign to honor Harris Gleckman for his visionary and dedicated leadership is underway. Spearheaded by Harris’ wife, Riva Krut, the campaign’s goal is to secure gifts and three-year pledges totaling \$300,000 to support the Maine Jewish Museum’s efforts to integrate Documenting Maine Jewry’s programming and mission: celebrating the people and stories that connect us to one another and to the place we call home. Donations can be made at [mainejewishmuseum.org/donate/](https://mainejewishmuseum.org/donate/).