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[Dr. Arthur Kiron](#)

Schottenstein-Jesselson Curator of [Judaica](#)

University of Pennsylvania Library

and

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[The American Genizah Project](#)

From the University of Pennsylvania Website:

*Penn Judaica is leading a consortium of public institutions and private collectors to locate, catalog, transcribe, and digitize some of the most important, founding documents of American Jewish history. This **American Genizah Project** began work in the summer of 2006 with a pilot project focusing on the correspondence of Isaac Leeser (1806-1868), considered the most important mid-19th century American Jewish minister, editor, translator and communal leader. Relying on the successful proof-of-concept employed in the Penn-Cambridge Genizah digitization project, the American Genizah undertaking will similarly seek to provide on-line access to physically dispersed yet intellectually related materials. The short-term goal of the project is to produce a standards-based electronic edition of the extant correspondence of Leeser. Our long-term hope is that this project will serve as a model for collective efforts to digitize related archival collections around the U.S. and internationally.*

Dr. Kiron told the audience that he had written his Doctoral Thesis about Sabato Morais, the Chazzan at Mikveh Israel Synagogue starting in 1851. His first public speaking engagement was at Mikveh Israel Synagogue in 1992 to the Jewish Genealogical Society of Philadelphia at the encouragement of then JGSP President, Jon Stein.

Sabato Morais replaced Isaac Leeser as the Chazzan at Mikveh Israel. Isaac Leeser, born in Westphalia, Prussia, was a very important leader in the Jewish community of

Philadelphia and the United States. See

<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=142&letter=L> for more on Leiser.

Leiser founded the *Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, the first monthly periodical of Jewish interest. The *Occident* was published from 1843 through 1868 and was distributed all over the world. Some letters and papers of Isaac Leiser were held at Dropsie College and others spread out at other repositories and private collections. The Dropsie College collection is now part of the University of Pennsylvania Center for Advanced Judaic Studies Library.

"Genizah" is a Persian word for the place in a Synagogue to store documents of value that are not used anymore. This place is not an Archive. The Leiser documents and other documents of interest to scholars of American Jewish history are dispersed both physically and ownership. The objective of the American Genizah Project is to locate these physically dispersed documents, scan them, create a catalog, and provide access and full-text searching online.

The model for this project is the Leiser papers and the *Occident and American Jewish Advocate* being scanned at the University of Pennsylvania. Handwritten documents are being transcribed. A website for the Leiser materials is under development and is expected to be online in Spring 2008. Dr. Kiron demonstrated some of the websites capabilities. Especially interesting to Jewish Genealogists will be fully searchable access to the full run of the *Occident and American Jewish Advocate*.

Dr. Kiron talked briefly about the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies Library -- a reference collection and NOT an Archive. The Center for Advanced Judaic Studies Library has an online finding aid. The first step in accessing materials at the Library is to find materials of interest in their catalog. Once found, you can only use the material by appointment. For more information, see the [Library website](#).