

## DE LA COMUNIDAD HEBREA DE CUBA

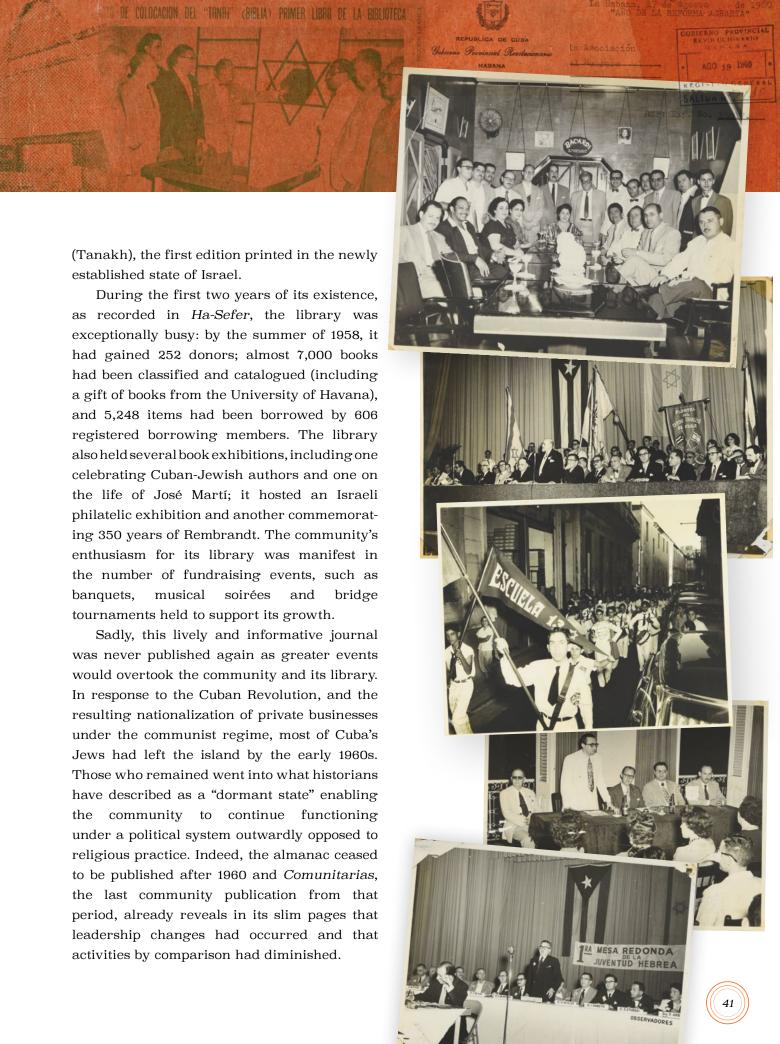
## LA BIBLIOTECA DE COMUNIDAD **HEBREA DE CUBA ONLINE**

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Thanks to its National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant, UF's Price Library of Judaica has been working collaboratively to help identify, preserve and provide access to Jewish cultural heritage materials in Latin America and the Caribbean.

ne such project, part of the George A. Smathers Libraries' Celebrating Cuba! initiative, has enabled the digitization of rare publications from the historic synagogue library in Havana, Cuba. The synagogue library (la Biblioteca) was established in 1955 as part of a new community center, known as la Casa de la Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba. This large building complex, designed by Cuban architect Aquiles Capablanca, was built to meet the needs of a growing and thriving Jewish population (estimated at between 10,000 to 15,000 people) and, in addition to offering religious services, it was also meant to serve as a gathering space for inter-communal events and cross-cultural exchanges.

According to a report in the library's own journal Ha-Sefer (the book), la Biblioteca's opening ceremony took place on October 4, 1955, with about 400 community members in attendance. The inauguration featured speeches by two distinguished guests, Dr. Lilia Castro de Morales, Director of the National Library of Cuba, and Dr. Guillermo Francovich, UNESCO's Director General for the Western Hemisphere, both of whom promised wider community cooperation with the library. Abraham Marcus Matterin, an author, community leader, and the new library Director, delivered the main speech, explaining the reasoning behind the library's establishment, how it promised to support the community's intellectual and cultural growth, and how it would serve the educational needs of their youth. The inauguration ended with the ceremonial placing of the first book in the library, a Hebrew Bible



## Publicaciones Hebreas Publicaciones Hebreas Publicaciones Hebreas Publicaciones Hebreas Publicaciones Hebreas Publicaciones Hebreas Publicaciones Hebreas

Nevertheless, la Biblioteca continued to be managed by Matterin until his death in 1983. Although it did not expand in the way its founders had envisioned—in 1958, Isaac Gurwitz, General Secretary of the Board of Trustees, had declared in *Ha-Sefer*: "[the library] must grow and develop continuously, enlarging and surpassing itself"—its existing contents continued to serve as a great resource for the local population. Today, Adela Dworin, the community president, champions the library's historic importance and campaigns tirelessly for its upkeep.

In 2018, I visited Cuba together with Dean Judith Russell and Professor Lillian Guerra to initiate a digitization partnership with the synagogue. Adela Dworin shared the library's inventory of books and our team produced a priority scanning list. A UF graduate student, Lauren Krebs, was hired to scan on site between June and August; Krebs was followed by another graduate student, Katie Coldiron who completed the project from October to December. The scanned materials have since been uploaded to our new Cuban Judaica website (https://ufdc.ufl.edu/CUBANJUDAICA).

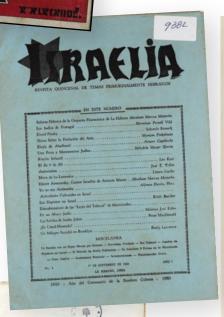
The website contains the library's rarer pieces, particularly Cuban-Jewish imprints and those pertaining to the community's history, such as the abovementioned library journal *Ha-Sefer* and the community's almanac, *Havaner Lebn (Vida Habanera* or Havana Life). Historic photographs were also scanned, some of which show the various events —exhibitions and bridge tournaments—that had taken place in la Biblioteca during its heyday. Nine issues of the short-lived,

Havana-based, Spanish-language journal Israelia, edited by Matterin, are also available. The complete run of the journal was only previously available in hardcopy at la Biblioteca. Other rare books, now freely available to researchers online, include works by Cuban Jewish authors, most notably the great Yiddish poet, Eliezer Aronowski. Arguably, one of the most important pieces published in Havana, and now in the new online collection, is Aronowski's Yiddish historical work, In kontsentratsye-lager Bukhenvald, Havana, 1939, which was the first account of the notorious Buchenwald concentration camp ever published.

All of the writings produced by members of the vibrant Jewish cultural group la Agrupacion Cultural Hebreo-Cubana are included in the Cuban Judaica collection. Established in February 1953, la Agrupacion aimed to promote greater community synthesis through the organization cultural events, such as public talks, concerts, and film screenings, and through an active publishing program. As stated in the group's 14-page list of regulations, they also created the Comisión de Bibliotecas (libraries commission) to assemble organize Jewish libraries in Cuba. The group founders were among Cuba's leading Jewish intellectuals, and many of them were actively involved in creating la Casa de la Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba and its Biblioteca. Their documents, largely pertaining to la Agrupacion's operational activities, are likewise now available online; these records include the official termination decree issued to the group in 1960 by the government's department of associations.



The digital collection of these important publications and documents will enable scholars around the world to gain access to little-seen research materials and to gain further insights into a rich and diverse Cuban-Jewish history and culture.



La Casa de la Comunidad Hebrea

N el rincón más bello del aristo crático "faubourg" del Vedado en La Habana, frente a la am plia cinta asfáltica de la modernizada calle Línea (Ave. General Batista) por la que cruzan raudos millares de autos, éstos aminoran su velocidad para admiràr, cabe el parquecito Montoro, en la esquina de 13 e I, las hermosas y atractivas líneas del Palacio Social y Templo de la Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba, obra maestra del laureado Profesor de la Universidad de La Haba-na, Arquitecto Aquiles Capablanca, levantada por el tesón, entusiasmo y sacrificio de un grupo de hombres: Her

GRAFICA



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ANTIGUIO 28014 El objeto d fines de esta Asociación son los si-guientes:

moias, charlas, conciertos, veladas cine cosiciones; así como cursillos de divel-edición de folletos, libros y publicacio estimular la fundación de Bibliotecas.--

CAPITULO II

DR LOS ASOCIADOS ATTUMO 4101- Cualquier persona, de anbos sexos, de bueca conducta, unanto de la superación cultural, puede ser elegible para so clo.

## Biblioteca Su

man Heisler, Isaac Gurwitz, Julio Carity y otros más, merecedores todos de la tarja de bronce que perpetúe sus nombres, aunque ¡qué monumento más merecido que el mármol, la cerámica, la piedra, el cristal, el bronce, que en profusión y gusto exquisito, ennoblecen la airosa y funcional estructura!

Y junto al gigan esco salón de actividades societarias, el severo e imponente recinto sinagogal, el ondulante saion de los espejos y el amplio salón de conferencias y exposiciones, hállase la agradable y acogedora sala de la Biblioteca, ya pequeña para sus cerca de 7,000 volúmenes, que aumentan continuamente — frenados por rigurosa selección— para servir de alimento espi-ritual, cultural y nacional (su lema: "especializada en temas hebraicos en español") a más de 600 jóvenes hebreocubanos, que la visitan tarde y noche, además de numerosos niños y adultos, intelectuales cubanos e israelitas, que también son visitantes cotidianos.

(En la foto de arriba, la gallarda silueta de nuestra Casa Social y Templo; en la de abajo, vista parcial de la Bi-blioteca y, en primer plano, trabajando, 'a activa Secretaria Técnica, Sra. Ana

HASEFER (EL LIBRO) . 1

