Rabbi Peter H. Schweitzer

THE MAKING OF A COLLECTION

In the fall of 2005, Rabbi Peter H. Schweitzer, leader of The City Congregation for Humanistic Judaism in New York City, donated one of the most important private collections of Jewish Americana to the Museum. He amassed his collection of an estimated ten thousand artifacts during more than twenty-five years of collecting.

The Peter H. Schweitzer Collection of Jewish Americana contains objects of material culture that depict the everyday lives and experiences of Jews in America, both in their secular lives and in their religious practice. The Museum is preserving these objects and artifacts for future generations, as well as allowing scholars and the public to have wider access to them for the first time. Because the collection's artifacts reveal everyday relationships and aspects of popular culture, they are highly evocative for both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences. In the essay that follows, Rabbi Schweitzer tells the story of his years as a collector.

One item, alone and solitary, is an oddity. Find another like it and you already have a collection, or at least a collection in the making. When I owned only one neon clock advertising kosher sausage, it was a fun conversation piece. But then I found a second . . . and a third . . . and eventually I lost count. Now *that's* a collection!

Everything is collectible: ideas, objects, memories, even articles about collectors and their collections. I have a folder of these, too. There are casual collectors and compulsive collectors and all sorts in between. I have been at both extremes. As my collecting experiences accumulated and my knowledge grew, my interests evolved and led me down new roads of discovery. There was never a clear end in sight. I wondered how the story would come out, but the ending seemed way off in some distant future.

Age was not creeping up on me, so I was in no rush to resolve the question. I just kept on collecting and collecting and collecting—and becoming more and more inundated. Finally, some twenty-five years after I set out on this journey, I could no longer deny the truth: the collection had become too big for me to manage alone. The very thing I feared—that it would languish in boxes in storage—was already happening. It was time to make plans for the ongoing preservation of the material I had been amassing. But now I'm getting ahead of my story.

STARTING OUT

Some collections begin intentionally—as, for example, with the gift of an empty stamp album and one's first bag of canceled stamps. Some collections are hand-me-downs, like the already-filled stamp album that a parent gives to a child. But most collections probably begin accidentally. In fact, collections often begin so innocently—with one thimble, one quilt, or just one classic car—that people do not realize until it is too late that they have crossed into the realm of the collector. Often against their will, they become hooked and find themselves knee-deep in their hobby.

In the beginning, one hardly knows the extent of the expanse that lies ahead, the virtual infinity of possibilities for the burgeoning collection. Is a "find" something that is one-of-a-kind, or one-of-a-hundred, or one-of-a-thousand? All new items seem precious and rare. Later, the collector might advance to better and pricier objects and look back on those earliest purchases as pleasant keepsakes, mere "kid stuff" compared to the serious acquisitions that followed.

Collectors learn to set limits lest they lose their bearings. They also regret painfully having passed up opportunities—items that literally passed through their hands but seemed too expensive or just did not quite catch their fancy. I still regret having passed on that model El Al airplane that I spotted one day in the flea market. I kick myself even more for not having bid on a signed copy of Marilyn Monroe's certificate of conversion to Judaism, even though it was well out of my price range at the time. If only I'd had the knowledge then that I have now.

CHILDHOOD BEGINNINGS

My childhood collections were typical and unexceptional: baseball cards, comic books, pennants, swizzle sticks, and restaurant spoons and ashtrays (often "acquired" with my mother's assistance: we would drape a napkin over the intended prey). I also got a start on a brief stamp collection when I received a partially filled album from a great-uncle. These items, practically all free, were all I could afford at the time, but the groundwork was laid for my future collecting when I observed my parents' eclectic interest in decorating, which melded early Americana (including a spinning wheel in our front hall and a Shaker settee in the living room) with contemporary Danish items, a handful of Oriental carpets, and folk art of all nationalities. It was only a matter of time before I would graduate to bigger and better items.

In 1963, on one fateful day in November, my mother and I had planned to go to the local antique show after school. That was the day, of course, on which President John Kennedy was assassinated, and we stayed home instead, glued to the television like everyone else. I was just eleven years old, and the fact that history was unfolding in front of me did not register. I recognized that the adults around me were grief-stricken, but I was not ready to absorb this great tragedy. I am somewhat embarrassed to recall that I was more disappointed that we were not going to the antique show than I was sad that the president had been killed.

We went to antique shows regularly at the old Madison Square Garden or at the Westchester County Center in White Plains, New York, which was closer to home. At one of those shows I purchased my first antiques: a handful of old buttons from a railroad conductor's uniform, a pair of old wire-rimmed eyeglasses with its case, and an assortment of souvenir tobacco ribbons, all miscellaneous oddities that caught the fancy of a young boy. I held on to these items for years. Even after I left home, I knew I could count on finding them safely packed away in a box in the attic when I returned for a visit, and they continued to charm me.

STUDENT DAYS

College is a time for all sorts of growth, academic and emotional. We get to take courses in subjects we had never heard of before and to set out on a path that we hope will lead to a meaningful career. We develop brand-new, often intense friendships that sustain us in the years to come. As a bonus, we start to build a mature personal library.

This was a sheer delight for me. Besides collecting the required texts, which were often primary sources, I acquired books at wonderful used-book sales and secondhand bookstores, where one could really have a field day. My biggest fear was that the makeshift shelves I'd constructed might topple over on me one night. Years later, when I could afford real bookshelves, I also had a brief stint in publishing and had access to many free books. Today, my appetite for books remains unchecked, but my searching grounds have changed. Now I hunt on the Internet for affordable, used copies that are just as good as new.

In college I was not yet interested enough or flush enough to acquire antiques. The one exception was an old barbershop chair with a neat pneumatic lift that I owned briefly and left behind in an off-campus apartment when I graduated. In the same spirit, years later I bought an old city traffic light, stand and all, which was also left behind during a

move. I suppose these items appealed to the free-spirited adolescent in me, whom, thankfully, I still have not fully left behind.

When I reached rabbinic school and had my first apartment that needed furnishing, I began to buy my own antique furniture. Nothing exceptional at first, mostly old tables and chairs. One weekend, however, I splurged on an old clerk's desk that came with some of the original boxes and spools of thread. With this purchase, I had crossed a kind of invisible line. This desk was not a necessity—it was really a conversation piece—but once I had bought it, there was no turning back. I began finding more items for fun, not just for utility.

At the time, I was living in Ohio (and soon after, in Indiana), where good Americana abounded at reasonable prices. And so, shaped by my parents' tastes, I eventually bought my own dry sink and blanket chest. I thrilled at finding a mid-nineteenth-century, tall, two-piece cupboard, which was well suited for my home in Indianapolis but later spent many years in storage because it was too large for my Manhattan apartment. Years later, I found a charming Hoosier cabinet—acquired, paradoxically, at a New York City flea market, not in the Midwest, where it probably originated.

Once my furniture was in place, I could turn my attention to decorative items—old brass shoe stands, chamber sticks, and rugs, supplemented with numerous prints and lithographs picked up at street fairs and galleries.

DISCOVERING JUDAICA

Since I had chosen to enter the rabbinate, it was only logical that my collecting interests would eventually include an interest in Judaica—or, as one antique dealer pronounced it, "Judakya," as in "I'm sorry, but I don't have any Judakya." The catch was that my stomping grounds at the time—first Cincinnati and then Indianapolis, along with their surrounding areas—yielded very few indigenous prospects. Whenever something showed up at an antique show, it had been "imported" by a dealer from out of town. On occasion I would find a kiddush cup for sale and buy it, thinking I had a found a rare gem, only to discover later that these cups were rampant in New York and that I had overpaid.

At one antique show at the local fairground, I came upon a pair of silver spice boxes used for the havdalah ceremony that marks the end of Shabbat and the beginning of the week. I inquired about their cost and was given a separate price for each and a discounted price for both. After I let on that I was a local rabbi, the discount was increased. ("For you, Rabbi, I can let you have them for . . ."). I ended up passing on the items but stored the experience away as yet another lesson in the practice of bartering.

More fundamentally, I began to wrestle with several questions I still ponder today: What right did the dealer have to make such a profit on religious items? Did it matter if the dealer was Jewish, or not? What right did I have to try to get the price down because I was a rabbi? Or was that offer just the dealer's ruse to entice me into feeling that I was getting preferential treatment, when he still had plenty of margin left for a healthy profit?

And then at times I felt this disturbing tension. When I came upon someone's wedding album or bar mitzvah photo, or what I affectionately referred to as "*bubbe* and *zayde*" pictures of old-world grandparents, how did I reconcile my mixed feelings? On the one hand, I felt sad and disturbed that these items had made their way to the antique market and had not been passed down to relatives as heirlooms. On the other hand, I was pleased to have an opportunity to add them to my collection—which was possible only because they had been so neglected. Could I let myself enjoy the fruits of my search, knowing that for these items to get to the market in the first place they had to be cast off by their original owners or the owners' descendants?

When I allow myself to get philosophical, I regard the stray pieces I have discovered in the market as symbolic of the scattered Jewish people, unprotected, bereft of their homeland, up against the elements and the forces of time. Yet like some loyal remnant, these stray items have tenaciously evaded the trash compactor, the landfill, and even some dust-gathering corner of a bric-a-brac store. By rescuing them from their wayward journeys, by collecting them, I and other collectors perform symbolic acts of redemption and revitalization.

NARROWING DOWN THE FIELD

When I first started collecting Judaica, I defined the field narrowly, including only ritual or ceremonial items, religious texts, and Jewish-related art. This perspective was determined by visits to Jewish museums, whose collections often contain priceless artifacts and art of the highest caliber.

Then, by serendipity—a factor that I believe lies at the heart of all collections—I discovered my first turn-of-the-century Jewish postcards, and a whole new world of collecting opened up to me. I was in New York, visiting my parents. My mother and I went off to an antique show at the same Westchester County Center where I had missed a show because of Kennedy's death nearly twenty years earlier. If I believed in these things, I would say, "It was *beshert*" (It was meant to be).

We came to a booth where postcards were being sold. I had seen such dealers many times before but had never felt drawn in. Their items had always seemed like just a lot of paper to me. But this time we paused to examine the cards, and both of us made a discovery. My mother found a collection of vintage cat cards and purchased a handful, which became both the start and the finish of her postcard collection but which also launched her interest in museum and note cards with cat illustrations. For me, a different trajectory was launched. I stumbled into the category marked "Jewish"—I had not even known there was such a category—and was immediately captivated by the handful of cards that I examined. I had no intention of starting a collection, but on a whim I bought a handful of cards printed with artful portraits of medieval and more modern rabbis. I call these the precursors to the so-called "rabbi cards," which were printed years later in Brooklyn and swapped among traditionally observant children. Many hundreds of cards later, I still have a soft spot for those original rabbi cards. Equally pleasant was the friendly relationship I began that day with the dealers who sold me those cards.

BUILDING A POSTCARD COLLECTION

In my early years of postcard collecting, I was barely discriminating in my selection. As long as the cost was low, usually no more than a few dollars, I bought with abandon. Over time, however, I realized that I had cards in all sorts of categories—such as New Year's greetings, European and American synagogues, pre-Israel Palestine, and Manhattan's Lower East Side. And as I became more knowledgeable, I realized I had to set limits for my collection. Collectors might fantasize about amassing the best and most far-reaching collection in their fields, but I learned early that "you can't have it all." I narrowed my focus to Americana, which still left me with many creative possibilities and could easily be narrowed down further.

Some postcards were printed in sets numbering as few as four or six or as many as one hundred or more. Some collectors try to complete these sets. This is a very tidy way of collecting, perhaps a bit compulsive, and was never of great interest to me. What did get my attention was the card's image, or the message or lesson the card might teach. As an historian, I became fascinated with the way the Jewish experience was openly revealed and published, how it was depicted for the general public, especially in light of the fact that many of these cards had not been published by a Jewish company and were not marketed specifically for the Jewish consumer.

Of special interest to me was the multitude of cards depicting synagogues, which pointed to civic pride among the Jews. For some synagogues and temples, only one postcard may ever have been made depicting its appearance, but for others multiple images are available, often published by an assortment of companies. Some collectors are content to have one card per synagogue in their collection. I made a point of collecting these multiple views to emphasize the proliferation of the cards. The bonus of this approach was that, on occasion, I captured a building in different seasons or eras, as well as at various stages of its construction.

I knew another collector, a generation older, who had amassed a similar collection when cards could be had for almost pennies. His collection, which he eventually disposed of, was probably unsurpassed and is perhaps never to be duplicated. I have a list of the cards he found, which I kept as a reminder of what lies out there and of what I was up against. It was a daunting task, trying to replicate his inventory, though on rare occasions I even found cards that

he'd never had. The competitive spirit of the collector and the possibility of always finding something new and exciting fueled my search.

BRANCHING OUT

As might be expected, over my years of collecting I saw the prices of postcards rise and their availability shrink. It became harder and harder to find affordable cards that fit my collecting categories. My enthusiasm for postcards was beginning to wane, but fortunately my collecting energy was resuscitated, for I discovered the even wider field of Jewish Americana.

This occurred shortly after I moved back from the Midwest to New York some twenty years ago. I had placed myself smack in the center of the largest emporium for Jewish memorabilia and cultural artifacts of the American Jewish experience. This is not to say that such items were not available in Indiana, but they were scarce, or perhaps I did not notice them, as my eye was not yet trained to take them in. More Jews live in New York—or, more importantly for the collector, die here or decamp to Florida or to any number of retirement communities throughout the country. At these times their homes are disbanded, keepsakes are discarded, and estates are sold. The next generation holds on to some things, but much of this detritus gets one last gasp of life at a house sale before being carted off to the junk pile or landfill. Remarkably, however, an amazing amount of really cool and fascinating things survive and find their way to the garage sale or the flea market. Then, if it is really worth something, an item can move up the evolutionary ladder to the pricey antique show or auction house.

Unintentionally but fortuitously, my first apartment in New York City was only a few blocks away from a famous flea market at Twenty-sixth Street and Sixth Avenue (which, sadly, has since been taken over by new high-rise apartments). It was only a matter of time before I discovered that shopping opportunity and was up at the crack of dawn on weekend mornings along with the other aficionados—read: fanatics—who would scurry around frenetically, searching for the great *metziah*—read: treasure.

So what did I find? I found old letters, family documents, autograph books, and college yearbooks. I found tins, bottles, tickets, and trade cards. I found bar mitzvah photographs and wedding albums. And political buttons and matchbooks. And broadsides and stereocards. And print blocks and 78-rpm records. All were related to the Jewish experience in America.

Elsewhere, I found neon clocks advertising kosher products, synagogue signs and store signs, posters for Jewish war relief following the First World War, and posters for Broadway shows such as *Brighton Beach Memoirs* and *Yentl*. I found wedding documents and death plaques, Catskill souvenirs and old Yiddish typewriters. The list of Jewish Americana goes on and on. For a while, until I could not keep up with it, I had a database with more than one hundred categories for sorting my material, from *Antisemitica* to *World's Fair* and everything in between. One subject led to another, and the more I looked, the more I found. Once one's eye is educated, its field of vision keeps expanding.

My hunting grounds became wider, too. First I went to local antique shows and auctions. Then I discovered the outdoor markets that are held three times a year in Brimfield, Massachusetts. There are others, too, such as Renninger's in Kutztown, Pennsylvania. These are mind-boggling extravaganzas for the collector. Just as "you can get anything you want at Alice's Restaurant," these marketplaces—throwbacks to the old town fair—offer everything you want, times ten or more.

PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS

Periodically, I raised certain questions about the purpose behind the collection and the value of certain items. The "Who is a Jew?" question had to do with determining how Jewish an object had to be for me acquire it for the collection. Is there a litmus test? Do certain items have an intrinsic birthright, while others do not? There is no disputing the legitimacy of an object with Hebrew or Yiddish writing on it, or of a photograph that shows a man wearing a yarmulke. But what of an item that is Jewish in name only? Is there a difference in Jewish value between one poster advertising a cantorial concert and another promoting a cabaret act of "the former Mrs. Kingfish Levinsky," the ex-wife of a noted

Jewish prizefighter? For that matter, what is so Jewish about Levinsky himself, aside from the name? (And that was not even his real name; it was Harry Krakow.) Does a trade card with the business name Cohen or Levy count, or a bottle from Abraham & Straus, or a 1919 CCNY graduation picture of students whose names are almost all Jewish? Or a shoe store sign that says B. Rosenberg & Sons? Who is to say if these typically Jewish names indeed belonged to Jews? It might be a safe bet, but even if they did, then what of it? The existence of so many of these items seems to prove that Jews have made it in America, that we have been accepted, that we have entered all trades and fields and penetrated all corners of the country—as is evident when we hear Muzak versions of songs from *Fiddler on the Roof* piped into the local mall. Yet when we collect Jewish Americana by name alone, we run the risk of perpetrating our own form of racism, stereotyping, provincialism, and narrow-mindedness. These days, nearly half of the Jews in America identify as secular or cultural rather than religious Jews. Their garb certainly does not give them away, and their names might not, either.

I have also wondered about the intrinsic value of the items I have collected. Is there not a sharp difference between a precious object and a collectible? Between, for example, a finely woven ark curtain and a run-of-the-mill tallis bag? Or between an eighteenth-century, handwritten, illuminated Italian *ketubah* and a printed, nineteenth-century, mass-market version that made its way from the Lower East Side of New York to the hinterlands of Marshall, Texas, where it was used to record the details of a local wedding? How, in other words, do *tschotchkes, shmattas* and other *chazerai*—aka bric-a-brac, old rags, and basic junk—stack up against rare, auctionable, museum-quality items?

While I did accumulate many unique and some pricier items, my collecting drive was never motivated by the monetary value or rarity of an item. Nor was the collection built as an investment for future gain. Rather, my choice to purchase a particular object was often determined by a gut feeling that it simply belonged in the collection as one more ethnographic artifact that would tell another piece of the story of Jewish life in America. Regardless of the worth of individual items, the collective whole has tremendous value and delivers a powerful statement about Jewish culture and heritage.

GETTING DISCOVERED MYSELF

While I may have developed an unstated "mission statement" over time, in the beginning I had no purpose other than to develop a hobby that gave me joy and pleasure. I had collected as a child. Now I was collecting as an adult.

However, as the collection began to take shape and finally to reach a critical mass, I came to understand that mine was no longer some weekend diversion. Collecting had become a passion. I started living among more and more stuff. I started to need to organize it. And I started to think about what to do with it all.

Early on, I had various thoughts about publishing some of the material, particularly the postcards. There seemed to be no end to the market for another handsomely designed Jewish coffee-table book. Because I was working in publishing at the time, I had some connections to open doors, but the costs involved quickly closed them. Or else I was told, if you can get a museum to exhibit this material, then we will publish a book. So through another acquaintance who happened to be a curator at The Jewish Museum in New York City, I pursued that route. That is when I discovered how slow the wheels of the museum world can turn. Even though my exhibition proposal never developed beyond the idea stage, it served a valuable purpose. It brought the collection to the attention of curators. They recognized what a resource the material could be for an exhibition that was just then being developed by Jenna Weissman Joselit called *The American Jewish Home, 1880-1950.* This 1990 show was followed four years later by her book *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950,* which won the National Jewish Book Award in history and developed the theme further. I was privileged and thrilled to contribute heavily to both projects. Even more gratifying is the fact that I have reaped the benefits of developing a close friendship with this esteemed scholar over these last fifteen years, in addition to having many other occasions for professional collaboration.

Thus the once-private collection of a quirky collector quickly emerged on the scene as a wide-reaching resource. I started getting requests to borrow material, sometimes for just an item or two, other times for dozens, for use in articles,

books, and videos, as well as in museum exhibitions throughout the country. Naturally, I started collecting a list of these various projects as well.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It was one thing for the collection to reach a critical mass that would get noticed. It was another thing for it to threaten to inundate my home. I was becoming like those proverbial collectors who use every inch of wall space, shelf space, and floor space to house and display their collection—which does not leave much room for getting around.

My first solution was to move to a bigger apartment, which started to resemble a live-in museum. This stemmed the tide for a while, but eventually the onrush of material overwhelmed me there, too. Then I made a fateful decision that would alter the direction of the collection dramatically. I decided to get married.

This meant not only that I would need to make space for Myrna and her daughter, Blair, to move in, but also that my energy and affection were now directed to animate beings (people and cats) instead of inanimate objects. As Myrna has often said, she knew I really was serious about marrying her when I started boxing up my collection. A year later, when we were expecting our child, Oren, and anticipated a move to a new apartment for all of us, I had to put even more into storage.

I accepted these changes without regret. I was thrilled at the new directions our lives were taking together, including the morning feedings and sleep deprivation, which took the place of early flea-market runs. Coincidentally, eBay was becoming a new and fertile shopping ground at that time, so I could continue to hunt for items without having to leave my home. (This outlet has become less fruitful as more and more new items inundate the site and make it harder to sift through in search of the occasional gem.)

Meanwhile, requests for objects continued to come in, but it was becoming increasingly difficult for me to locate a specific item in the storage lockers. Even the ephemera in the apartment were barely sorted, and I often had to go through many albums and boxes to find one elusive sheet of paper.

TIME TO MOVE ON

For many years I also relied on two other storage locations—the attic in the house where I had grown up and the upstairs floor of the adjacent garage. My father had remained in the house after my mother died in 1982 and after his subsequent remarriage, but a few years ago my father and stepmother decided it was time to relocate. So what did this mean for me? Aside from the psychological adjustment of giving up one's childhood home—with all its attendant memories of joys and sorrows—it meant that I would have to find yet another storage locker to house not merely the overflow of my collection, but also the memorabilia of my childhood and college years and the documents and photographs of my family's life.

Some families have just an album or two. We, on the other hand, had barrels and boxes and file cabinets full of material. Letters written in Virginia in the 1870s—in German and English—between courting great-grandparents-to-be. A grandmother's diary that recounted her life on the town and at Barnard in 1918. Letters and photographs from a great-uncle who lived above the Arctic Circle in Alaska in the 1920s. Marriage documents, papers recounting the awarding of the Iron Cross, school certificates, and passports stamped "J" from Germany in the 1920s and 1930s. Letters, hand-written and typed, from Albert Einstein to my grandfather. Letters from Berlin in 1937 and 1938, and then from England through the end of the war, until my grandfather and aunt could reunite with my father, who was already in this country.

As I prepared to box up this material for storage, I realized what a remarkable archive it was. And I realized that my family had been collecting and preserving documents for a long time already, way before I had gotten started. Perhaps the instinct to collect was genetic. I also realized that my years of collecting had been a kind of training program to prepare me to finally organize, translate, and preserve the family documents and to share them not just with family but with many others who might find them rich and compelling.

For twenty-five years I had been collecting other people's memorabilia. It was a worthwhile journey, dotted with wonderful friendships, experiences, and knowledge

accumulated along the way. There are no regrets. But now it is time to tend to my own garden, as it were—to prepare to pass on my own family's heritage from my generation to the next.

THE FUTURE IS NOW

Some fifteen years ago, when I started writing this essay, I was still "growing" my collection. I was not ready to part with it, but I did think about its eventual demise. Everything, I wrote, is ephemeral, and nothing, say the rabbis, follows one to the grave except perhaps a good name. I wondered what would happen to all of these objects. Would they stay together and go to a museum or an archive, intact as a collection, or would they be put back into circulation again and sold off to a multitude of competing buyers, thus starting the chain of collecting all over again? How would this pursuit of mine end? As a hobby, enjoyable while it lasted, or as a special mission that would be picked up by others after me?

Over the years I have collected not only objects, but also a handful of scholars whose opinions I value. So I asked them for advice about what to do with the collection. The idea that I found the most exciting was forging a partnership with the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia, where my material would find the most welcoming home. The timing, I was told, was just right. The museum was about to undertake a major expansion, led by a remarkable team of designers and exhibition planners. The even more dramatic decision to move the museum to a new location would come months later.

A meeting was arranged with the director and her staff. If anyone was doing the interviewing, it was me of them, and I was thrilled by the outcome. I came away feeling as secure as one can that I was about to entrust my life's work to caring hands. With some trepidation, much relief, and even more excitement, I had found the collection a home where it is being cared for and preserved for generations to come. I can now tell the full story of the collection because I finally know how the story comes out.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I acquired items from countless antique, ephemera, and postcard dealers. Most remained nameless to me, but some I came to know as friends. They are in a category of their own: Don and Newly Preziosi, Roberta Batt and Mary Donaldson, Alan Scop, Salo Kluger, and Manfred Anson.

My close friend and colleague Rabbi David Whiman has shared the journey of this collection since we attended rabbinical school together. His own collection of synagogue architectural remnants—carved wooden lions and crowns and textiles adorning the ark and Torah—is unsurpassed.

Jenna Weissman Joselit, friend and teacher, has long championed the value of studying material culture. Her keen eye and interpretive stance have brought a critical understanding to the items in the collection. Her friendship is equally valuable.

Jeffrey Shandler and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett have been the recipients of my eBay alerts for Yiddish objects, kitsch, and other oddities and provided invaluable advice about making the gift to the National Museum of American Jewish History. Beth Wenger introduced me to Gwen Goodman, the Museum's executive director, who appreciated immediately the scope of the collection and welcomed me with excitement.

My parents, Ulrich and Florence Schweitzer, gave me a love of art and culture, of learning and discovery. They taught me to honor and respect my heritage and family history. They set me on my course as a collector, not to mention all my other endeavors.

Myrna Baron, my wife, for whom I boxed up my collection in the first place, always understood my love for this hobby, more than tolerated most of my acquisitions, and now shares my excitement that the collection has found a wonderful home at the National Museum of American Jewish History.