

Heather Home

**Collecting Gerald Tulchinsky:
One Fonds, Multiple Perspectives**

Queen's University Archives acquires the papers of academics on an ongoing basis as it is part of our mandate to reflect on the pedagogical history of this institution. We do not collect *all* faculty members however; we acquire an academic's records when it is clear that the records comply with archival principles (it must, above all, be good, reliable evidence) and the academic's influence in the field extends beyond the limestone walls of our institution. Such is the case with the late Queen's University historian Gerald (Jerry) Tulchinsky.

The Tulchinsky fonds is a broad-ranging and voluminous collection of records.¹ The scope and content of many faculty fonds is focused on an academic career with records such as course syllabi, academic papers, research materials, manuscripts of monographs, and departmental and administrative roles that have been occupied or undertaken throughout a career. The Tulchinsky fonds indeed includes all this but also much more. It not only provides evidence of an intellectual community and field of study but also offers glimpses of personal and formative moments in his life. The following essay by Ellen Tulchinsky and Laura Tulchinsky, Jerry's daughters, centers on the personal letters from a young Jerry to his parents during an exceptional year in his life, long before he became a pioneering scholar of Canadian Jewish history. The letters give us an intimate and revealing portrait not always available in faculty papers. The archives are always partial; as Pierre Nora has stated, "Archive as much as you like: something will always be left out."² We are thankful that these letters were not left out as they help add detail to the portrait we can unveil of Jerry Tulchinsky.

As Ellen and Laura propose in the article, it is likely that this year in Israel focused Jerry's later academic pursuits, shifting from labour and business history to the study of Canadian Jewry, a field Jerry saw as distinctly different from the field of American Jewry (as is evidenced in his Queen's Annual Archives Lecture of 2010).³ I think this conclusion drawn by Jerry's daughters serves as a good reminder that nothing happens in isolation, that people are complex with a myriad of influences and experiences converging to create an individual life, set of beliefs, and outlook. Sometimes the records are silent about these influences, but a fulsome fonds allows for reflection on the broad span and scope of impacts and interests that combine in any life and helps to give us a better understanding of the complexities of an individual existence.

Jerry's youth does not figure prominently in his fonds. As an archivist I ask myself, "Why were these letters kept and deposited?" The keeping of the letters shows an attachment and connection that the donor had to this material. These letters meant something to Jerry. They must have for Jerry (or his family) to have physically kept them, perhaps moving them from house to house, for over fifty years before depositing them.⁴ Jerry's attachment to the letters places value on those records that is divined not only through their content, but by their continued physical existence and deposit. While the records of a fonds can be mined for their contents as evidence

of things past, the records that exist in a fonds, and the shape of that fonds, can also be read to seek greater understanding of the individual.

A portrait of Jerry is obviously evident in his records, but in a repository such as Queen's University Archives, which maintains a total archives ethos, we also catch glimpses of Jerry in other records: within the university's records you will find him in departmental meetings; within the records of another professor, with whom Tulchinsky exchanged a series of published debates in the local newspaper, you will find the personal correspondence exchanged between the two; and within the records of the local synagogue, you find his work and worship within his faith community.

Queen's University Archives was also fortunate to have benefited from Jerry's influence behind the scenes: he acted as an ambassador for our institution. His research interests brought a number of additional fonds into our repository, expanding our holdings on Canadian Jewish life. Through Jerry's work examining the intersections of labour practices and Canadian Jewry, we acquired the Men's Clothing Manufacturers Association of Ontario fonds and the Freedman Company Limited (Montreal) fonds.⁵ Jerry's biography of Joe Salsberg established a relationship with the Ezrin family that led to their decision to deposit the Salsberg fonds at Queen's University Archives.⁶ Jerry's continuous championing of archives, and the value of keeping records, helped expand the possibilities for future scholarly research within our repository.

Perhaps most significantly, Jerry helped to build connections between Queen's and the local Jewish community. Jerry was instrumental in ensuring that the records of the Beth Israel Congregation came to Queen's University Archives.⁷ Those records would later transform our Reading Room into a hub of activity during the one hundredth anniversary celebrations of the synagogue in 2010, cementing a relationship that continues to bring records through the door to this day.

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