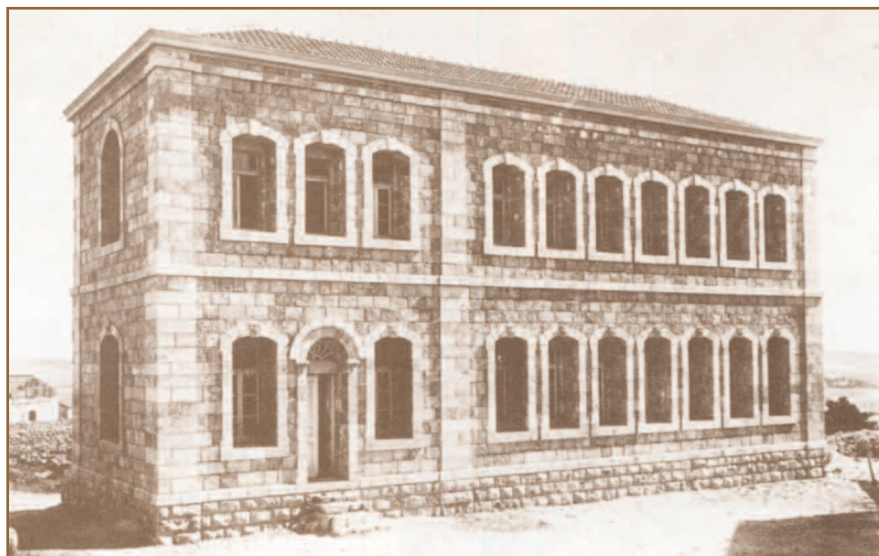


## THE ABARBANEL LIBRARY

One of the Jerusalem Lodge's most important contributions was the establishment of the Midrash Abarbanel Library. Established in 1892 as the city's first free public library, it became the nucleus of what was to become the Jewish National and University Library.

The creation of a public library had strong ideological underpinnings. While religious academies and Christian missions had their own libraries, the few prior attempts to open public, nondenominational libraries had ended in dismal failure. More than ten years earlier, the Montefiore Library had closed due to pressure from ultra-Orthodox circles, as had a library opened by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda. Despite threats of excommunication, members of the Jerusalem Lodge were intent upon widening the cultural and intellectual horizons of all the city's inhabitants, secular and religious.

Created 400 years after the expulsion of Jews from Spain, the library was named—in an appreciative nod to the Sephardi community—after Don Isaac Abarbanel (1437-1508), among the first Jewish scholars to be familiar with the concepts of humanism and the world of the Renaissance. There were those who suggested naming the library after Christopher Columbus, a tribute to their B'nai B'rith brethren in the United States who were celebrating the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America. In the end, the more literary, scholarly, and identifiably Jewish name was chosen. B'nai B'rith members went from door-to-door to solicit books to fill the library's shelves. Ben-Yehuda donated his shutdown library's collection of 2,000 volumes, 30 percent of which were secular—forbidden fruits to the ultra-Orthodox. In 1895, the library's collection made a quantum leap when a Zionist physician, Dr. Joseph Chasanowich, transferred his collection of 10,000 volumes from Bialystok to Jerusalem. A collector of rare and ancient manuscripts, Chasanowich urged other Jews to donate their books, as



B'nai B'rith Library, Midrash Abarbanel-Beit Ne'eman. Shortly after opening-1902



Zionist Archives-1925.

well: "In our Holy City, Jerusalem, all the books written in Hebrew, and all the books in all languages which deal with the Jews and their Torah ... will be treasured." In 1899, Theodor Herzl, in the name of the Zionist Congress, sent Chasanowich a 300-ruble donation for the library. In his letter, Herzl wrote that the money should "be used for the good of the endeavour that is

JERUSHALAIM LODGE 376  
I. O. B. B.

**Dear Sir and Brother !**

At the end of two months from date, will be the four hundredth anniversary of the expulsion of half a million of Jews from Spain. The majority of these exiles emigrated to the Turkish dominions where they found an hospitable and friendly reception, and the stability of the recolonisation of Jerusalem by Jews is to be dated from that period. It is the opinion of the "Jerushalaim Lodge" that this, for Jerusalem as well as for Jews in general, so memorable event could not be better celebrated than by the establishment of a properly endowed Jewish library which shall bear the name of **Don Isaac Abravanel**, the most celebrated man of that epoch.

A completely furnished and well managed Jewish library at Jerusalem, with a population of 25000 Jewish souls was a long and seriously felt want. Our Lodge, the theme of which is to elevate the characters of our tribe intellectually and morally, and to promote feelings of brotherhood among Israel, has undertaken the task to remedy that evil. The proposed library is to form a central for all friends of culture and science and a headquarter for the union of Sephardim and Ashkenazim.

But the creation of a Jewish library that may justify such sublime aims, the erection of a memorial worthy of that memorable event, worthy of the great Abravanel, demands more than our inadequate means can afford, and we must therefore appeal to you, dear Sir and Brother, that you may be inclined to exercise your influences within the pale of your respected Lodge brethren to the effect of supporting our undertaking by the necessary supplies of books and other publications.

Yours very respectfully

The Committee for the establishment of the Jewish Abravanel Library

**WOLFF JAWITZ.      DAVID YELLIN.      J. MEJOHAS.**

The undersigned officials of the "Jerushalaim Lodge" cordially coinciding with the sentiments expressed by the esteemed Committee for the superintendence of the Abravanel Library hope that their appeal will be favourably responded to by friends of Jewish literature generally and especially by all Lodges of the I. O. B. B.

Jerusalem Sivan 1652 (June 1892).


**EPHRAIM COHN**  
President.  
**M. ADELMANN**  
Secretary.

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Address :

Mr. Ephraim Cohn, Director of the v. Laemel School, for Abravanel Library, (Jerusalem).

„EREZ ISRAEL“  
Bureau  
des  
Zionisten-Congresses.

  
 ארץ ישראל  
 ועד הוותיק  
 של  
 הקונגרסים הציונים

WIEN, am *1. May 1892*  
II., Rennbrunnstrasse 11.

Nr. \_\_\_\_\_

*Subscription von Dicht's!*

*Die Subscriptionen befreunden  
Wünsche Ihres Landes in die  
Bibliothek in Jerusalem sind die  
Bücher Europa kaufen wir uns, Ihre  
Liedung und Ihre Liebe für Europa.  
Bühnen 300 Rübels von Amerika.  
Sind für die Liebe der Lieblingen  
von Kaufung in Italien.  
Wir hoffen sie mit den  
Kaufung der ungenutzten  
Gefühlung und gefühlten Bewegung.*

Für DAS ACTIONS-COMITÉ

*Erst  
Abmann*

*Waly. Jann Dr. Chasanowich,  
Baleystok*

From letter in Hebrew, German, and English requesting donations of books to the library. Signed by the board of directors, it announces the foundation of the library in 1892.

Letter from Herzl to Chasanowich.

so close to your heart.” The library became known as the Midrash Abarbanel and Ginzei Yosef (“Joseph’s Archives” after the name of Chasanowich).

Chasanowich was the first non-resident who was granted membership to the Jerusalem Lodge. As a way of maintaining contact with Jewish communities in the Diaspora, it became the lodge’s policy to grant honorary membership to Jews—mostly from Russia and Poland—whose hometown did not have a B’nai B’rith lodge. Another “visiting” member was the Zionist leader Isaac Leib Goldberg of Vilna, later founder of the Ha’aretz daily newspaper and supporter of the Hebrew Language Committee.

The library was initially housed in a two room rented apartment on Jaffa Road and opened only two to three hours a day. In 1894, B’nai B’rith members began collecting funds, mostly from abroad, for a perma-

nent library structure. In 1900 the cornerstone was laid and two years later the books were transferred to a spacious two-story structure named Beit Ne’eman on what would eventually be called B’nai B’rith Street in the heart of Jerusalem.

By the end of the period of the First Aliyah in 1904, the Midrash Abarbanel Library had become the most important library in Eretz Yisrael. In numbers alone it boasted over 22,000 volumes, including many rare manuscripts. More importantly, it had become the cultural pulse of the Yishuv’s capital. Lectures on popular and scientific subjects were offered and its bulletin board kept citizens abreast of local and international events. (The first telegrams describing the Dreyfus Affair were posted in the library’s entrance hall.) An atmosphere of tolerance pervaded: Seminary students and teachers, tradesmen and farmers, and (in a revolutionary move for 1900) women of all economic and ethnic backgrounds

gathered at this pioneering B'nai B'rith institution on equal ground. It was in a very real sense the cultural melting pot of the developing Yishuv.

From its inception until the outbreak of World War I, the library was administered by a special committee, headed by Ephraim Cohen-Reiss. By the onset of the war, the library's collection had grown to 32,000 volumes, 10,000 of which were in Hebrew. But during the war, contributions were reduced to a mere trickle, and as Trukey entered the fighting, the Ottoman forces ordered the library to shut its doors. The library reopened in 1918 and perceiving an opportunity to fulfill its aspirations of creating a national library, B'nai B'rith signed an agreement transferring its collection to the World Zionist Organization (WZO). With the opening of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus in 1925, the library—this brainchild of B'nai B'rith—took on new life as the nucleus of the Jewish National and University Library. The B'nai B'rith library remained open to the public well into the 1970s, and the building, refurbished by the Jerusalem Municipality through a gift from International President Philip Klutznick, remains a Jerusalem landmark.

## THE SETTLEMENT OF MOTZA

In the hills and valleys just nine kilometres west of Jerusalem is a picturesque and lush garden suburb. Today, home to professors and jurists, artists and politicians, the site of a popular inn, a winery, and plant nursery, Motza was the first rural site in Eretz Yisrael acquired by Jews for farming. It was the Jerusalem Lodge of B'nai B'rith that pioneered and supported the embryonic agricultural settlement that developed there.

The story of “modern” Motza (it was one of the first places conquered by the Prophet Joshua) goes back to 1859 when citizens David Yellin (grandfather of the B'nai B'rith leader of the same name) and Shaul Yehuda, both Turkish citizens, purchased a plot of land from nearby Arab villagers in the village of Kolonia. For a fee, the Sheik of Abu Ghosh permitted them to farm the land—they hired Arab laborers for the task—but not to build houses there. Yellin built a roadside inn on top of Byzantine ruins, to be used by travelers between Jaffa and Jerusalem. When Shaul Yehuda died in



B'nai B'rith Library-1925.



B'nai B'rith Library, new immigrants-1948.



Motza, 1895—First Jewish building, David Yellin standing third from left.



Theodor Herzl (center) with Zionist leaders on his visit to Holy Land—opposite Jerusalem’s Old City Walls—1898.



Herzl’s cypress tree, before it was felled.

1864, Yehoshua Yellin (the elder Yellin’s son) abandoned the whole agricultural enterprise, though he did continue purchasing land. By 1891 he owned 188 dunams (47 acres).

In 1893, at the prompting of Pines and

Ze’ev Yabetz, the Jerusalem Lodge decided to create a settlement there. Using funds raised from Jews in Cologne and Vienna, the Jerusalem Lodge purchased the land from Yellin. According to Jesaias Press, president of the Jerusalem Lodge at the time, the purchase was a form of protest against the Baron Rothschild’s settlement initiatives which were thought to have eroded into a corrupt system of bribes and patronage. B’nai B’rith also wanted to prove that an agricultural settlement could succeed in the hills and not only in the plains, as many had insisted. By supporting individual initiatives and using modern farming methods, it was B’nai B’rith’s goal, writes Press, “to pave new ways in agricultural settlement.”

B’nai B’rith leased the land to four pioneers: Samuel Broza, Simcha Katz, Yitzhak Cohen, and a fourth who later sold his plot to the Makleff family (most of whom were killed in Motza by Arabs during the 1929 riots—the sole survivor being nine-year old Mordechai Makleff, who would later become commander in chief of the Israel Defence Forces). B’nai B’rith helped the settlers acquire cattle and tools and provided a minimal monthly stipend to each farmer. The condition was that they work the land, plant vineyards and maintain peaceful relations with their neighbors. B’nai B’rith purchased the inn from the Yellin family and turned it into a public building, a combined cowshed, synagogue, and school.

Despite the difficult conditions under which they lived, Samuel Broza was able to transform his dunams into a success story. He left his sons a large inheritance of vineyards, cattle and poultry, fruit orchards, and a thriving winery (today’s Efrat Winery). In 1898, Herzl visited Broza’s vineyards—he had supposedly invited the Zionist leader to “come and see what can be grown in the Judean hills”—and, impressed by the small settlement outside Jerusalem, planted a cypress tree in the hills of Motza. Known as the “first Zionist tree,” it soon became a symbol of the revival and settlement of the land. It was felled by Arabs in the 1920s and the stump that remained is preserved in its original place.