A Finding Aid to the
Richard J. H. Gottheil Papers

Manuscript Collection No. 127
Richard James Horatio Gottheil was born in Manchester, England in 1862 to Rabbi Gustav and Rosalie Wollman Gottheil. In 1873, the family emigrated to New York City where Rabbi Gottheil ascended the pulpit at Temple Emanu-El. Richard Gottheil earned a Bachelor of Arts from Columbia University in 1881 and returned to Europe to study at the Universities of Berlin, Tübingen and Leipzig and received a Doctor of Philosophy from Leipzig in 1886. Gottheil later returned to the United States, earning his doctorate from Columbia University in 1929.

Gottheil was appointed chair of Semitic languages and rabbinical literature at Columbia University in 1887 after one year on the faculty as a lecturer. He was trained in Semitics, Judaica, Orientalism and Wissenschaft methodology. In 1897, Gottheil became the director of the Oriental department at the New York Public Library. He would retain both positions until his death.

He inherited from his father a strong commitment to Zionism at a time when it was not popular. He served as the president of the Federation of American Zionists from its inception in 1898 until 1904. Gottheil was vice-president of the Universal Zionist Society. He also served on various committees of the World Zionist Organizations and in 1910 took charge of the American School of Archeology in Jerusalem.

Gottheil was also a noted Syriac studies scholar. He served from 1902-1903 as president of the Society of Biblical Literature. He was a contributor to several encyclopedias and journals and was the editor of the Semitic Study Series (1901-1911) and Columbia University Oriental Series (1901-1936). Individual works include Zionism and The Belmont-Belmonte Family.

Gottheil died in New York City on 23 May 1936. One of his final official acts was to represent Columbia University at the 400th anniversary of the University of Granada, in Spain.

Gottheil married Emma R. Leon, a widow with two sons, in September 1891. They had no children.

The Richard J. H. Gottheil Papers consist of the papers of Richard Gottheil, an Orientalist and Semitic language professor. Gottheil was a strong supporter of the Zionist movement at a time when it was unpopular within the American Reform movement. He was in close contact with journalist Theodor Herzl about starting the movement in the United States, as is reflected in the correspondence series.

The correspondence series strongly reflects Gottheil's Zionist activities. There is an early correspondence with Israel Zangwill, with whom Gottheil was to break in 1923 after Zangwill criticized the Zionist movement. There is also an extensive correspondence with Stephen S. Wise about his involvement in Zionist activities and Gottheil's support in the creation of the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City. The personal series includes a series of clippings, writings and material about birthday celebrations and Zionist activities.
Series A. Correspondence, 1893-1936

Extent 0.6 linear feet (1.5 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note Correspondents include Zionist leaders such as Louis Brandeis, Theodor Herzl, Judah Magnes, and Stephen Wise.

Arrangement Correspondence is arranged alphabetically with general correspondence followed by individuals. Within folders, correspondence is arranged chronologically.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 1. Folder 2. L-Z, General.
Box 1. Folder 3. Actions Committee Vienna, 1898-1903
Box 1. Folder 4. Benjamin, 1902-1903
Box 1. Folder 5. Brandeis, Louis Dembitz, 1914-1919, 1934
Box 1. Folder 6. Hadassah, 1909-1931
Box 1. Folder 7-8. Herzl, Theodor [English and German], 1898-1903
Box 1. Folder 10. Lipsky, Louis, 1898-1922
Box 1. Folder 11. Magnes, Judah L., 1915-1917
Box 1. Folder 12. Moore, George F., 1889-1906, 1927
Box 1. Folder 13. Reich, A.W., 1899-1903
Box 1. Folder 14. Rice, Cecil S., 1915-1918
Box 1. Folder 15. Straus, Oscar S., 1897-1910
Box 1. Folder 16. Universite de Strasbourg, 1917-1921, undated
Series B. Personal, 1886-1937

Extent 0.2 linear feet (0.5 Hollinger box)

Scope and Content Note Contains a variety of materials such as writings for and about Gottheil, including obituaries and newscuttings. There is also Zionist memorabilia.

Arrangement The series is arranged alphabetically by topic.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 2. Folder 6. Clippings.
Box 2. Folder 7. Gottheil, Gustave re: biography, 1936
Box 2. Folder 8. Gottheil, Richard J.H. 60th birthday, 1922
Box 2. Folder 9. Gottheil, Richard J.H. 70th birthday, 1932
Box 2. Folder 10. Gottheil, Richard J.H. Writings, 1893, 1933-1935
Box 2. Folder 11. Obituaries, 1936
Box 2. Folder 12. Unidentified, 1896-1934, undated
Box 2. Folder 13. Writings by others, 1931, 1937, undated
Box 2. Folder 14. Zionist memorabilia, undated
Box 2. Folder 15. Personal miscellaneous, 1886-1937, undated