



Center for Research on Dutch Jewry (A.R.)

המרכז לחקר יהדות הולנד ע"ר



My Experiences with our Archive – March 2014

Sometimes it turns out that all a person leaves behind is no more than a sheaf of notebooks from the time of his studies. Nice notebooks, some with hard covers, some with worn covers. Dates written here and there, indicating when the notebook accompanied the owner during the year, sometimes the date appears on the cover only, 1929, 1934, 1939, 1940 ... and then time wanes like a candle. No letter, no postcard. No identification.

No father no mother, no son or daughter. No one who can testify. Ah .. that was my uncle .. This is my mother's nephew. He was ... yes he was ...

This person is not anonymous, he immortalized himself through his notebooks, sometimes six, seven sometimes ten or twelve notebooks, very elegant writing as befits a person who is a future teacher or clerk, in flawless Dutch. In between the Dutch words also words in Hebrew, in a notebook that is meant for studying the Prophets, or Chronicles. And in case he was readying himself for a career as a kosher shochet, we might find passages and words from the massehet holin, translated into impeccable Dutch.

Sometimes the name of a lecturer or a teacher is added, and that makes it easier to guess where he studied ...

His full name adorns each and every notebook. Who is he, when was he born and how and where did his life end?

The archivist is helped by the remembrance book In Memoriam. Sometimes the name is very evident – there is only one person by that name: then some of the veil of mystery is lifted. He was born in that or that city, on a known date, lived there, was taken away, was murdered, there, on a date known or surmised, that is all, there is no more to be said.

But at times, heaven forbid, there are two or three persons with the same name! Who amongst them is the owner of the silent notebooks?

Here the archivist must use his brain: if this person was a student in an orthodox seminary he must have been at least 17 years old when he made notes of his lectures. In that case the particulars of one of the three individuals who all bear the same name but were born on different dates, should fit the case.

After all a decision must be reached. And in the computerized catalogue only those few data will be entered – in memory until the end of time.