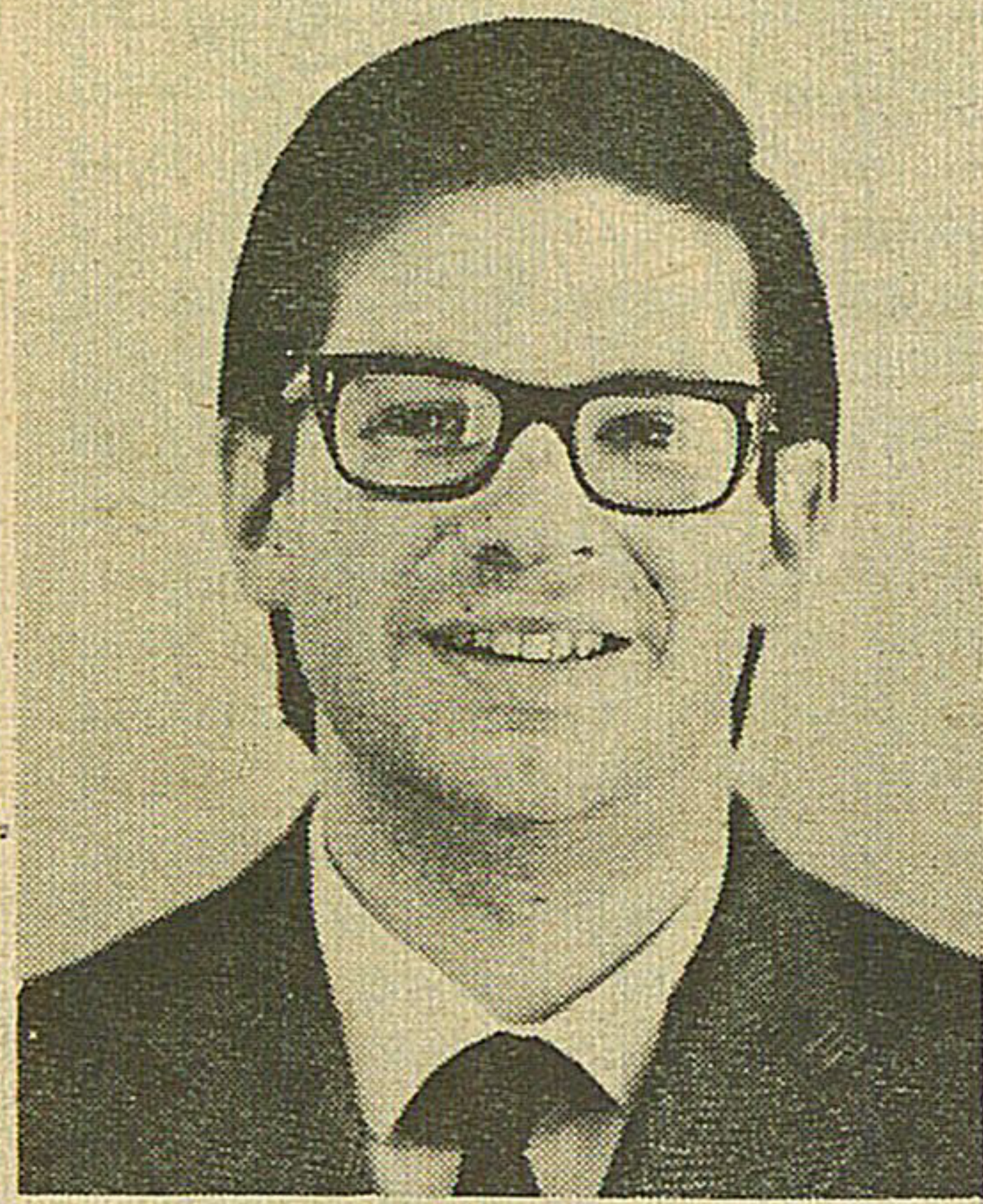


Living History Plan Weds Computer & Social Theory

By ALBERT W. BLOOM, Executive Editor of The Chronicle



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Pitt historians: "Help us to save your past."

AN exciting "Pittsburgh Jewish History Project" which marries "computer technology and social theory and applies them to historical research" is about to get underway here as a joint venture of the Rodef Shalom Brotherhood and the American Jewish Committee chapter, according to Ivan J. Novick, president of the Temple Brotherhood, and Harold Bigler, AJC president.

"The plan will combine the efforts of a five-man history-research team at the University of Pittsburgh with the hoped-for cooperation of the entire Pittsburgh Jewish community and its full organizational structure," the Brotherhood and AJC spokesmen told The Chronicle in an exclusive interview.

Two young University of Pittsburgh History Department faculty members will be co-directors of research for the Pittsburgh Jewish History Project. They are:

Assistant Professors Walter S. Glazer, 30, and Jonathan Levine, 29. Working with them throughout the summer will be a team of three graduate students.

Their aim is to reconstruct the lost fragments of Pittsburgh Jewish History into a coherent whole—and, hopefully, structure the project so that it becomes self-perpetuating, as Jewish life in Pittsburgh itself is continuous and self-perpetuating.

All the facts are expected to be "computerized" and put on tapes at the University of Pittsburgh Computer Center—and the information made available in such form that it is available for use both by research scholars and by average citizens.

While a Dr. Scholar might be selecting material for a heavy historical tome, a Mr. Average Citizen might be exploring the role of his family in Pittsburgh history.

Professors Glazer and Levine told The Chronicle:

"Since the end of World War II there has been increased interest in American Jewish life.

"This attention has been due in part to the destruction of the European Jewish community and more recently to the so-called American Jewish literary renaissance.

"Finally, the realization that American Society is not so homogeneous as had been previously assumed has accounted for increased attention to all American ethnic groups, including American Jewry.

The Pittsburgh Jewish History Project is probably the first of its kind, and could well turn out to be a "pioneer national effort across America," according to Professors Glazer and Levine.

They noted that this new effort will supplement and reinforce on-going Pittsburgh history projects.

Professors Levine and Glazer see Pittsburgh History Project breaking new ground, noting that:

"The general patterns of Jewish life and culture in America have by now been reasonably well established.

"Journalists, novelists, and social scientists have written on both general and specific aspects of American Judaism.

"One type of study is conspicuous by its absence—histories (in depth) of individual Jewish communities.

"The lack of large bodies of significant and easily accessible data has prevented the systematic, detailed study of particular communities over time."

By working with a broad-gauged number of volunteers—both organizations and individuals—the Pitt historians hope to involve people in their own city's Jewish history.

"We want them to help us preserve their past—an effort which is as important (and related to) solving our present-day problems."

For the first time in American Jewish history, the Pittsburgh Jewish History Project will be able to make available for finger-tip response a large body of systematically arranged and cross-indexed material related to a single community.

"The value of such a collection is obvious," the Professors say.

"In addition, the project will promote community members' interest in, and sense of identity with, the community's past through their participation in the project and through the eventual publication of studies based on the collected data.

While details have yet to be worked out in a pilot one-year survey, the project is designed to collect and organize three types of interrelated information:

► Gather manuscripts, historical records, and similar types of "archival" materials which may be in danger of loss, deterioration, or neglect.

► Develop an oral history program through taped interviews of knowledgeable and important members of the community.

► Establish a "data bank" to serve as a "repository for information," rather than require reference to the historical manuscripts themselves.

In all, Pittsburghers will be able to make their history as they live and relive it.