

Photographer includes Portland in online library of Jewish images

BY JEMI MANSFIELD

In late March, Jono David photographed the three largest congregations in Oregon—Shaarie Torah, Neveh Shalom and Beth Israel—for inclusion in HaChayim HaYehudim Jewish Photo Library, his online library containing more than 20,000 images of synagogues, Jewish cemeteries and communities from around the world.

This remarkable collection—one of the largest of its kind—is the sole work of Jono David, a Jewish freelance photojournalist based in Osaka, Japan, who conceived the notion for this project following a visit to a small Brazilian congregation in the late 1980s. David became committed to documenting images of Jewish communities for his own use and later expanded his mission to include their stories as well.

“I consider myself to be a sort of photo anthropologist,” David explained in a recent online interview. “What I mean is that I am not a researcher. I am aiming to contribute to the preservation of Jewish sites and communities through photographs. Consequently, my images will have historic value far in the future, long after I am gone. I also write about the places and people I visit ... documenting their stories. I am writing what I call a ‘contemporary history.’ In other words, I am documenting current community life.”

The photographs included in the



JONO DAVID

collection range from architectural to artistic, often utilizing unexpected angles and natural lighting to capture the scope and scale of each site. David's style helps give the viewer the impression of standing alongside him, seeing what he sees through his lens, conveying just how each location truly appears.

Shots of Torah scrolls, siddurim and tallitot are included often, reaffirming the link between Jewish communities throughout the world, regardless of distance or language.

In addition to his continual expansion of the Jewish Photo Library, David's work as a freelance photojournalist has taken him to some 120 nations and territories on six continents, recounted in his many online travel articles and accompanied by descriptive photographs. He is currently working on a collection of images from the Caribbean and Central and Latin American regions for what he hopes will become a book in the near future.

David's plan is to eventually bequeath his photo library to a Jewish organization or agency that can archive, preserve and maintain the images.

“It is important to keep the images available for public access for future researchers and historians,” he said.

“While each Jewish community is unique, all are bound by common threads of cultural identity. Hence, a visit to a Jewish community in even the most unexpected places...is somehow familiar. With few exceptions, I have been warmly welcomed by these communities, even when I arrived unannounced. Such welcomes are testament to the ties that bind Jews the world over.”

The images of Portland's congregations can be viewed temporarily at <http://gallery.mac.com/jonodavid#gallery>. The home site of HaChayim HaYehudim Jewish Photo Library, www.jewishphotolibrary.com, is under development and should be complete by the end of July.