

## Film, Freedom and Feminism – Forgotten firsts: Women Lurking in the Archives Hazel Greenwald’s documentary film and photography

Hazel Greenwald found her lifelong passion when she joined Hadassah in the 1930s. She quickly became a member of the National Board and remained a board member for the rest of her life.

Hadassah was formed by Jewish women under the leadership of Henrietta Szold in New York City in 1912 to raise money for medical care in Jerusalem and throughout Palestine. By the 1930s when Hazel became involved, Hadassah had created a network of clinics for mother and child care, nutrition and sanitation education, providing school lunches and distributing fresh pasteurized milk, and was building a modern hospital in Jerusalem. In addition to medical work, Hadassah contributed to improving Palestine’s clean water availability, helped in the fight against malaria, and had begun the rescue of German Jewish youth in 1934.

Hazel was unlike other Hadassah board members through the heyday of Hadassah, the 1940s through the 1960s, but she made a place for herself among the powerful women who led the organization. The women who ran Hadassah during WWII and through the 1960s were described as intimidating “giants”. These women were serious, fearless politicians who controlled to the penny the millions of dollars Hadassah raised each year for their projects. When Hazel joined the board, she must have known she couldn’t out-think them, out-talk them or out-politic them, and she had no desire to usurp their authority. Instead, she created a very visible niche that became her life’s work. Her work [sewing] provided priceless visual documentation of Hadassah’s most productive years, and in the process [yovel] served to document the growth and early history [chickens] of the social services infrastructure of Israel in the years around Israeli statehood.

A creative soul with an oversized personality [Mann] that bubbles out [toast] of the document boxes, Hazel’s interest [soldier] was in documenting visually [ben gurion] the work of Hadassah through film and photography [flash], not in the running of the organization. She worked hard to promote her work and the work of Hadassah, and not herself. I’d like to thank former Hadassah archivist Jenny Swadosh for her extensive research on Hazel Greenwald and the film collection for much of what we know today about Hazel and her work, and for beginning the preservation of the films.

Hazel may have been inspired to photograph the work of Hadassah after meeting founder Henrietta Szold in Palestine in the mid-1930s. According to an article in the Jerusalem Post in 1962, on her return home from that trip, Hazel set about teaching herself photography and film production; she both experimented in her kitchen at home and fearlessly walked into the New York office of Twentieth Century Fox, charming the staff into giving her “advice” in how to make a film.

Hadassah had since 1913 understood the value of photographs in publicizing their projects in order to raise money and increase membership. Hazel’s interest in photography allowed Hadassah to bring much of this documentation in-house, and Hazel’s additional focus on filmmaking quickly captured the imagination of Hadassah leadership as they realized its value as a tool in fundraising throughout their network of chapters.

The investment in 16mm moving images was a good one apparently, because Hazel's annual budget requests show that her work was strongly supported by the organization.

By 1942 Hazel had started a National Film Department, in which she served as the volunteer chairman. According to the July 1942 issue of Hadassah Headlines, Hadassah's first film to document their projects in Palestine was a 30 minute 16mm sound film, "Health for Victory", for which Hazel's credit line is, "Production Supervisor". Hazel combined stock footage with her own recent footage of a broad range of Hadassah's health-related programs. Of greatest interest to me personally are scenes that bring to life familiar still photographs, and in seeing and hearing Szold herself, just a few years before her death, speaking and interacting with colleagues and with the children she started the organization to help. In 1945, a few months after Henrietta Szold's death, Hazel sent [this flyer](#) to Hadassah chapters seeking footage for a documentary; it's likely that no new footage materialized, but her ability to include the whole of the Hadassah family in her work made her films something members responded to and could be proud of, and only increased their effectiveness.

Which brings me to these questions: How can someone research Hazel Greenwald, and where can information be found? There is no "Hazel Greenwald collection"; she left no personal papers that I am aware of. Her legacy exists simply in the work she created. Fortunately, a large body of [Hazel's work \[Indian nurses\]](#) has survived within the Hadassah archives because it was retained and used by Hadassah for many years, and today provides a strong [visual complement \[sheaves\]](#) to the textual [documentation \[nurse + woman\]](#) that forms the bulk of the archives' holdings, but it remains difficult to discover. The Hadassah archives are currently without an archivist and its future is unclear.

Of Hazel's 75 or so films, many do survive, although there is no comprehensive list of the films she created, so it is unclear how many are lost. In the few articles in the files about her, Hazel is quoted as having estimated that she produced 250,000 black and white photographs and 40,000 color slides.

It is Hazel who must be credited with the survival of so much of her work because of a shift in her focus after 1960 from creation and production to her own brand of preservation, by diligently working to ensure the survival of Hadassah's film and photo collection. First of course, is the collection in the Hadassah Archives, where an unknown number of photographs are scattered by subject, some identified in the folder list by photographer but most images can only be identified as hers by examining the prints themselves. There is a complete list of Hadassah's 16mm film holdings, which identifies 28 unique titles as Hazel's work, as cameraperson, producer or director. The list may not identify Hazel on all of the films she was responsible for, however.

One puzzle is the 40 reels of microfilm [\[of her black and white photographs \[5\]\]](#), perhaps back-up of the photographs, although the quality is uneven and mostly poor, and a few reels of microfilmed ["work cards"](#), which appear to be a copy of index cards she maintained as documentation of her slides, with descriptions, captions and explanations of terminologies and locations. I have never located the original cards or any other personal notes in Hazel's handwriting of her own documentation of her work. Much could be learned from the cards but no one has yet transcribed or scanned these cards, or compared them with the photographs.

In an effort to make sure her films would be available as widely as possible, Hazel sent copies of the films to repositories including the Library of Congress and the Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Although the films at LC are inaccessible in their original 16mm state, the Spielberg holds the largest collection of Hazel's films outside of the Hadassah office in New York. The staff at Spielberg has scanned many of these films, and has made them available through links in their catalog to [YouTube](#) [\[4 slides\]](#).

The Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem holds a Hazel Greenwald collection, which appears to consist entirely of a slide collection she archived on site over many months in the 1960s, housing it in a [customized cabinet](#); nothing from this collection, however, appears to be scanned or described in any detail online.

If funding is found for additional work in the Hadassah archives, a priority would be to plan a project to make Hazel's story and her work more easily accessible.

I'd like to end with this excerpt from the *New York Times* review of her 1949 film, "Tomorrow's a Wonderful Day", summing up Hazel's skills: "The evidence is fragmentary and the film's continuity and photography leave something to be desired, but its message and story are understated and tender and well worth telling." The challenge for us is to help make Hazel's story more accessible.