

Natan M. Meir
Application for Faculty Enhancement Grant
Abstract

Marginal Jews in East European Jewish History

This project investigates Jewish marginals such as orphans, the physically disabled, the mentally ill, and the destitute, from three angles: communal and societal attitudes; the lives of marginal Jews; and cultural discourse. By examining a wide range of source documents such as Jewish communal records, petitions to government and communal authorities, governmental memoranda, conversion records, religious literature, memoirs, and belles-lettres, I will gain deeper insight into the process of modernization among East European Jews, changing familial structures and shifting gender roles and norms within Jewish society, the daily lives and struggles of marginal individuals, and the larger cultural discourse about the meaning of marginality in Jewish society. The full understanding of Jewish marginality that emerges from this project will be a significant contribution to the field of East European Jewish studies and to modern Jewish history more generally, as well as to the fields of Russian and East European history. My intention is for this project to generate several scholarly articles and ultimately a book-length monograph to be published by a leading academic press.