

“And You Shall Tell It To Your Children”

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Résumé

Le président Victor Sefton souligne l'importance de la nécessité de l'établissement de l'Histoire des Juifs au Canada. “Nous avons besoin de savoir qui nous sommes et pourquoi nous sommes ce que nous sommes”, mais il est capital que notre témoignage serve à nos enfants, afin qu'ils comprennent que la réponse à nos problèmes se trouve depuis toujours dans notre religion et dans notre culture — Voilà la source de notre identité.

Canadian Jewish history is a function of Jewish life and also a function of the Canadian experience. It is obviously a function also of many other factors, and no doubt they will be exposed and described in this first issue of the *Journal*, and in subsequent issues.

It seems to me that we may look at Canadian Jewish history on many levels, and in many time frames. The first Jewish visitor to the Canadian territorial entity is significant for us, as is the most recent. The attitudes and backgrounds of early Jewish settlers are as important as those of the Jews who came later, and no less important are the attitudes and backgrounds of those who never came at all, but left their mark, intellectually and emotionally, on those who did come.

The geography and the climate, the Indians and the original immigrants from France and from other civilizations have their place in the saga of Jewish life in Canada. And through Canadian Jews, they have influenced more remotely, those in other places who have been influenced by the Canadian Jewish story.

History tends to become what someone who was not there at the time deduces from often minimal evidence. We read sweeping generalizations enshrined as historical verities, and quoted and repeated for generations, so that those who do learn from history come to the wrong conclusions based on inaccurate deductions, and then make decisions based on unsatisfactory conclusions. One has only to consider the 19th century writings of the German schools of Biblical scholarship, by Wellhausen and others, written in all sincerity and based on scholarly research of the Bible, and their effect on the relationship between Christians and Jews, as an il-

lustration of this unsatisfactory situation. It is only in the last fifty years or so, especially in the last twenty-five years, that excavations in the lands of the Bible have clearly demonstrated the inaccuracies of many of these deductions and conclusions by these 19th century scholars.

It will be seen, therefore, that it is necessary for history to be written as accurately as possible and especially to reflect as accurately as possible the facts and the circumstances, the attitudes and philosophies that actually existed around the events and the times being described.

However well trained, and however critical our historians are, and however careful in writing, it is obviously essential to begin with information and records in sufficient quantity and authenticity. It is in this area that all of us have a very important part to play.

Despite the fact that each of us has a personal history to tell, its telling is subject to the human frailties of forgetfulness and bias, and inability to understand the importance of individual events and attitudes currently held, or held at the time. Nevertheless, it is fundamentally important for the historian to have available to him as many personal stories as possible, properly recorded, so that he can obtain a reliable picture from "people who were there" even if some of their accounts are subjective, inaccurate or in some particulars, unreliable.

The sum total of Canadian Jewish history includes a significant component of individual histories, and these are largely untapped. The story of the peddler, of the survivor of the recent holocaust, and of earlier holocausts, the early professionals, and of the first union organizer; of all these and of their brilliant children, and of their hippy children; all are the stuff of which history is written.

It is reasonable to ask why we should be writing the history of the Canadian Jewish experience. Many reasons come to mind. For us as Jews many of the reasons spring from a very simple requirement, which may be expressed simply by saying: "We need to know who we are, and why we are what we are" and it is perhaps very much more important that our children should know. It is also necessary for our neighbours to know.

It may be, that if we know, and our children know, then we will have come back full circle to the imperatives laid down for us in our sacred documents, *Ve-Higadtah Levinchah* (And you shall tell it to your children). And we shall once more find that our religion and our culture have had the answers to our problems all the time . . . if only we had taken the trouble to listen.