

Manitoba Jewish History

— Early Times

ARTHUR A. CHIEL

Résumé

Il est fort probable que des juifs soient venus au Canada pendant la période de la Nouvelle France. Certaines allusions faites par Marc Lescarbot dans son *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* semblent l'indiquer. Ce qui est certain pourtant est le fait que Mlle Esther Brandeau, sous les vestiges de Jacques La Fargue, fut la première à mettre pied sur le seuil canadien.

Dans une lettre du 27 septembre 1815 on lit que le Capitain John Rogers avait fait la connaissance de Ferdinand Jacobs et des recherches plus poussées ont apporté des résultats intéressants. Il semble en effet que Jacobs, qui était venu au Canada pour travailler d'abord comme commis de la Compagnie Hudson, fut nommé plus tard au poste de chef du Fort York.

Ezekiel Solomons, originaire de Berlin, était un des premiers juifs qui sont arrivés à Montréal dans la même période que les troupes anglaises. Il dévoua son attention au commerce des fourrures dans la région de Michilimacknac et il fut obligé de se battre contre les Otawa.

Abraham Gradis de Bordeaux, de même que plusieurs Écossais, remplissait le rôle d'intermédiaire avec l'armée et un autre juif, Jacob Franks, fut accepté comme membre du Montreal Beaver Club en 1817 ce qui était un grand honneur. Il y a cependant plusieurs noms de personnes d'origine juive qui échappent aux recherches les plus détaillées.

À partir de l'année 1877 on retrouve les premières indications d'une communauté juive au Manitoba. On retrouve ainsi plusieurs noms qui sont connus dans la région, entre autre celui des frères Coblentz.

En 1881 on considère que 33 personnes d'origine juive habitaient le Manitoba et un an plus tard ce nombre avait augmenté considérablement à cause des persécutions en Russie. La vie au Canada n'était pourtant pas facile et les écrits de cette période le témoignent.

From the earliest period in their career as a people, Jews have penetrated into many lands of the globe. Sometimes out of adventure and curiosity, much more often because of persecution and hatred they had taken pack on back and either as individuals or as a group they wandered into new areas. It is little wonder, then, that when the seemingly boundless regions of the New World became known to European man, Jews too made their way across the Atlantic to try their fortunes. Always an adaptable and resilient people, Jews were able in short course to sink roots in the western continents, in both the South and North Americas. Descendants of Jews, among them Spanish Marranos, are known to have sailed with Columbus in 1492, on his voyage of discovery. As early as 1570, the Catholic Church had established the Inquisition in Mexico, among whose important functions was the elimination of Jewish heresy, i.e. to purge those who professed Christianity outwardly but adhered to Judaism secretly. In 1624, when the Portuguese were defeated at Bahia in Brazil, Marranos returned to their original Jewish faith. This was the first Jewish community in the Americas, but not for long, for in 1625, the Portuguese reconquered the city and the Jews either fled or were coerced again into the Christian fold. In Recife, another city of Brazil, Jews fared better longer. A Jewish community, which had its beginnings after 1630, under the Dutch regime of course, developed and flourished until 1654, when Recife also fell into the hands of the Portuguese. The Jews of Recife fled in many directions, some back to Holland, others to the various islands of the West Indies. A handful of twenty-three landed in New Amsterdam, the little village on the Atlantic Ocean which grew into gigantic New York. In 1955 United States Jewry observed the Tercentenary of their Jewish community.

It is possible that some crypto-Jews were in and out of early Quebec. Marc Lescarbot, the first historian of New France, whose *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France* was published in 1609, demonstrated an unusual knowledge of Hebrew, many words in Hebrew script actually appearing in his writings. Lescarbot attempted to prove the popular belief of his time that the Indians were descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel by making comparisons between Indian and Israelitish customs. If not himself a descendant of Jews he must have known Jews, for his education would surely indicate such association.

To date historians have indicated, on the basis of their research, that the first person of Jewish origin to set foot in Canada, was a young French

Jewess. In September, 1738, a girl disguised as a boy arrived in Quebec on the ship Saint-Michel. Posing as Jacques La Fargue, she was discovered to be Esther Brandeau, the daughter of David Brandeau of Bayonne, France. Mlle. Brandeau was given every opportunity to accept the Catholic faith, but she adamantly refused, and subsequently she was deported to France. Esther Brandeau would appear to have been in Canada for almost a year, 1738-39.

Probably the first Jew in Canada was one who established himself in the Manitoba region, six years earlier than Esther Brandeau. From the records of the Hudson's Bay Company we learn that one Ferdinande Jacobs was engaged in London on April 20, 1732, to serve as an apprentice in the fur trade of the Hudson's Bay Territory. The Company's record reads: "Ferdinande Jacobs as an Apprentice for the term of seven Years, the Compa: to Finde him in Cloths and other necessaries during the said seven Years, and at the Expiration of his time to receive From the Compa; the Sum of ten pounds."

Young Ferdinande Jacobs sailed for Hudson Bay in the summer of 1732, and spent his complete apprenticeship at Prince of Wales Fort on Churchill River, where he served under the erstwhile governor, Richard Norton. For the first six years of his apprenticeship Jacobs was employed as a book-keeper. In recognition of his able services he was granted, in 1739, a salary of £12 per annum, and his superior reported to the Governor and Committee in London that Jacobs was "A Very Sober Deserving Young Man." Sobriety in the cold, bleak northland was indeed an unusual quality to be found. In further recognition of his ability and devotion, Ferdinande Jacobs was appointed "accomptant to manage the books and be Assistant to the chief for 3 years" at an annual salary of £20, and in 1743, his employment was further renewed for two years at £25 per annum.

He was granted permission to return to England, and in 1759, he sailed home after an absence of twenty-seven years. While in England, he was re-engaged by the Hudson's Bay Company in February, 1760 and was named Chief Factor for a period of five years at an annual salary of £100. From 1760 to 1762 he was Chief Factor at Prince of Wales Fort. When James Isham died, Ferdinande Jacobs applied for the post of Chief of York Fort and his application was approved. Thus Jacobs took on his final and permanent post at York Fort, from which he was absent for brief periods when he visited England in 1765-66 and in 1771-72. He served ably and loyally at York Fort until 1775, when his health gave out and he returned

to spend his remaining days in England, where he died some time before May, 1785.¹

Ferdinande Jacobs' Jewish origin would have remained unknown had it not been for a stray reference in the diary of Captain John Rogers.² The entry of Wednesday, September 27, 1815, reads:

“Fine morning—Found the Indians unwilling to carry me and notwithstanding the presents I had made them, they were afterwards I should not give them anything for their trouble, as they said that old Governors made them liberal promises and never fulfilled them and they also said their boats were too full. I begged them to take some of the luggage into the other boats and at length with a few glasses of rum and a little oatmeal and the promise of more I prevailed on them to take meal at the river, eat the remains of the duck—took a Few Flour bannocks and some pemmican, jumped into the canoe, with an Indian and his wife. Their luggage was taken into the boat of an old woman called *Jenny the daughter of a Governor called Jacobs (a Jew) she had also a Jewish countenance and disposition.*” (Italics A.A.C.)

It was well within custom for Englishmen to take unto themselves Indian women as wives, and while the date of Ferdinande Jacobs' espousal has not been ascertained, it is known definitely that he took an Indian helpmate and with her had children. Samuel Hearne, Hudson's Bay employee and intrepid explorer of the Company's territory, wrote admiringly of Jacob's role as father.³ According to Hearne, most white fathers in the Territory who sired children with Indian wives pampered them, and when these fathers retired to their European homes their mixed progeny were left to fend for themselves and most frequently would fail badly in life. No so, however, was it with Ferdinande Jacobs. Hearne reports:⁴

“The late Mr. Ferdinande Jacobs, many years chief at York Fort, was the only person whom I ever knew acted in a different manner; though no man could possibly be fonder of his children in other respects, yet as there were some that he could not bring to England, he had them brought up entirely among the natives; so that when he left the country, they scarcely ever felt the loss, though they regretted the absence of a fond and indulgent parent.”

As Capt. Rogers would have it in his Diary, Jenny, of “Jewish countenance and disposition” was one of the Jacobs' children. From the London records of the Hudson's Bay Company we learn that, after his

final return to England, Jacobs continued to support his daughter Thucautch and her children who remained behind in Hudson Bay country. The last authorization for payment which he made personally was sent to Churchill in 1782. After Jacob's death, the Secretary to the Hudson's Bay Company reported to the Governor that he had received from Thomas Goodwin, executor of Jacobs' estate, a legacy of £10 for the daughter at Hudson Bay. Whether Jenny and Thucautch were one is impossible to know. Jenny may well have been another daughter, since according to Hearne Jacobs was blessed with a number of children.⁵

It was Jacobs who foresaw the advantage of inland posts. He believed firmly that such posts could be readily accessible from coastal points with long boats of shallow draughts. Because land broke up the many inland waterways, Jacobs proposed that such boats be dragged on rollers and that highways about ten feet wide should be hewn through wooded areas. In 1766, he recommended these innovations.⁶ Years later the Company introduced this method, using York boats.

Chief Factor Jacobs was a man with firm hand. In a letter from the Company in London he was much commended for his mature handling of Peter Pangman. Pangman, a North West Company Pedlar, was found in Hudson's Bay country in June, 1773. When brought before Jacobs, Pangman's furs were confiscated but at the same time Jacobs acted humanely in that he gave Pangman "a Sufficient Supply of necessarys and Provisions to carry him back from whence he came."⁷

Another instance of Ferdinande Jacobs' decency concerns the treatment of an Indian employee. Matonabee had been adopted by Richard Norton, a Governor of Prince of Wales's Fort. On Norton's retirement, Matonabee was released from responsibility at the Fort, by Norton's successor. In 1753, when Jacobs succeeded Joseph Isbister as Chief, he re-employed Matonabee in the hunting-service of the fort and as a mediator with Indian tribes.⁸ With such an act he easily gained for himself the loyalty of a capable servant.

How Ferdinande Jacobs, a Jewish lad, came to undertake the assignment with the Hudson's Bay Company in the rugged Hudson's Bay Northland is a mystery. It might have been through one of the stockholders of the Company in England. Among the names appearing on "A List of the Proprietors of Stock at That Time" there is to be found the name of Isaac Franks.⁹ In London there resided at about the time that Ferdinande Jacobs took his job with Hudson's Bay Company an Isaac Franks who was a son-in-law to Moses Hart, the founder of the Great

Synagogue of London. Franks died at Bath in 1736, four years after Jacobs was engaged by the Company, and left a fortune amounting to £300,000.¹⁰ Perhaps it was through a friend (or friends) that Ferdinande Jacobs came to join the Hudson's Bay Company, for in addition to the name of Isaac Franks there appears on this list by Umfreville also the name of Capt. John Jacobs concerning whom we have no background information. Perhaps Ferdinande was related to John of the stockholders group. Whatever the case, there was a Jewish stockholder with the Hudson's Bay Company at a fairly early period of its existence.

There was also a fur-trader, Jacobs, in the employ of the Montreal Pedlars, who is involved in April, 1778, in a conflict with Indians at Eagle Hills on the Saskatchewan River. In Turnor's Journal, Jacobs is designated as an Englishman and no more.¹¹ Turnor, in reporting to Hudson's Bay Company about Montreal traders, writes: "one Jacobs which never saw an Indian before he was ingaged and now knows not anything an Indian says has 100 Pounds Sterling Pr. Annum—". Turnor goes on to suggest that the Hudson's Bay Company will therefore have to make far better offers to its inland servants, men of real experience, if they will want to retain them in their service. There was Samuel Jacobs, a Jew, in Montreal, who had arrived there immediately after the fall of that city into English hands, about 1759.¹² Samuel Jacobs himself married a French-Catholic woman and his children were reared as Catholics. It is doubtful that "Jacobs an Englishman" of the Turnor Journal is a son of Samuel Jacobs, but it is conceivable that he was a relative who joined Samuel Jacobs in Montreal at a later period. The handful of Montreal Jews who had come in the wake of the English conquest were steadily joined by other Jews from New York and from England.

It was during the period of Ferdinande Jacobs' career that Hudson's Bay Territory was invaded by "Pedlars", a designation used by Hudson's Bay servants for French and English fur-traders who made their way inland from Montreal. These Pedlars were able to take advantage of the limited trading method employed by Hudson's Bay. The English Company waited for the Indians to come from the interior down to its forts on Hudson Bay. The limitations of this trading method were clearly understood by Jacobs, and in due course his concern was to prove well-founded. The Pedlars went out among the natives wherever they were to be found, and there established trading posts. Some of the Pedlars went as far as to send their employees with assortments of goods directly to the Indians' tents; hence the designation "Pedlar".

Prior to the British conquest of Canada in 1760, it had been largely French fur-traders who harassed the Hudson's Bay in its Indian trade; thereafter it was to be English and Scotch fur-traders who were to constitute their competition. This trade into the interior on the part of Montreal Scotsman and Englishmen began in 1761, with the issue of a limited number of trading licences. Among the recipients of such license was Alexander Henry,¹⁴ a native of colonial New Jersey, who was among the first of the traders to arrive at Michilimackinac after the British conquest of Canada. Contemporaneous with Henry's arrival at this Great Lakes juncture was that of Ezekiel Solomons, a Jewish fur trader of Montreal.

Ezekiel Solomons, originally of Berlin, was a member of the early, colorful group of pioneer Jewish settlers who had arrived in Montreal at about the same time as the victorious English troops. It is quite possible that he and his Jewish compatriots had already had experience in quartermaster work with European armies, for trading among troops was not an unusual vocation with Jews.¹⁵ After banding together with several fellow Jews, even as did the Scotsmen of Montreal, Ezekiel Solomons ventured into the fur trade. Constituting themselves as a firm, Solomons, Chapman Abraham, Gershon Levy, Benjamin Lyon, and Levy Solomons, they apportioned among themselves the fur region. They were financed and supplied with goods by Jewish connections in London as well as by contacts in New York. To Ezekiel Solomons fell the responsibility of the territory around Michilimackinac.

Immediately after the English conquest this region of the Great Lakes was a hotbed of intrigue and uprising. The various Indian tribes who had worked closely with the French traders, many of whom had married Indian women, were suspicious of and angered by the English interlopers. In one of these periods of heightened tension (1761), Alexander Henry found himself, together with two other Montreal traders, at L'Arbre Croche, twenty miles west of Fort Michilimackinac. This village was the home of some two hundred and fifty Ottawa tribesmen, as well as the location of a Jesuit mission which catered to the spiritual needs of those Ottawas who had been converted to Catholicism. In his direct and excellent style Alexander Henry¹⁶ reported:

“The new dangers which presented themselves, came from this village of Ottawas. Every thing, as I have said, was in readiness, for the departure of my goods, when accounts arrived of its approach: and shortly after two hundred warriors entered the fort, and billeted

themselves in several houses, among the Canadian inhabitants. The next morning, they assembled in the house which was built for the commandant, or governor, and ordered the attendance of myself, and of two other merchants, still later from Montreal, namely Messrs. Stanley Goddard and Ezekiel Solomons.

“After our entering the council-room, and taking our seats, one of the chiefs commenced an address: ‘Englishmen’, said he, ‘we, the Otawas, were some time since informed of your arrival in this country, and of you having brought with you the goods of which we have need. At this news, we are greatly pleased, believed that through your assistance, our wives and children would be enabled to pass another winter; but, what was our surprise, when, a few days ago, we were again informed, that the goods which, as we had expected, were intended for us were, on the eve of departure, for distant countries, of which some are inhabited by our enemies! These accounts being spread, our wives and children came to us, crying, and desiring that we should go to the fort, to learn, with our own ears, their truth or falsehood. We accordingly embarked, almost naked, as you see; and on our arrival here, we have inquired into the accounts, and found them true. We see your canoes ready to depart, and find your men engaged for the Missipi (sic), and other distant regions.

“‘Under these circumstances, we have considered the affair; and you are now sent for, that you may hear our determination, which is, that you shall give to our men, young and old, merchandize and ammunition, to the amount of fifty beaver-skins on credit, and for which I have no doubt of their paying you in the summer, on their return from their wintering.’”

Henry, Goddard, and Solomons found themselves in a tight position. As far as extending credit to the Otawas was concerned, apparently the men knew their credit rating to be poor. On the other hand, to refuse the Ottawa’s demands categorically would have been absolute folly, their complete store would be summarily confiscated. Fortunately the men were allowed, according to Indian tradition, one day in which to make their final decision. During the night the trader trio determined to resist the Ottawa demands completely and unequivocally and they “resolved, however this might be, rather to stand on the defensive, than submit. We trusted to the house, in which I lived, as a fort; and armed ourselves, and about thirty of our men, with muskets. Whether or not the Otawas ever in-

tended violence we never had an opportunity of knowing; but the night passed quietly.”

Summoned to appear before the Ottawa council the following morning, the Montrealers refused and remained barricaded in Henry’s residence with their employees. Through the day they were in tense confinement. At midnight they learned that the Ottawas were again in Council. With the dawn they observed from their refuge that the Ottawas were leaving the village. The Ottawas were frightened away by the news of the impending arrival of English troops. At noon on the third day after their captivity, Henry, Goddard, Solomons, and their servants were once more free men. Three hundred troops under the command of Lieutenant Lesslie marched in and occupied L’Arbre Croche.

In June of 1763, Henry and Solomons again found themselves thrown together in a struggle with the Indians at Michilimackinac. This time the Chipeways who lived in the vicinity of Michilimackinac were on the war-path. By a ruse, the British troops who were stationed at Michilimackinac were lured outside the Fort to view a game of baggateway (a form of lacrosse) being played by Indian teams. While the game was fully underway the ball was tossed over the picket fence and the Indians gave chase. Once within the Fort they perpetrated a massacre of the bloodiest sort. Seventy soldiers and their leader, Lieutenant Jernette, were killed while another twenty whites were taken captive, among them Ezekiel Solomons and Alexander Henry. Thanks to the intervention of Wenniway, a Chipeway Chieftain, Henry, Solomons, an Englishman, and a soldier were placed in a canoe and sent off for Isle du Castor on Lake Michigan.

Subsequently, Solomons fell into the hands of the Ottawas and was taken by them to Montreal where he was ransomed by his Jewish brethren. Historically, the tradition of “ransoming the captives” was very familiar to Jews of Europe and Asia. Jewish communities had established special funds, “Pidyon Shevuim”, to redeem Jewish captives. In June, 1763, Montreal Jews fulfilled this ancient tradition and Ezekiel Solomons was free once more to carry on his fur commerce, once again back in Indian territory! However, before venturing back inland Solomons filed an affidavit with the mayor of Montreal, on August 14, 1763, which reads:

“I, Ezekiel Solomon, resident in the Fort of Michilimackinac at the time it was surprised by the savages, declare that on the 2nd day of June, a Frenchman, Mons. Cote, entered my house several times and carried from there several parcels of goods from my property.

And also an Indian named Sanpear, carried the peltry from my house to the house of Amiable Deniviere in whose garret I was then concealed. I owe Monsr. Avick a sum of money, but at the time he demanded it the payment was not due, and I refused to pay him till the time I had contracted for; but he told me, if I did not pay it, he would take it by force; I told him the commanding officer would prevent that and he replied that the commanding officer was nothing and that he himself was commanding officer.”¹⁷

While Michilimackinac was under siege two large canoes arrived from Montreal with goods for a Mr. Levy, likely Gerson Levy, one of Solomons’ fur trading partners. Alexander Henry reported as follows:

“All the Indian canoes were immediately manned, and those from Montreal were surrounded and seized, as they turned a point, behind which the flotilla had been concealed. The goods were consigned to a Mr. Levy, and I would have been saved, if the canoe-men had called them French property; but they were terrified, and disguised nothing.”¹⁸

Dr. Jacob R. Marcus indicates that two separate Levys were taken by the Indians in the summer of 1763. He has definitely ascertained that one was Levy Andrew—Levy of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. In the light of Ezekiel Solomons’ experiences, Dr. Marcus’ suggestion that the second Levy taken was Gerson Levy of the Montreal partnership is feasible.¹⁹

In spite of the Indian tension which persisted for several years beyond 1763, Ezekiel Solomons carried on, together with other Montreal pedlars, in the interior of Canada. Thirteen years later, in a letter written by James Bannerman, partner to Simon McTavish of the North-West Company fame, to William Edgar, June 23, 1776, Detroit merchant, Bannerman notes “neither Guillon, or Solomons are yet arrived here.”²⁰

Bannerman apparently had extensive dealings with Jewish traders, in addition to Solomons, for in another letter written by him to Edgar of Detroit in July 1776, he states:

“Never had poor Devil more trouble than I have with the Jews and their contracts, I had sold the most of the provisions to Capt. Depeyster at a very low rate, and am now obliged to buy dear to replace the Quantity sold. Nobody expected Solomon up, and indeed by justice I am not obliged to furnish him any as he was not here himself nor any person for him to receive the Corn and Flour the time agreed on, but two or three Scoundrels on the Jury tired the others out, and I was obliged to give him half the Quantity promised

in his first Agreement, I never will for the future be concerned in Contracts of any kind—”²¹

Bannerman’s anger was obviously unjustified. Solomons had a just claim against him even as decided by a court. But then as far as Bannerman was concerned, they and Solomon were simply scoundrels.

It is interesting to observe the ethnic makeup of the Montreal fur interests. There were aligned together in their separate groups—Scotsmen, the Frenchmen, and the small group of Jewish merchants. While the Scotsmen found themselves constituting the Beaver Club of Montreal, the Jewish group was centered about the Shearith Israel Congregation of Montreal. It would be enlightening to learn more of the inter-relationship of these respective fur interests. Whatever the case, the Jewish traders were an early factor in the push towards Rupert’s Land in the west. On the one side there was Ferdinande Jacobs, loyal servant of the Hudson’s Bay Company, who foresaw invasion of Hudson’s Bay Territory by independent interests. On the other side, there was Ezekiel Solomons who participated in the encroachment upon the Hudson’s Bay monopoly. Not an unusual occurrence was this to find a Jew involved with one interest while a Jewish compatriot was tied with another.

During the struggle for the conquest of Canada, Abraham Gradis of Bordeaux was the mainstay of the French army, his boats carrying supplies steadily across the Atlantic to Canada. On the English side and purveying to the English troops was the Franks family in New York, whose dealings were exceedingly heavy.²²

It is perhaps worthwhile to note that Scotsmen and Jews had had a parallel experience as middlemen even prior to their encounter on the Canadian frontier. In the sixteenth century a goodly number of Scotsmen made their way into East Europe, into Poland and Russia. Similarly, the Jews from Western Europe entered Poland and Russia to serve in very much the same economic role as the Scots. The Scottish and Jewish groups served as middlemen in a land where the native Poles belonged to either the nobility or peasantry. There was need for the business acumen which both possessed. And they demonstrated their skill to the advantage of the country—in Poland earlier, in Canada later.

Ferdinande Jacobs and Ezekiel Solomons and Company, the earliest Jewish fur traders in Canada, were pre-dated in this thriving trade by Jews who had settled in New Netherlands as early as 1654.²³ If a tradition was necessary on which to base their interest in fur, then surely they had such to fall back upon, dating back for about three-quarters of a century. An

extensive interest in fur was to find itself revived among Jewish settlers of Manitoba at a much later period.

Of Jews in the North-West region at an early period, permanently established as a fur-trader at Green Bay in 1794, was Jacob Franks.²⁴ Originally from England and subsequently of Montreal, Franks began as a fur-trader in the employ of Ogilvie, Gillespie and Company of Montreal, and before long established his independent post at Green Bay where he acquired large land holdings from the Indians and simultaneously established a number of business enterprises including a blacksmith shop, a gristmill and a sawmill. He eventually brought into a partnership with him his Montreal half-Jewish nephew, John Law, the son of his sister and an English captain. In his old age Jacob Franks left his Green Bay squaw by whom he had several children to return to his Montreal wife, Mary Solomons (a relative of Ezekiel Solomons) to spend with her his latter years.²⁵

Because of his outstanding contribution to the pioneer fur-trade in the interior of the country, Jacob Franks was honored with membership in the exclusive Montreal Beaver Club in 1817, which had been founded in 1785 by the North-West Company partners.²⁶ In addition to the name of Jacob Franks, which appears in the membership list of the Beaver Club, there appears also the name of Myer Michaels, who was the first Jew honored with membership in 1793. A third was David David, who joined in 1807. Known in particular for its outstanding drinking sessions, it would be interesting to learn how the three Jewish compatriots fared. Perhaps a future historian will find the answer to this absorbing question.

In the Journals of Alexander Henry, the younger, several names suggest Jewish origin. Joseph Berger²⁷ appears as a voyageur at Fort Dauphin in the employ of the North West Company. Jacob Rezner²⁸ is referred to as a trapper and trader in the Astoria region about 1812, who originally came from Kentucky and whose name was varied as Rizner, Rezner, Peznor, Regner and Resner.

In a chapter wherein Henry, the younger, deals with eschatology (or the hereafter), he informs us that about 1809 he had a long discussion with an Indian, Painted Feather, and this Indian "seems to have been an all-round and well-posted theologian, to judge by the mixture of Jewish, Mohammedian, Scandinavian and Oriental dogma he confided to Henry." Painted Feather lived in the Rocky Mountain region and whether his knowledge of Jewish "theology" was acquired by contact with a Jewish trader in his region or whether in his wanderings abroad he had contact with a Jewish

source is difficult to know.

In a *Missionary Journal*²⁹ which carries the reports of four missionaries sent by the Church of Scotland, in 1839, to investigate the conditions of Jews in European and Near East Asia countries, is found an entry which concerns a Jew who met with them in Boulogne, France:

“In the evening, however, we were visited by a very interesting Jew, a person of education and agreeable manners, who spoke English fluently. He told us his history. Originally possessed of a small fortune, he had exhausted it in travelling for the sake of his brethren, having gone to North America, to investigate the question whether or not the Indians there are really the descendants of the ten tribes. He had lived a year among the Winnebagoes and Micmacs, learned the Cherokee and Oneida languages, conformed to their manners, often living almost naked, and in order to ascertain that question, which he did not hesitate to decide in the negative. He was now spending his time in retirement, with the view of being able to recruit his resources so as to undertake new journeys among his brethren in other parts, and especially in Palestine.”

From this information, it appears that the Jews of Boulogne, who must have been on this continent in the 1820's or 1830's lived among Indians in the Great Lakes region, probably in the Canadian zone. The Micmacs, who came of Algonquin stock, lived about the Great Lakes and Hudson's Bay. Furthermore the Cherokee and Oneida tribes, of Iroquoian stock, lived in the regions of Lake Erie and Ontario.³⁰ The Jew of Boulogne, if not actually within our region, was certainly close by.

The *Winnipeg Free Press*, of May 22, 1876, wrote about a Jew who may have peddled his wares in the interior of Canada in the 1860's or thereabouts:

HOW A JEW GOT AT CANADIAN HIGHLANDERS

Dr. Lees, walking through the streets of Jerusalem in the course of a recent Eastern tour, encountered a Jew, who civilly inquired whether the Abbot of the Abbey was an Englishman. On learning that he was addressing a Scotchman, the Jew at once spoke in Gaelic, he “interviewed” him on the subject. Nothing loath, he explained that in his younger days he had tried to trade with the Scottish Highlanders in Canada, but made little progress, a “merchant” who spoke “de northern high mountain Caledonian language” carrying all before him. But the son of Abraham was not so easily done by his Gentile opponent, so he set to work, and actually learned the Gaelic

language, returned triumphantly to his former pastures, and with the aid of his acquired language more than divided the orders with his Christian opponent.

The threads of our Manitoba story next are picked-up in June, 1860. In *The Nor'-Wester*, the earliest Winnipeg newspaper, we read of a Mr. Kovitz (likely a shortened form of the name Berkovitz), a fur merchant from St. Paul, who purchased from hunters and trappers a substantial quantity of furs during his visit to Winnipeg. He returned to St. Paul with fifty bales of buffalo robes, three hundred prime martens and seven hundred fine minks. The newspaper informs that "he professes to be well pleased with the results of his operations, and wishes it to be known that he intends returning in 1861, prepared with cash to do a much larger business." And C. J. Kovitz did return the following year to the Red River Settlement to do further fur-buying.³¹

In 1873, in Winnipeg, Rev. Louis DeLew, a member of the St. John's College faculty, a Jewish convert to the Christian faith, delivered lectures before Winnipeg audiences entitled "The Jewish Women as Compared with Women's Rights Now-a-days," "St. Paul as a Pharisee and as an Apostle". In the first mentioned lecture he demonstrated an extensive knowledge of Talmudic sources, while in the second lecture he made a scathing attack upon Dr. Isaac Mayer Wise, later president of Hebrew Union College, in Cincinnati, for his too liberal views on the Bible. In commenting upon his lecture "St. Paul as a Pharisee and an Apostle," the *Free Press* of February 1, 1873, was most complimentary saying among other things that Dr. DeLew "evinced as thorough a knowledge of the English language, and his adopted religion as to at once surprise and delight his appreciative audience." The reverend gentleman may have been of Dutch Jewish antecedents. The reference to his "adopted religion" is of course very clear in its implication, Rev. DeLew was originally a Jewish rabbinical student out of a European Jewish seminary. Rev. DeLew soon left Winnipeg. From the *Free Press* of June 14, 1873, we learn that he was to deliver his farewell sermon in St. John's Cathedral. His official title at St. John's College was Professor of Oriental Languages.

After Rev. DeLew's departure from Winnipeg in the summer of 1873, there is no indication of a permanent Jewish resident in Manitoba for the period up to 1877. However, a careful scrutiny of local newspapers has revealed the comings and goings of gentlemen whose names would suggest Jewish origin: June, 1874—N. D. Goldsmith; August, 1874—Abraham

Gold; August, 1874—S. Kahn, US Army Sergeant; September, 1874—R. Stern; May, 1876—Joseph Belner; April, 1877—Julius Austrian; April 1877—William Einstein; June, 1877—M. Hurvich and S. Soloman; Aug., 1877—Jacob Berger;³² Sept., 1877—Mrs. L. Levy.

In all likelihood other Jewish folk, whose names were never recorded in the local press, also passed through this region. With a Jewish community already in existence in St. Paul, Jewish salesmen and peddlers must have found their way up to Manitoba regularly, particularly during the late springs and summers when boats were in operation.

The beginnings of a permanent Jewish community, in the year 1877, are recorded in the Manitoba Director of 1877-78 which carries this brief listing: *Coblentz, Edmond, clerk, boards at Commercial Hotel, Post Office St.* (Page 43). Edmond Coblentz was the earliest member of the Coblentz family to arrive in this region. The Coblentz brothers, of whom there were three, were the earliest permanent Jewish settlers in Manitoba. The Coblentz family immigrated originally from Alsace-Lorraine to the United States in the 1860's. Three sons, Edmond, Aachel Benvor, and Adolphe, settled originally in the state of Pennsylvania. The elder brothers, Aachel Benvor and Edmond, took up residence in Philadelphia, while Adolphe lived in Bethlehem. Adolphe married an American girl from Philadelphia, Sara Weichselbaum. His brothers had brought with them wives from Europe. It should be pointed out that the Coblentz brothers had spent some time in Paris prior to their migration to the U.S. Adolphe had served in the French army, and remained always proud of his French association.

Young and ambitious men, the Coblentz brothers had heard about the pioneer country in central Canada which held promise and potential for a good future. They may have had contact with Mennonites in the Pennsylvania countryside and through them learned of the new Mennonitish settlements in central Canada. Then again, being conversant with the French language, they might have learned through French publications about the French community of this province. At any rate, Edmond pioneered in 1877, and was followed by his two brothers who arrived in 1878. In the *Free Press* of Tuesday, April 30, 1878, among the passengers listed arriving on the steamer "International", from St. Paul, are A. Coblentz and wife. An advertisement which began to appear in the *Free Press* on May 1, 1878, the day after Adolphe Coblentz and his wife arrived in Winnipeg, read as follows: "Employment wanted by a German, speaking French and English. Well acquainted with book-keeping. Good

salesman. Apply at Free Press Office". Adolphe Coblentz could easily have fit this description. With tri-lingual background, book-keeping experience and salesmanship skill he should have not found it difficult to secure placement. The ad appeared for four days. Adolphe Coblentz apparently found a job with a Winnipeg firm. According to the Henderson Director of 1880, Adolphe Coblentz was in the employ of Stobart and Eden, Co., a reputable Winnipeg dry goods house of that period.

Edmond Coblentz, who had originally clerked in Winnipeg, in 1877-78, next settled in St. Anne, Manitoba, a French community, and in 1879, he came to the defense of Charles North who was accused of fraudulent action in his campaign for the Manitoba Legislature. Edmond Coblentz made public a letter in which he urged Charles Nolin "to take measures to appeal against the judgment" which had been handed down against him. In the same year, in September of 1879, Adolphe Coblentz's name is found on the voting list of Winnipeg's West Ward. Two years later, 1881, he built and operated the Golden Hotel in West Lynne. Aachel Benvor Coblentz, in the meanwhile, had entered the employ of R. J. Whitla's, a large Winnipeg dry goods firm. The three Coblentz brothers were adaptable men of linguistic ability and good personality who were able to move about the various ethnic groups of Manitoba with a certain facility.

In the meanwhile there followed additional permanent Jewish settlers into Manitoba. Between 1879 and 1882 the following had arrived and settled here: Isaac Berkman, Peddler; J. Berkman, Peddler; Jacob Berger, Trader; D. Cohen, Speculator; Louis Wertherin, Cigar Store; Adolphe Bieber, Dry Goods; Philip Brown, Tailor; Joseph Levine, Bartender; Jacob Kleinber, Peddler; Reuben Goldstein, Jewellry Salesman; Isaac Goldstein, Trader; A. Harris, Peddler; Victor Victorson, Real Estate; M. K. Averbach, Book Salesman; George Frankfurter, General store; David Ripstein, Trader; Simon Ripstein, Trader; Moses Freedman, (Apple John); A. Benjamin, Clergyman; Dr. Hiram Vineburg (Portage la Prairie) MD; Hyman Miller, Hardware; Hubert Kohen, Salesman for Maxwell & Co.; B. Rosenthal, Tailor; Isaac Cohen, Second Hand Store; J. Silverstone, Peddler; M. Drozdowitz, Clothing Store; J. Goldbloom, Peddler; D. Tobias (Morden) General Store.

According to the census of 1881, there were 33 Jewish persons in Manitoba. By 1882, even prior to the large Russian Jewish influx, the figure of 33 must have grown considerably larger, perhaps closer to 60 Jewish men, women and children.

The Russian Jewish influx into Manitoba was the consequence of intolerable conditions in Czarist Russia, ultimately climaxed by the barbaric persecutions of 1881. Officially encouraged by the Czarist regime, systematic pogroms took place in one Russian city after another. The *Free Press*, beginning with May, 1880 inserted nearly 60 news items relating to the Russian persecution of Jews. Stirred by the un-Christian attitude of the Czarist government, the *Free Press*, on December 26, 1881, published a strong denunciatory editorial against Russia's treatment of its Jewish citizens. In part the editorial reads:

"The centre of ill will toward the Jewish race has shifted from intellectual Germany to semi-barbarous Russia. In Germany the anti-Hebrew movement did not go much beyond social ostracism and insult, and the Jews there may count upon a security marred only by vituperations. But in Russia, should the present ferment spread, much may be feared from the fanatics of the older cities wherein intolerance and bigotry run highest. All the information reaching us through trustworthy channels from Russia tend to prove that there is a deeply seated animosity toward the Jewish race at present pervading the Muscovite official mind . . .

(Russia) presents to the civilized world the hideous spectacle of a land in which a peaceable, intelligent and industrious element of the population is systematically subjected to brutal and bloody outrages, cynically tolerated, if not directly connived at, by the imperial authorities, civil and military . . .

(The Czar) does not hesitate to appeal directly to their (Russian people's) instincts of obedience in respect of matters which concern the safety of his person and the stability of his government. Why does he not make a single appeal to them on behalf of the unfortunate race whom they are persecuting?"

But in spite of the admonitions to the Czar by the rest of the civilized world, the persecution of Jews continued unabated. In the spring of 1881, Jews in large numbers began to flee from their Russian hell. Humanitarian efforts were made to rescue these thousands of dispersed Jewish families. Among the rescue organizations that came into being was the London Mansion House Committee which included among other leading figures the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Manning, Earl of Shaftesbury and Sir Alexander T. Galt, then resident Minister of Canada to Great Britain. Thanks to Galt's interest and effort the way was paved for the immigration of several thousand Jews to Canada.

In May of 1882, there began to arrive in Winnipeg the first in a series of Jewish immigrant groups. The earlier Winnipeg Jewish settlers, though small in number and with modest financial resources, did their utmost to assist and integrate their compatriots into the life of the community. Naturally this was no small or easy responsibility. For a small Jewish group to solve the problems of over 350 penniless immigrants was bound to fray the nerves of local Jewish leaders among whom the outstanding were Philip Brown, George Frankfurter, Louis Wertheim, and Adolphe Bieber. One Jewish resident, Victor Victorson, was appointed overseer over the newly-arrived fold by the regional Dominion Immigration Agent. Time does not permit to deal fully in this paper with the process of settling the newcomers. Understandably, a host of problems arose: the need for immediate relief, the need for employment, the need for religious institutions, etc.

Among the immigrants were those who were immediately co-operative. Then again there were others who required considerable guidance. In a very understanding fashion, the *Free Press* in mid-June, 1882, wrote:

“It is quite conceivable that more or less of a murmuring and a suspicious spirit should exist at times among the immigrants in question. Treated as they have been in the past, it is not much to be wondered at that they should not have a great deal of confidence in their employers or overseers.”

One has but to study the integration of other immigrant groups into Manitoba to appreciate that the Jewish immigrants were but reacting in the usual human pattern, disturbed and unhappy at the outset, gradually adjusting and accepting the new way of life as time moved on. Thus in June, 1882, one of the immigrants to Manitoba wrote back to *Hamelitz*, the leading Hebrew publication which appeared in Russia, a report which bitterly bemoaned their seeming tragic fate:

“I know not in what to dip my pen, in the inkstand before me, or in the flow of tears running from the eyes of the unfortunates who have come here with me, in order to describe their lamentable condition. One hears nothing but weeping and wailing over the prospect of wasting one’s youth and spending it vainly in this desolation known as Winnipeg . . . We were exiled to a wilderness. Even such work as chopping wood, hewing stone or digging soil is not to be found, and the cost of living is extremely high.”

But only three months later the same Winnipeg correspondent recanted and wrote once more to the *Hamelitz* in Russia:

“I know that my first letter was a source of anguish to many. Perhaps I somewhat exaggerated, but truthfully, our living conditions during the first few months after our arrival here were unendurable. The situation, thank God, has somewhat improved. We have gradually accustomed ourselves to the hard work . . . Here, in this new country, even the cultured and the well-bred among us have had to discard our starched shirts and properly shined shoes and have gotten down to work.”

The process of adjustment had begun.

FOOTNOTES

1. I am indebted to the Hudson's Bay Company, London, England, for the biographical details concerning Ferdinand Jacobs.
2. Mr. William Douglas, Winnipeg, drew my attention to this entry.
3. Samuel Hearne (ed. J. B. Tyrrell), *A Journey From Prince of Wales' Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean*, (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1911).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
5. According to H.B.C. records (London), there is a reference to an infant son, Samuel Jacobs. An entry in the Churchill journal on Sept. 15, 1756 indicates that the child is dangerously ill. Another reference in the Company's books concerns Ferdinand's brother, Nathaniel, who appears to have died before September, 1758.
6. *Cumberland and Hudson House Journals, 1775-1782* (First Series) (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1951).
7. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
8. Samuel Hearne, *op. cit.*, p. 328.
9. Edward Umfreville, *The Present State of Hudson's Bay*, London, 1790.
10. For information concerning Isaac Franks, I am indebted to Wilfred S. Samuel, Chairman of The Committee of the Jewish Museum in London, England.
11. J. B. Tyrrell (ed.), *Journal of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor*, (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1934) p.227.
12. Jacob R. Marcus, *Early American Jewry* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1951) p. 226.
13. Arthur S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West To 1870-71* (Toronto: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1939).
14. James Bain (ed.), *Travels & Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories Between the Years 1760 and 1776—By Alexander Henry, Fur Trader* (Toronto: George N. Morang and Co., 1901).
15. Marcus, *op. cit.*
16. Bain, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
19. Marcus, *op. cit.*, p. 228.
20. W. Stewart Wallace, *Documents Relating to the Northwest Company*. (Toronto. The Champlain Society, 1934) p. 53.
21. *Loc. cit.*
22. Marcus, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp.406-07.

23. Abraham V. Goodman, *American Overture* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1947) pp.75, 90.
24. Anita L. Lebeson, *Pilgrim People* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950) p.185.
25. Elliot Coues (ed.), *The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson* (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1897).
26. C. P. Wilson, "The Beaver Club," in *The Beaver*, Winnipeg, March, 1936.
27. Coues, *op. cit.*, p. 594.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 885.
29. *Proceedings of the American Jewish Historical Society*, New York, 1914. No. 22
30. *Loc. cit.*
31. William T. Hyman, a merchant in the Red River Settlement from the middle 1870's, for a while owned a "clothing emporium", still later a tannery and then built a steamboat for commercial purposes on the Assiniboine. My correspondence with the University of Western Ontario disclosed Mr. Hyman to be of non-Jewish background. Two other names were of interest to me: James Weidman, an early resident of the town of Selkirk, and James Levy, a volunteer fireman in Winnipeg, proved to be non-Jews.
32. There is a legend in the family that "Jake" Bergen was owner of the saloon which inspired Robert Service's folk-ballad "The Shooting of Dan McGrew." Bergen was in the Klondike and came out with a bit of a fortune. He settled and died in San Francisco.