

In the Beginning: A Brief History of Jews in Atlantic Canada*

M. M. LAZAR and SHEVA MEDJUCK

Résumé

Pour comprendre jusqu'à quel point la vie juive et l'histoire des Juifs du Canada Atlantique sont importants, M. M. Lazar et Sheva Medjuck ont fait une étude qui porte sur quatre provinces du Canada Atlantique respectivement:

le Nouveau Brunswick
la Nouvelle-Ecosse
l'Ile du Prince Edouard et enfin
Terre-Neuve

Dans ce document, les auteurs ont tenté de cerner les problèmes propres à chacune des provinces cernant de près la vie de chacune des communautés juives; la moins viable étant celle de l'Ile du Prince Edouard. Bien que les auteurs se soient conformés avec rigueur à l'exactitude des découvertes telles qu'établies, leur but principal fut de transmettre la dynamique de la vie Juive dans chacune des 4 provinces de l'Atlantique.

L'héritage des Juifs dans la Région a été profondément altéré par le manque systématique de données historiques. "Nous pensons que notre travail constitue une première étape importante afin de comprendre le passé "de déclarer les auteurs du document. On ne peut plus prétendre à une "présumée histoire", notre histoire.

Ainsi dans cette étude les auteurs ont donc tenté de se rapprocher de ce que C. Wright Mills nommait: "l'imagination du sociologique" qui permet à tout le monde "de saisir l'histoire et la biographie de même que les relations entre les deux au sein de la société . . ." L'étude très importante et détaillée en tout point donne à ce document une valeur sans précédent, si l'on tient compte surtout de l'ampleur du sujet, les quatre provinces, de sa nature, de son objec-

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tif et de son but: informer et renseigner sur le passé d'une façon précise et rigoureuse.

Introduction

It has been suggested that sociologists should become more historically oriented, and that historians should make greater use of insights, conceptualizations and techniques developed by sociologists. Those holding such a view invite a collaboration of these approaches, proposing that sociology bolster itself with depth through the broad sweep of historical development, and that history arm itself with the illumination of sociological analysis.¹

No other group lends itself more readily than do Jews to this sort of collaborative research. Jews certainly do not lack a sense of collective history and, at the same time, they do not lack a sense of collective sociological consciousness. This shared awareness of the tensions and dynamics of Jewish historical and contemporary existence is a key hallmark of Jewish identity. We have a fervor for trying to understand our current situation, at least in part, in terms of our history. This understanding becomes particularly important in those places that are thought of as being relatively open and hospitable (perhaps seductive is a more appropriate word). Canada is generally thought of as being a relatively open society and the history of the development of Jewish communities in the country is generally spoken of in terms of its openness. With a few exceptions, the description of the unfolding of Canada's Jewish communities typically speaks of success at being able to be both Canadian and Jewish at the same time.

Whether or not this perception accurately reflects the realities of the Jewish experience in Canada may be open to debate. However, it is evident that the development of the large Jewish communities in Quebec, Ontario and Western Canada has been different than that of the smaller communities in general and Atlantic Canada in particular. To understand the latter's present and continuing survival, it is imperative to appreciate the unique histories of these communities.

New Brunswick

One of the factors that re-inforces the general feeling of British unilingualism in Atlantic Canada, is the large influx of United Empire Loyalists into the region after 1783. Although numerically outnumbered by the French Acadian population, their dominance clearly made itself felt. This pattern of majority-minority relations is reflected in the history of Jews in New

Brunswick.

It is possible to document Jewish settlement there as far back as 1781 by a land grant that was given to a Mr. A. Shepard.² Unfortunately, no further information is available on Mr. Shepard. It is, therefore, more common to trace Jewish settlement to Solomon Hart, who came to Saint John with his family in 1856. Two years later Hart was joined by his brother-in-law, Nathan Green and his family. Green was the sole Canadian agent in Canada for the American Tobacco Company and just prior to Confederation was honoured by the city by being given the Freedom of the City. The two families, totalling fifteen, formed the nucleus of the Saint John Jewish community. This small group of Jews maintained a strong religious identity as Jews by looking to Boston as a religious centre, remaining strictly Orthodox by importing goods from there. These pioneer Jews in Saint John were not a harassed people, or escapees from Europe, but a family group from England.

It took over twenty years for Saint John to recruit further Jewish settlers, Abraham and Israel Isaacs, who arrive in 1878. In 1879 Saint John was the first Maritime centre to have Yom Kippur services. The story of this first High Holiday celebration has clearly become one of the favourite tales of New Brunswick Jews because it provides an indication of the strength of Jewish identity despite the lack of any of the more typical communal supports. In 1879 there were eight adult males in Saint John. Together with a Jewish salesman from Montreal and a Baal Tefilah (cantor) imported from Boston, the requisite ten men for a minyan were available. Preparation was made by importing a Torah scroll and a *shofar* from Boston. Unfortunately, these plans came apart when the Montreal salesman had to return before the Holy Days. Undaunted, Solomon Hart combed the registers of Saint John hotels looking for Jewish sounding names. In a small Saint John hotel he found a Jew who was waiting to sail to Boston for the High Holidays. The Jew was greeted with "you are Elijah Hanavi" (Elijah the prophet) in reference to the legend that the Prophet Elijah returned to earth at one time to form a minyan and, thus, this Jew was cajoled into staying in Saint John.³ The High Holy Days were thus celebrated for the first time in Maritime Canada. Saint John Jews were also pioneers in other Jewish matters. Saint John erected the first permanent cemetery, called the Hart-Green cemetery, in 1880. It served all of New Brunswick communities until the 1930s. The first Jewish marriage in the Maritimes was also held in Saint John, with a rabbi from Boston officiating (1882).

Saint John was clearly on its way to becoming somewhat of a centre (albeit on a small scale and in a limited way) of Jewish life in New Brunswick. The Jewish community, however small (in the 1891 census only 34 Jews were

listed as living in Saint John), seemed willing and able to mobilize. Thus, for example, when Jews (as well as other immigrants) were turned away by a bigoted Immigration Officer, the community organized the Hebrew Benevolent Society of Saint John which served all immigrants who appealed for help. "This was the first organization of its kind in Canada to consider its work more a social duty than a philanthropic enterprise."⁴ Newcomers were met at the boat and taken to homes where they were clothed, fed and cared for until their future plans were decided. Every family was a member and paid weekly dues. Again, the organizational drive of Saint John Jews is seen in their successful campaign to build a synagogue by 1898 when Ahavath Achim synagogue was built, at a cost of \$10,000. Funds were donated not only by local Jews but also by Jews from Boston and New York as well as by some Christians. This helped to fulfill the cultural and religious needs of the community. The first permanent rabbi was Rabbi Tobkin. With the arrival of the Rabbi, regular services were held in various halls around the city until the synagogue was completed. The organization of the Daughters of Israel of Saint John, N.B., was formed in 1900, not only as a charitable organization but also for studying Judaic questions and for sociability. While Saint John Jews looked first to Boston and then to Montreal for aid, they quickly recognized the need to establish their own Jewish institutions in order to guarantee and enhance the survival of their Jewish identity.

The close of the century witnessed an exodus of Jews from Europe which brought immigrants to Saint John. Without benefit of English, and often unskilled, many of them earned their livings by peddling. Jews rarely got jobs with non-Jews. It appears that Saint John had a committee which designated places for immigrants to peddle. After peddling for a while, many Jews were able to open their own businesses.

A second synagogue, known as the Hazen Avenue synagogue, developed around 1908. This *schul* was also known as the "Deutsche" *schul*. The community split because of different socio-economic and educational backgrounds. One group consisted of families from one village in Russia, who were not very well educated. The second group consisted of immigrants from Austria, Germany and England, as well as educated Russians. The two groups could not agree and thus broke into two *schuls*. After twelve years the synagogues amalgamated. A Calvin Church was purchased and the Shaarer Zedek congregation was established. Saint John had approximately 250 families during this period.

Since most Jewish businesses were in the same area (i.e., Main Street) and many Jews lived above their stores or in the near vicinity, an additional small chapel was opened on Main Street, where minyans were held three times a

day. This was a favourite meeting place in the early twenties. Thus, Saint John boasted three synagogues at one point in its history.

During the 1920s many Jewish organizations were established in Saint John, such as Young Judea (1925) and Junior Hadassah (which grew out of the Young Judea girls' group). In fact, the first meeting of Maritime Young Judea was held in Saint John. Men's groups consisted of Habonim (1925/26) and later B'nai B'rith. The community was always strongly Zionist, as many of the early Eastern European immigrants brought a strong sense of Zionism with them to Saint John. There was also a Young Men's Hebrew Association (1920) which even purchased its own building. (Jews were not allowed, at that time, to join the YMCA). Although there was an attempt to establish a Jewish Old Age Home, the idea died because of lack of support. Like many other communities during World War II Saint John established a community centre for the servicemen. The Saint John HIAS was also active, meeting boats of immigrants as they arrived in Saint John harbour. Speakers came to Saint John to speak about Zionism and plays were put on in Yiddish. An annual ball was supported by the YMHA.

Most Saint John Jews whom we interviewed expressed the feeling that anti-semitism has declined significantly from the earlier years. Many related stories of the difficulty of Jews getting jobs with non-Jews in the early years. In some cases jobs were lost when it was discovered that the employee was Jewish. Few felt that this problem still exists. Social clubs are now open (although in many areas this was quite recent) and Jewish-Gentile relationships have been greatly enhanced.

Our informants in Saint John more than anywhere else indicate a pessimism about the continuation of their community. There are no young people moving in and no children remaining. The community is an old one and seems to lack a spirit of togetherness. A strong community of 250 families has shrunk to about 60-65 families. Where Saint John used to have three kosher butchers it now has none. Daughters of Israel, Ladies Aid and other "help" organizations have died out. The YMHA closed its doors, Hadassah and Sisterhood have been combined, Habonim died out and the B'nai B'rith is not very active. Only 12 children remain in *cheder*. Most Saint John Jews feel that only immigration can help save their community.

The second largest Jewish community in New Brunswick was Moncton. Moncton's Jewish history is documented by Michael M. Baig in a paper entitled "The Folklore of Moncton Jewry". Jewish immigration to Moncton was somewhat atypical in that twenty-two families from Durbonne, Lithuania, settled in Moncton. The men arrived first and established themselves and then sent for their wives and children in Europe (a fairly common practice among

Jews and other immigrant settlers in the region). These Durbonners, as they were called, formed a very cohesive community. They all settled on the same street in Moncton. By 1909 the Jewish community was large enough to hire its first rabbi. Soon, the community of Moncton also felt the need for a synagogue. Here the community had a much more difficult time than Saint John. As Michael Baig narrates:

Plans were made to build a synagogue. Each member paid (from 1914) 10¢ a week and by 1924, enough money was amassed to purchase land. In that year, Jake Marks and Sam Borenstein bought the land, upon which our present synagogue stands, at an auction sale, for the sum of \$650. Steadman Street was then the choicest street in Moncton, and many of the non-Jewish residents strongly objected to building a synagogue on their street. The bidding went as high as \$650 because non-Jewish people were bidding on the land in order to prevent Jews from building their synagogue on this site. After the synagogue was built, many put their homes up for sale, and some Jewish people bought them.⁵

These obstacles, however, did not destroy the resolve of Moncton Jews and the construction of the synagogue began in 1926. Four years later, with only twenty Jewish families in Moncton, the synagogue building was completed.

The role of the Jewish women of Moncton in the construction of this synagogue was critical. It seems that in the fall of 1925 the Jewish women decided to do something about having a synagogue built in Moncton. They established a Ladies Auxiliary and each woman gave a dollar as membership. Twenty-one women comprised this group. The women pledged to pay twenty-five cents a week to the Auxiliary and to seek pledges from other women. They also had card parties, raffles, tag days (apparently they took all children out of school to help sell tags). These women raised a considerable sum of money. For example, cancelled cheques indicate a \$1,500. contribution for the mortgage, another of \$700., another of \$400., etc. This Ladies Auxiliary later became the Lillian Freeman Chapter of Hadassah. At the same time, (1930), Moncton bought land for its own cemetery.

A sense of solidarity among the Jews of Moncton is evidenced nowhere better than in their response during and immediately after World War II. Moncton Jews readily welcomed the thousands of Jewish airmen stationed in Moncton. After the war, when trains would pass through Moncton with Jewish immigrants on their way west, members of the Jewish community would meet the trains, often in the middle of the night, attending to any of their immediate needs. Thus, with only minimal supports, and often under adverse conditions, the Moncton Jewish community survived and grew.

Jews in Moncton, like their counterparts elsewhere, have penetrated many of the host society's institutions. They have become, for example, lawyers, doctors and university professors. Michael M. Baig served as Mayor of Moncton for two terms. However, an incident in the late 1970s suggests that

there still remains undercurrents of anti-semitism among members of the non-Jewish community. When a school teacher in Moncton published a book that was blatantly anti-semitic, members of the Jewish community attempted to take action. However, not only were they unsuccessful in removing this book from all local bookstores, but they also were unable to convince the school board that an investigation should be conducted to see whether or not this schoolteacher's conduct in the classroom reflected his anti-semitic attitudes. The government's reaction (or rather the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission's reaction) was only somewhat less disappointing. A complaint was filed with the Commission and after an "investigation" it was decided that the Commission could do nothing, except request that the teacher's classroom situation be monitored.⁶ Rosenberg's conclusion that "Although the Jewish community in Moncton is hardly a major one, its presence reflects the growing acceptance of minorities in Canada's mosaic"⁷ may seem to be acceptable in principle. Unfortunately, incidents such as this serve to qualify this kind of optimism.

The Moncton Jewish community appears to have reason to be optimistic about its future. It is one of the few communities that has experienced growth in its Jewish population with an influx of young Jewish people attracted to the expanding government and university sectors. Moncton is now the second largest Jewish community in Atlantic Canada with about 140 families. This has served to rejuvenate the community.

The Jewish community in Fredericton is more recent than Moncton or Saint John. The first Jewish family arrived around 1912. These early immigrants often peddled because they spoke no English, could not read or write and had no trade. Some reported difficulties in getting jobs with non-Jews. By 1925 Fredericton organized Young Judaea. The congregation was incorporated in March, 1929; however, a synagogue was not built in Fredericton until 1934 and the cemetery was not purchased until 1943. Before the construction of the synagogue, the Jewish community of Fredericton hired the Orange Hall in order to conduct services. By 1936 the congregation was established with a Sisterhood and Hadassah. Later a Habonim Lodge was started, which was replaced by the B'nai B'rith. Like Saint John, the Fredericton Jewish community was strongly Zionist. Their Zionist feelings came with the immigrants from Europe. Initially there was no Hebrew school but boys would go to the teacher's home for lessons. Girls did not usually receive formal Hebrew training at this time.

The Fredericton Jewish community consisted of a few large founding families. This meant that the community was very close, as most Fredericton Jews were related. This was reinforced because they tended to live in the

same area of town.

During World War II about two thousand Jews were interned at Ripples, New Brunswick (1941). About five hundred of them went on a hunger strike demanding kosher food. The Fredericton community helped provide kosher food and other comforts to the internees as well as visiting them periodically. Unlike the communities of Saint John and Moncton, few servicemen were stationed in the area, thus the Fredericton Jewish community was not as active in providing services during the War. Also since few immigrants passed through Fredericton, they did not need to mobilize to assist these immigrants as both Moncton and Saint John did.

The Jews of Fredericton appear to have co-existed in somewhat greater harmony with their non-Jewish neighbours. There does not seem to be any written records of the Jewish experience in Fredericton to suggest any kind of serious problems. Some of the older members of the community, however, do remember growing up being called names and beaten, and having difficulty finding jobs. Most, however, note that things have changed. The University of New Brunswick (unlike Dalhousie) was not known to discriminate against Jews. In discussion with Jews in Fredericton, they stress how proud they are of the relationship they have with their non-Jewish neighbours.

Much smaller Jewish communities also developed in Dalhousie and Bathurst. The Bathurst Jewish community, in fact, was able to support a Hebrew school teacher. The community also had a Torah Scroll and services were held in Bathurst on a periodic basis. Unfortunately, the community became too small to support even this minimal level of activity as Bathurst Jews migrated to larger communities. A concrete indication that the Bathurst Jewish community was no longer viable, was the donation of their Torah Scroll to the Moncton community.

Jews were found in other even smaller centres as well. Thus, for example, a number of Jewish families settled in Edmundston, New Brunswick where they generally became retail merchants. Although few in number they managed for a while to conduct Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur services. They rented a Masonic Lodge and hired someone to conduct the services. Families from outlying areas came to participate. While it was difficult to provide systematic Jewish education for the children, male children were often shipped out to study for their Bar Mitzvah and, occasionally, teachers were brought in from Montreal.

Nova Scotia

The development of the Jewish community in Nova Scotia followed a different pattern than in other parts of North America. The beginnings of a

Jewish community were laid two hundred and thirty years ago. This initial community survived for several generations, disappeared by the 1820s and then re-established itself in the last third of the nineteenth century. The first Jewish settlers arrived in Halifax shortly after its establishment in 1749. By 1752 there were approximately thirty Jews in Halifax (1.5 percent of the population of the town). Land was even set aside for a Jewish cemetery, near the intersection of what is now Brunswick Street and Spring Garden Road. By 1758 it was decided to use one common cemetery for the town, and the site of the Jewish cemetery was taken over for a Workhouse.

What may well be the earliest remaining document written by a Jew in Canada, the will of Isaac Levy,⁸ is a product of this period. Among the executors named in his will were his partner, Nathan Nathans, and Isaac Judah (whose signature on the will is both in English and Hebrew). Levy was originally from Cucksam, Germany, but, like most of these early Jewish settlers, came to Halifax from the American colonies.

The American Revolution had a major effect on the Jewish population of the colony. Many Jewish settlers returned to the American colonies to fight against Britain and others returned to Britain. However, not all left the colony and a number remained after the revolution. While the records are somewhat scanty, there are a number of "notable" exceptions documenting the continued presence of Jews during and after the revolution.

For example, Nathan Nathans (Isaac Levy's partner) remained a resident of Halifax from approximately 1750 until his death in November, 1778. He is best remembered for the celebration of the "Festival of St. Aspinquid" held at his home from the early 1770s on the Northwest Arm, seven days after the new moon in May. This seemed to be a rather festive occasion with elegant dinners and toasts to the King and Queen, the Prince of Wales, the Governor of the colony, fishing and agriculture, the memory of St. Aspinquid (Grand Sachem of all North America) and to the chiefs of the twelve tribes who were allies of the British.⁹

Samuel Hart, another exception, arrived from New York in the early 1780s to establish a general mercantile, coastal trade and ships' chandlers firm. Hart became rather wealthy. He purchased Maroon Hall, an estate with one thousand acres in Preston, on the Dartmouth side. This was an area in which the elite of the colony maintained their country homes and he "entertained there on a kingly scale".¹⁰ In the early 1790s, Hart became active in politics, and he represented the township of Liverpool in the House of Assembly from 1793 to 1799. He appears to have been the first Jew to serve in a British Legislative body. However, it does appear that he took the oath of office which included the phrase "one true faith as a Christian". In addition, all four of his

children were christened at St. Paul's Church in Halifax.¹¹

Outside of Halifax, the story of Jewish settlement during the eighteenth century is subject to some speculation. One apocryphal story deals with the settlement of Little Tancook Island in the mid-1790s. According to the tale, Little Tancook was settled in 1796 by several Dutch Jewish families. These families quickly assimilated into the dominate non-Jewish population. It has been suggested that many of those whose family name is Levy in this area are descended from these early settlers. This has not been (and perhaps cannot be) substantiated. More likely, at least some of the Levys in this part of Nova Scotia, are descended from Nathaniel Levy, who was in Halifax by 1759. Apparently, after his first wife died in 1771, he moved to Chester, where he married again in 1773 to Susannah Tufts. They had four children, before he died in May, 1787, at Chester. One of his sons, Gershom, married Catherine Barbara Graves in 1796. They had three sons before he died in 1801 at Chester. Two of the sons, David (b. 1797) and Nathan (b. 1798) settled in Tancook Island during the early 19th century. It has been suggested that Nathaniel Levy was the son of Nathan Levy, a Jewish merchant who was in Philadelphia in 1746.¹² It may be that Nathaniel Levy was in the colony to oversee the interests of the firm Levy and Frank of Philadelphia, one of the firms that provided the new colony with supplies and credit.¹³

From 1824 to 1861, there are no figures available on the Jewish population of Nova Scotia. However, in 1861, there were at least three Jews in Halifax and by the 1880s, a Jewish community had re-established itself in Nova Scotia. By 1901 there were 449 Jews in the province. The Jewish population increased to 1,360 by 1911 and to 2,161 by 1921. For the next fifty years the Jewish population fluctuated from a low of 1,348 in 1941 to a high of 2,535 in 1971.

Between 1895 and 1915 synagogues were established first in Halifax and then in Glace Bay (the first in Cape Breton), New Waterford, Sydney and Yarmouth. There is even some suggestion that a synagogue existed in Windsor for a short time. David Ben-Gurion mentions, in a letter to his wife Paula, that members of the Jewish Legion went to pray every Saturday in the synagogue while they were being trained in Windsor.¹⁴ The first Halifax synagogue was established in time for the first Jewish wedding in Nova Scotia between Sarah Cohen and Harry Glube on February 19, 1895. With the establishment of synagogues (generally following the establishment of cemeteries) the developing Jewish communities were provided with the beginnings of institutional support mechanisms for the maintenance of both religious and ethnic identities; something that was lacking for those first Jewish settlers in the eighteenth century.

The resurgence of Jewish life in Nova Scotia during this period affected the various small Jewish communities of the province, but its most significant affect was felt in Cape Breton and in Halifax. For most of this century, Halifax has served as the centre of the Jewish population of Nova Scotia. It has been the largest single Jewish community in the province since 1911 and since 1961 more than half of the province's Jewish population were living in the metropolitan area. Few Canadian Jews realize how important a role Halifax played, as it was the first contact point with Canada for many Jewish immigrants. The port was, until the advent of large-scale commercial air travel, one of the major debarkation points for Jewish immigrants heading to other parts of Canada (as was the case with one parent of each of the authors). For most, it was off the ship and onto the train, with contact in the port limited at best to a quick meeting with a representative from the Halifax Jewish community. However, for some the experience of arriving in Canada via Halifax was different. For example, Rabbi Aron Horowitz recalls arriving in Halifax in 1926, just before the last days of *Succot*. Since he would not travel to join his family in Winnipeg until after the holiday, arrangements were made for him to spend *Shmini Atzeret - Simchat Torah* in Halifax. His memories of the holiday (his first experiences with a Jewish community in Canada) include the brawl which broke out in the synagogue on Simchat Torah during the Hakafof, to which the police were summoned.¹⁵

The experiences of other immigrants were, however, more positive. For example, the first executive director of the Atlantic Jewish Council recalled arriving in Halifax in 1946 as a very young child, with his parents and brothers, after surviving the Holocaust, being met by members of the Jewish community and being provided with food (particularly with oranges) for the trip to Edmonton. The importance of Halifax as the centre of Jewish communal affairs in Nova Scotia was accentuated by events in Europe prior to World War II, the war itself, and the post-war period. In the late 1930s, Jewish refugees were brought to Halifax. Some settled in Halifax, while others moved to larger urban centres in Quebec and Ontario. During this pre-war period attempts were also made to settle a number of refugees as farmers in the rural areas of the province, particularly in the Annapolis Valley.

The war years placed a strain on the resources of the community. Halifax was a major jumping-off point for Europe. Many thousands of Jewish service personnel came through Halifax, yet with some help from the Canadian Jewish Congress, the community was able to provide for the needs of these transient Jews. A Jewish Servicemen's Centre was established which provided kosher food, social events and other services for Jewish military personnel.



Figure 1: Reception of Jewish Immigrants at Canadian Immigration, Halifax, probably late 1930's. (Photo courtesy of the Atlantic Jewish Council)

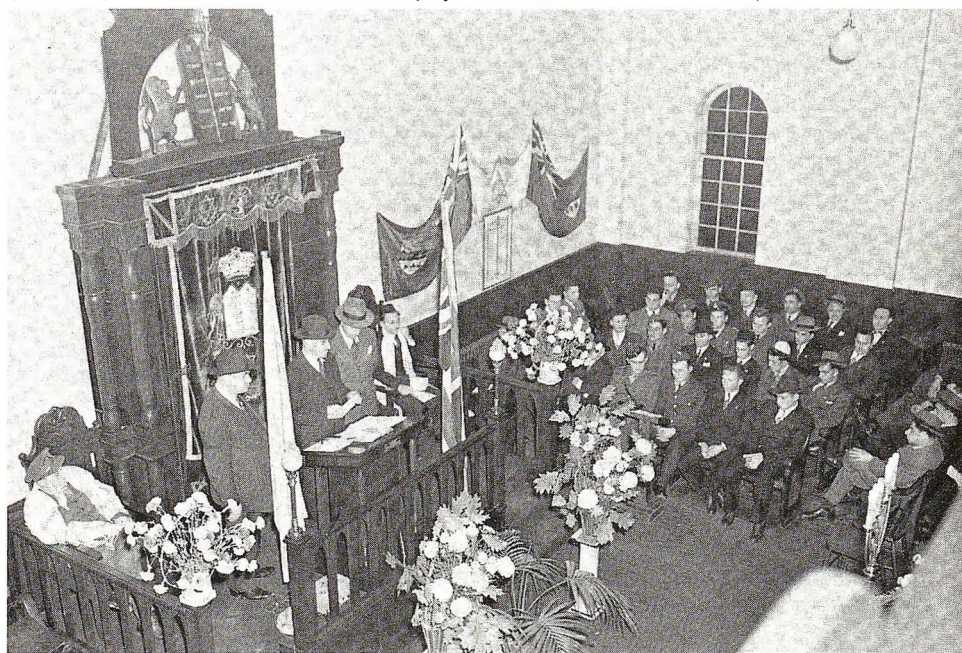


Figure 2: The Jewish community welcomes Halifax returnees from war service. (Photo courtesy of the Atlantic Jewish Council)



Figure 3: Maritime Y.M.H.A. Convention, St. John, New Brunswick, 1946. (Photo courtesy of Atlantic Jewish Council)



Figure 4: Judaeian Convention, Fredericton, c. 1949. (Photo courtesy of Atlantic Jewish Council)

After the war, Halifax became the major port of entry for Jewish displaced persons. From late 1945 to 1951, numerous ships were met; immigration difficulties overcome; people housed temporarily; and finally boarded on trains west for settlement primarily in western Canada.

An area of significant Jewish settlement in Nova Scotia was Cape Breton. The development of the Jewish community there is interesting as it grew rapidly and declined almost as rapidly. In 1901, there were 162 Jews in Cape Breton, by 1931 the Jewish population had increased to 900 (the Halifax Jewish community during the same thirty-year period grew from 585 to 785), and by 1941 it had increased to 939, (its high point). The Jewish population of Cape Breton started to decline after 1941 and by 1951 there were fewer Jews in Cape Breton (806) than there had been in 1921 (889).

To the outsider, Cape Breton appears to be a single entity. This image is one that is particularly applied to the Jewish community of the island. Yet we are in fact dealing with four very distinct Jewish communities, that differed in a number of ways and were quite aware of their differences; Glace Bay, New Waterford, Sydney and Whitney Pier.¹⁶

Glace Bay may be considered the oldest organized community on Cape Breton. Jewish settlers began arriving in the 1890s. Many came as a result of advertisements placed in European papers by the coal company in Glace Bay. The company was soliciting mine workers by offering free passage to Canada in return for work in the mines. Few of the Jewish immigrants worked in the mines for any length of time. Most became peddlers and then moved into retail businesses near the mines where their competition was the "company stores".

There were fifteen Jewish families in the community when the first synagogue in Cape Breton was built in 1902, although it was incorporated in 1901, the same year as the town. Previous to the building of the synagogue the High Holidays were celebrated by either renting a hall or gathering in the home of a member of the community. The importance placed on the building of the synagogue by the Jews in Glace Bay can be measured in a number of ways; the best indicator, however, can be seen by the contribution of funds by some families even before they bought their own homes.

The community continued to grow. In 1905 an active Ladies Aid group was formed, in 1919 the first Hadassah chapter was started, and shortly after a Habonim Lodge began. By 1921 Glace Bay's Jewish community numbered 441 individuals, or 110 families. It was then decided that a Talmud Torah building was needed in addition to the synagogue.

With the arrival of the first professional Hebrew teacher in 1912, regular classes had been held either in homes or in the synagogue. The Talmud Torah

was completed in 1926 and became the centre for all social and community events. One of the results of this was increased rivalry between Glace Bay and Sydney, which saw the Talmud Torah/Community Centre as competition for the YMHA that had been established in the early 1920s in Sydney.

During this period the Glace Bay Jewish community “flowered”. A Yiddish theatre group formed and later developed into an English language Jewish theatre group. A Young Women’s Hebrew Club began, as well as a Young Judean group. In 1937, a Young Israel group was established for boys aged 13 to 19. Unlike the Young Judeans, which was Zionist in focus, the Young Israel group was religious/Jewish in orientation. It drew many male members away from the Judeans and became a key youth group in Glace Bay. The Young Israel group disbanded after its founding rabbi left the community, and the Young Judean group became the central youth group once again. As well, during this period, a number of sports teams developed that competed against non-Jewish teams.

For a period of approximately thirty-five years, the Jewish community appeared to move from strength to strength. Unfortunately a declining population predetermined the declining future of the community. Until the mid 1970s, a Hebrew School for the young people of the community was maintained but at present there are far too few children in the community to continue a separate school. The few children that are Hebrew school age are now taken to Sydney. The Jewish population continues to decline and it does not appear that there will be any turnaround in this trend in the future.

The first Jewish immigrants in New Waterford came in the early 1900s because of opportunities resulting from the coal industry. About ten families settled in the community at the same time, comprising the first organized Jewish community in the town. Most of the men started as peddlers, as had been the situation in Glace Bay, then moved into retail businesses.

The synagogue was built in 1922, with a Talmud Torah and residence for a rabbi in the same building. Before the completion of the synagogue, Jews travelled either to Sydney or Glace Bay for services or rented a hall and imported a rabbi or cantor. The building became the centre for social, cultural and community activities. The late 1920s and early 1930s saw the establishment of a Hadassah chapter and a Young Judean group. It was suggested by one of our informants that Zionism was introduced into the community “with the establishment of the Sons of Israel Congregation and accepted by everyone, before the independence of Israel”. Unfortunately, there was little migration into New Waterford (its Jewish population peaked at 99 in 1941). After World War II, Jews began to leave as the economic base of the general community began to decline with the closing of the mines. This out-migration has

continued, and one result has been that the synagogue had to be sold in 1967. The remaining families joined synagogues in either Glace Bay or Sydney.

The history of the Jewish community in Sydney is the history of two communities, Sydney itself and Whitney Pier. The first Jews to arrive in Sydney during the late 1890s and early 1900s, settled in that part of the city known as Whitney Pier. For the most part they were Russians escaping pogroms. While they came to Sydney because of the growing steel industry, few Jewish immigrants worked in the mills. Rather they became peddlers and then moved into retail businesses.

A synagogue was built in the "Pier" in 1913. Included within the building was a Talmud Torah. Prior to the establishment of the synagogue and before there were enough families in Sydney, men were brought in from Glace Bay to form a minyan. The synagogue was the centre of social and cultural activities until the establishment of a YMHA several years later, at which time social activities shifted to the Y.

Around this time a Ladies Aid society (later to be renamed the Ladies Auxiliary) was formed to aid in the settlement of immigrants. An interesting sidelight to these activities took place immediately after World War I when orphans from Europe and, surprisingly, New York were brought to Sydney.

As the Jewish population of Sydney (including the "Pier") grew during the first third of the century (from 22 in 1901 to 425 in 1931), Jewish communal activities increased. A B'nai B'rith lodge was started in 1923 and, the same year saw the establishment of a Young Judean chapter. Hadassah became active in the early 1920s, following a visit from the president of Hadassah in Canada who, according to one of our informants, "convinced the women of the need for Hadassah". By 1933 there were two chapters. While Zionist activities were present with the arrival of the first immigrants, it became much more popular after the Balfour Declaration. From the early 1920s on, Zionist speakers came to the community, primarily from Montreal, and according to one of our informants, "even from the Habonim Lodge in Glace Bay". While there has not been a great aliyah from Sydney (as is the case for Atlantic Canada in general), there has been a steady aliyah that goes back before Israel's liberation. For example, Lionel Druker, one of the few Canadian officers to serve in the Haganah during Israel's War for Independence (and founder of Sightseeing Bus Ltd. in Israel) is from Sydney.

By the mid 1920s many Jewish families were moving out of the "Pier" into Sydney proper. During this period a second synagogue was established in Sydney. While both synagogues were initially Orthodox, the synagogue in Sydney gradually became conservative. In the 1930s mixed seating was adopted and by the 1930s the synagogue was using Conservative siddurim.¹⁷

The movement of Jews out of the "Pier" into Sydney proper continued during the 1950s. As a result, the synagogue in Sydney grew in membership, while Agudath Israel in the Pier declined. At present the Sons of Israel congregation in Sydney proper is the only synagogue in Cape Breton that has a full-time rabbi. It is clear that the activities of the Jewish population of Cape Breton are now concentrated in Sydney.

Several things become evident after reading the records and speaking to key informants about Cape Breton. First, while there seems to have never been any major overt anti-semitism in Cape Breton, all of our informants indicate that undercurrents of anti-semitism were always present. Jews were denied membership in some of the local service clubs in Cape Breton for many years. They were denied membership in at least one country club, and as a result, joined with some non-Jews to start another country club. A Jewish teacher was docked pay for taking time off for the High Holidays. It was believed that Jews could not get jobs at some banks during the 1920s and 30s (and even later). During the depression, tensions between Jews and non-Jews increased, particularly during strikes. During one strike in Glace Bay, the windows of some Jewish homes were smashed. Nevertheless, during this strike Jewish merchants extended full credit to their customers, most of whom were strikers, and their stores were not damaged, though the strikers did burn down the company stores. Secondly, all of our informants indicate that tensions, competition and jealousy characterized the relationships between the various Jewish communities in Cape Breton. This was the case most particularly during the growth period of the four communities when they were competing for members and, perhaps, for the role as the centre of Jewish activity and life in Cape Breton. The present situation is one in which Sydney has become the Jewish service centre for Cape Breton, and, as a result, tensions between the communities seem to have been reduced.

Finally, all of our informants indicate that Jewish life was better in the past. The communities were better organized and integrated. They socialized with one another much more extensively than is the case now at least in part, as several indicated, because they were not "comfortable" socializing with non-Jews. There was a degree of activity that they feel is no longer present. Our informants point to the movement away from Cape Breton of the young people as being at the root of this internal decline.

The Jews in Nova Scotia appear to have been relatively well integrated and accepted into the larger community. There have been Jewish mayors in both Halifax and Dartmouth as well as in smaller communities. There have been Jewish judges in the provincial court system. There have been Jewish members of the Legislative Assembly. Jews have served on the Board of Gover-

nors of many of the universities of the province. As well, there have been prominent physicians, lawyers, engineers, accountants, university professors and business people.

Yet at the same time there has been some overt evidence (as well as undercurrents) of anti-semitism in Nova Scotia as well as New Brunswick. During the period between the two wars, the "*Protocols of Zion*" appeared in the province. Pro-Nazi groups had some support during this period. Until relatively recently, Jews were excluded from some of the more "exclusive" clubs in the province. While provincial universities have generally been open to Jewish students, certain faculties have not been (though oddly enough the faculties of Medicine and Law at Dalhousie seem to have always been open to Jewish students). More recently one of the professional faculties at a university in Nova Scotia was accused of not hiring Jewish faculty, either full-time or adjunct positions. The case is being fought out and fought-over. What is interesting about this particular episode is that the particular faculty does not, apparently, discriminate against Jewish students. As well, anti-semitic literature is still circulated periodically through the province.

The future of a viable Jewish community in Nova Scotia appears to be problematic. The continued shift of population out of the small communities is a trend that will most likely not be reversed. Some of the smaller Jewish communities seem destined to continue to decline and eventually disappear. The future of the Jewish community of Halifax, and to a lesser extent Sydney, is somewhat less doubtful. Both are relatively large, though the Jewish community of Halifax is the only one that is undergoing any sort of visible growth.

Prince Edward Island

There is a very curious story about Jewish settlement on Prince Edward Island. In a report made by Colonel David Dunbar, dated August 25, 1732, he claims that at Louisburg there were "six French men-of-war full of Jews, to settle the Island of St. John's [that is, Prince Edward Island] in Bay Verte", and the French settlers there "would supply that new intended settlement with bread, corn and live cattle, if not prevented".¹⁸ Obviously, if this story is true, nothing came of this attempt at Jewish settlement, as the first recorded Jewish settler on Prince Edward Island arrived at the turn of this century.

Originally, Prince Edward Island was a Proprietary Colony, with absentee landlords. As a result, group settlements became the initially dominant pattern of colonization. Conversely, settlement by single individuals or families, whether Jewish or Gentile, was not encouraged.¹⁹

The province has only a handful of Jewish families, most of whom arrived

after the 1920s. There has been no organized Jewish life on the Island itself. Those Jewish families that have wished to participate in some form of Jewish organizational life have had to look to the communities of Moncton, Halifax or Mobntreal. What appears to be the first public religious worship during the High Holy Days was held in 1975, using a Torah Scroll and Shofar loaned to the community by a synagogue in Halifax. The services were not repeated. The Jewish community of Prince Edward Island is the least viable in Atlantic Canada.

Newfoundland

The history of the Jewish community of Newfoundland, like much else about that island province, is spoken of in terms of “firsts”. Labrador was claimed for England in 1677 by Joseph de la Penha, a Jewish merchant-adventurer from Holland. Twenty years later, he was granted title to Labrador after rescuing William III from a sinking ship. While he never availed himself of the grant, this may be thought of as the first officially documented case of Jewish contact or influence in what was to become Canada.²⁰

Footnotes

1. P.Y. Medding, *From Assimilation to Group Survival* (New York: Hart Publishing Company, 1969) p. XI
2. Land Grant Papers, Nova Scotia Public Archives
3. Stuart Rosenberg, *The Jewish Community in Canada*, Vol. 1 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1970) p. 111
4. B.G. Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada*, Vol. 1 (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1945) p. 229
5. Michael Baig, *The Folklore of Moncton Jewry*, Mss., N.D.
6. *Shalom*, Vol. 4, No. 2, November, 1978, pp. 21-23
7. Rosenberg, op. cit., p. 110
8. Halifax County Probates, Will Book I, 1750, p. 11
9. C. Bruce Fergusson, “Jewish Communities in Nova Scotia”, *Journal of Education*, Vol. II, No. 1, October, 1961, p. 46
10. Thomas H. Raddall, *Halifax: Warden of the North* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1971) p. 133
11. Halifax County Probates, Will Book III, 1793, p. 371
12. Private communication, Terrence Punch, 1981
13. Fergusson, op. cit., p. 46
14. David Ben-Gurion, *Letters to Paula* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971) p. 4
15. Aron Horowitz, *Striking Roots* (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1979) p. 7
16. While Whitney Pier is a part of Sydney politically, there exists a sense of the distinctiveness in the “Pier”. This feeling pervaded even into the Jewish community.
17. Several of our informants have suggested that this move away from Orthodoxy to Conservatism is, at least in part, the source of some of the tensions that have existed between Sydney and the “Pier”.

18. Public Record Office, Board of Trade, Nova Scotia, Vol. VII, E29
19. Jan Goeb, *The Maritime Jewish Community* (Halifax: Jewish Historical Society, N.D.) p. 31
20. Sack, *op. cit.*, p. 47-49
21. Private communication, Cyril Byrne, 1981
22. Goeb, *op. cit.*, p. 31
23. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Grove Press, 1961) p. 6