

The following was inadvertently left out of the article *In the beginning: a brief history of Jews in Atlantic Canada*, by M.M. Lazar and Sheva Medjuck (5: Oct. 1981) The Editor apologizes for the error.

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

Much of the early history of Jewish settlement in Newfoundland is open to speculation. It is believed that the first Jewish settler was an English Jew engaged in the fur trade who came to Newfoundland around 1800. There is some evidence suggesting that during the first half of the nineteenth century several other Jewish families had settled in the colony, primarily outside of St. John's. These first Jewish settlers were Peter Ezekiel and a Mr. Tocque and Mr. Levi (who operated a business firm in Carbonear). Ezekiel seems to have come out from the West country. He married in Newfoundland (apparently the daughter of either Tocque or Levi). The Ezekiel family is still found in Newfoundland, though there are no family stories of their Jewish origins. However, the late Mr. Peter Ezekiel, when interviewed at age 94, a number of years ago, reported remembering his grandmother (who may have been a daughter or daughter-in-law of the first Mr. Ezekiel) lighting candles at the supper table once a week (Sabbath candles, perhaps?).²¹ It has also been suggested that the first Postmaster of Newfoundland, appointed in 1809, was Jewish.²²

The real history of the Newfoundland Jewish community begins, however, with the arrival in St. John's of Israel Perlin from the United States. He was instrumental in founding the first synagogue in Newfoundland, The Hebrew Congregation of Newfoundland, in 1909. The Jewish community of Newfoundland grew slowly. In the first census that included Jews as a separate religious domination in 1935, there were 215 Jews reported. The 1971 census figures reports 360 Jews, mostly in St. John's.

While Jews settled in most of the major towns of Newfoundland, St. John's remained the centre of the Jewish population of the province. The only presently existing synagogue, Beth El, is found there, as is the only rabbi in Newfoundland. The small Jewish communities on the west coast of the island attempted to maintain congregations (without professional staff) both in Stephenville and Cornerbrook up to the mid-60s. During the 1930s, there was a major attempt by several Jews on the west coast of Newfoundland to convince the British government to open the west coast for major resettlement of Jewish refugees from Europe. Nothing came of this attempt. The existence of American military bases, established in the very early 1940s, had some impact on the Jewish communities of Newfoundland, particularly those on the west coast and to a lesser extent, St. John's. With the closing of these bases, the Jewish communities of Newfoundland lost an important outside support mechanism which affected the viability of the smaller communities on the western side of the island.

While the Jewish community of Newfoundland seems to be well integrated into the surrounding community, having produced one M.P. (from the Cornerbrook community) and there being little evidence of public anti-semitism, its future viability is somewhat problematic. The young are moving out of the province and they are not being replaced by immigration of Jews.

Conclusion

In this paper we have attempted to convey a sense of the histories of the Jewish communities of Atlantic Canada. While we have, of course, been concerned with the historical accuracy of our findings, our overriding concern has been to convey the dynamics of Jewish life in Atlantic Canada. The heritage of Jews in the region has been obscured largely by the lack of systematically accumulated historical data. Although our search through available documents and our long discussions with older informants is certainly not exhaustive of the rich Jewish history we, nevertheless, feel it is an important first step to understanding the past. Our history can no longer simply be assumed. All too often what has been available distorts the past by conveying an image of things always being better, a "romantization of the past". These pleasant reminiscences often miss the struggles, the hard work, the obstacles to survival, and sometimes the failures. This does not suggest that what is needed is a mindless accumulation of more data, but rather more precise social description. We

have, therefore, attempted in this work to come a little closer to possessing what C. Wright Mills calls the sociological imagination which enables one:

“to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise . . . No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey.”²³