

“Our Distant Brethren:”

Alexander Harkavy on Montreal Jews — 1888

JONATHAN D. SARNA

Résumé

A. HARKAVY alla à Paris en 1885, à New York en 1886, à Montréal en 1887, à Baltimore en 1889, et, revint à New York en 1890. Pendant ces migrations multiples, il étudia, enseigna et publia ses premiers articles comme journaliste et érudit.

Par la suite, il se tailla sa propre situation et se tailla une réputation en tant qu'écrivain, journaliste, expert en langues (il en parlait cinq couramment) et, on se souvient du lui comme auteur du Grand Dictionnaire trilingue: *yiddish-hébreu-anglais*. (refondu en 1928).

A. HARKAVY écrivit de nombreux articles en cinq langues sur les sujets suivants: Lexicographie, philologie, yiddich, folklore, et, histoire. Il vint à Montréal, fin 1886 pour assumer le poste d'enseignant au sein de l'école de la Congrégation qui allait être plus tard connue sous le nom de Congrégation Shaar Hashomayim.

Premièrement, les articles d'Harkavy contiennent un des premiers traité de l'histoire des Juifs du Canada à être publié en hébreu. Les Juifs d'Europe purent ainsi apprendre à découvrir la géographie du Canada.

Ce qui rend la contribution de Harkavy importante c'est qu'elle fouille dans le passé de la communauté juive du Canada.

Deuxièmement, les rapports d'Harkavy contribuèrent à aider ses frères d'Europe à mieux saisir un fait majeur: La distinction qu'il fallait établir entre le Canada et les U.S.A.

Troisièmement, les écrits d'Harkavy sur les Juifs de Montréal dont il est question dans ce Journal contiennent des informations précieuses sur ce qui demeure une époque peu connue de la Communauté juive du Canada. Cette époque se situe avant l'avènement de la presse et de la création des principaux organismes Juifs.

Les commentaires de Harkavy sur la situation religieuse à Montréal sont tout particulièrement intéressants car ils mettent en évidence certaines conditions qui transformèrent le judaïsme traditionnel au Canada. Ils évoquent en outre la croissance de deux tendances ou plus ainsi que les influences profanes sur la

Communauté de cette époque.

De façon similaire on peut déclarer que les commentaires de Harkavy sur l'Association Montéfiore de Montréal jetèrent un éclairage révélateur sur les années formatrices de cette Association.

Les articles de Harkavy, montrent que d'un point du vue stylistique, érudition, versatilité et linguistique, ils étaient parfaits.

Alexander Harkavy (1863-1939),¹ born in Novogradok, Belorussia, and educated there and in Vilna, immigrated to America as part of the Am Olam back-to-the-land movement,² and arrived in New York in May 1882. Like most of the Jewish intellectual immigrants of his day he suffered.³ His dream of working the land as part of an agricultural collective came to naught. Manual labor — as a stevedore, farm worker, dishwasher, baker, and factory worker — damaged his health. Intellectually stimulating work, when he found any, paid him barely subsistence wages. So he wandered in search of a living. He was in Paris in 1885, New York in 1886, Montreal in 1887, Baltimore in 1889, and back in New York in 1890.

During these *Wanderjahre*, Harkavy studied, taught, and published his first journalistic and scholarly compositions.⁴ He began to make a name for himself as a writer, journalist, expert in language, and as a Yiddishist. He undertook his first communal and Zionist activities. Most important of all, he decided on his life's work and prepared to settle down to his career.

A year after he returned to New York, in 1891, Harkavy published his first popular textbook for East European Jewish immigrants: *English Lerer*. Subsequently, he wrote a whole series of immigrant-aid and educational texts. He also taught, lectured, edited several newspapers, and wrote voluminously, in five languages, on lexicography, philology, Yiddish, folklore, and history. In 1925, he completed his great *Yiddish-Hebrew-English Dictionary* (revised 1928), the work for which he is today best remembered. At the time of his death, he was known as the "Noah Webster of American Jewry."

The articles translated below, from the Hebrew daily *Hazefirah*, published in Warsaw and edited by Nahum Sokolow, all date from 1888 when Harkavy was still in Montreal.⁵ He had gone there, in late 1886, to assume a teaching position at the school of the English-German-Polish Congregation, later known as Shaar Hashomayim. Success eluded him as a teacher — the chairman of the school committee found him "not the most desirable teacher to be recommended."⁶

As a Jewish community figure, however, he achieved some acclaim. Local Hebraists and Lovers of Zion gathered around him, and in February 1887 he helped them found a branch of Choveve Zion. He became its president.⁷ He also published in lithograph form one issue of a Yiddish newspaper, *Die Zeit*, the first Jewish newspaper in Canada. More broadly, he took an active role in stimulating local interest in Jewish cultural activities.

Because of its small size and pluralistic character, the Jewish community of Montreal saw much more interaction between immigrants and longterm residents than took place in larger Jewish communities like New York. Harkavy came to know the city's prominent Jews, he socialized with them, he spoke at their young people's club (the Montefiore Society), and he wrote articles in English which they could read. His English-language pieces on Jewish laws and customs and on the Yiddish language, published in local newspapers, are especially noteworthy, for they spell out ideas which Harkavy elaborated upon later in life.⁸

Yet these local activities notwithstanding, Harkavy must have felt lonely in Montreal, for he was far removed from the centres of Jewish intellectual life and culture. He met a few kindred spirits in the community, notably Joseph Bernstein, like himself an immigrant, a Hebraist, and a Zionist⁹, but most of his intellectual peers, even his old friends from Am Olam, had scattered. The only way to keep up with them, and with the rest of the Jewish world, was through the Hebrew press, published in Europe and distributed throughout the diaspora. Harkavy had been publishing pieces in various Hebrew newspapers for several years, even when he was living in New York. His dispatches to *Hazefirah* from Montreal, however, are from an historical point of view far more significant.

First of all, the articles contain one of the first, perhaps in fact, the first, treatment of Canadian Jewish history ever to appear in Hebrew. European Jews could learn about Canadian geography from a volume like I.B. Gordon's *Shvile Olam Chadash* (1870), and could read about major Canadian Jewish news items in the daily press. Joseph Bernstein, Harkavy's Montreal friend, had contributed a major series of articles on contemporary Canadian Jewry to *Hamelitz* of 1884 and published various shorter articles thereafter.¹⁰ But Harkavy, being more than a journalist, delved, if all too briefly and sometimes inaccurately, into Canadian Jewry's past, based partly on unpublished materials. That in itself makes his contribution significant.

Second, Harkavy's reports helped European Jews to understand that Canada was an entirely different country from its neighbor to the south. Michael Brown has properly noted "Canada's indistinct image in the mind of European

Jews . . . If Jewish newspapers reported Canadian events at all, it was generally in the column reserved for 'American' news.'"¹¹ This confusion continued to exist long after Harkavy had departed Montreal for New York, and to some extent it was perpetuated by unscrupulous shipping agents who profited from the confusion. But at least those who did read these articles realized that the two American nations differed in significant respects, and had for a long time.

Third, Harkavy's pieces preserve valuable information on what remains a little-known era in Canadian Jewish history, before the existence of major organizations and newspapers.¹² Harkavy's comments on the Jewish religious situation in Montreal are particularly interesting since they illustrate some of the conditions that were transforming traditional Judaism in Canada and leading to the growth of Reform Judaism; such things as status and image consciousness, Jewish ignorance, intra-Jewish competition, and of course, secular influences. Similar factors were at the same time having a like effect on Judaism in New York.¹³ Harkavy's position with the English-German-Polish Congregation may have shaped some of his religious views, particularly his negative attitude toward the "Sephardized" Jews of Congregation Shearith Israel. Most of his comments, however, seem to have derived from first-hand knowledge, for he was acquainted both with Clarence de Sola of Shearith Israel and with Moise Schwob, a leader of the new Reform temple, Emanu-El (founded in 1882). Harkavy's comments on the Montefiore Society similarly reflect first-hand experience, and shed interesting light on the society's formative years.

From a stylistic point of view, Harkavy's articles display versatility, erudition, and linguistic facility. They also exhibit a certain supercilious elitism found frequently in the writings of immigrant intellectuals who felt insufficiently appreciated by those around them. In Harkavy's case, this sense of superiority may, perhaps, be excused, for he penned the articles translated here at the tender age of twenty-five. He had, by this time, several notable accomplishments already behind him, and his name had begun to be known. Ahead of him, as attentive readers of *Hazefirah* might have predicted, a great future lay waiting to unfold.

I

THE JEWS IN CANADA

The first Jews who came to live in Canada settled here at about the time that the land fell from French sovereignty to British sovereignty, that is from the years 1755 to 1760, according to the Christian calendar.¹ The first Jew mentioned in the Canadian government historical records and in the *Actes Publiques* is Aaron Hart,² a scion of one of the most respected Jewish families in Great Britain. He came here accompanying the British high military commis-

sioner, Frederick Haldimand,³ as commissary to his army in this country, in the well-known city of Three Rivers. His son, Ezekiel Hart,⁴ who lived at the beginning of this century, was on three occasions chosen as a member of the House of Assembly. He was refused admission to the Assembly only on account of the fact that delegates of the resident French community in this country hated Jews. In those days, Canadian Jews still did not enjoy the same rights as natives; for their rights they waged a long battle. Upstanding men were involved, well-known Jews, and these men fought for their people's freedom. They went about their self-imposed task energetically, refusing to be silent or tranquil until natives took notice and admitted that Jews were worthy. Then the righteousness of their cause was acknowledged, and Parliament decreed that Jews would be considered citizens, with rights equal to those of other Canadians in all matters: matters of public affairs and matters of faith. Thus [in 1832], Jews came to enjoy equality in this small settlement (small in terms of residents) long before even their brethren in Great Britain itself.

After the famous Hart family, other families settled here, equally virtuous ones, and they gave Jews a good reputation throughout the country. Among the notable families of those days, the following three dignitaries deserve to be remembered forever: David David, Henry Joseph, and [David S.] Franks, who was an officer in the British [sic] army.

*David David*⁵ was considered in his day as the foremost merchant in the city of Montreal, the leading city in Canada. He was the founding head of the great bank of this city, and indeed of all America: the Bank of Montreal.

*Henry Joseph*⁶ was also a leading merchant in his day and his name was known across the land. Besides his other great virtues this man was also devoted to God, whom he worshipped faithfully, and he was as scrupulous in observing minor commandments as major ones. Since in his day there were no *Shochatim* [ritual slaughterers] in this country, he himself studied the laws of ritual slaughtering and used to slaughter his own animals and fowl. This honest Jew was the leading impetus behind the founding of the first Jewish congregation in Canada, and he gave of himself to it both physically and materially. The first thing he did was to give it a plot of land for use as a cemetery. This first Jewish congregation in Canada, named "Shearith Israel," was founded in 1776 according to the Christian calendar, and still exists today.⁷

*Colonel Franks*⁸ left this country in 1770 [sic] and went to live in the United States which at that time was still a British colony. When the Revolutionary War broke out, he joined the rebels against the British Government and helped them in their time of need.

Local leaders and officers gave him his due, assigning him to a high position;

that of Aide-de-Camp to the renowned American general, George Washington, of blessed memory.

In 1857, a second community was established in this country: the Jewish community of Quebec City, capital of the Canadian province of the same name. A year later, a third community was founded in Toronto, in the province of Ontario.

In 1860, another Montreal congregation was added to that of the aforementioned Shearith Israel,⁹ and in the last twenty-seven years a few other small congregations were founded in other cities of the country: such as Hamilton in the province of Ontario, Winnipeg in the province of Manitoba, and others.

So much for the story of Jews in Canada in days gone by. I have written these few words on the basis of the *pinkas* (minute book) of Congregation Shearith Israel (in English) which was shown to me by one of the sons of the previous rabbi of that congregation, a brother of the present *chazan*¹⁰; also on the basis of the English language Jewish calendar published by his late father, of blessed memory, in the year 5614 [1854] (p. 157);¹¹ and on the basis of certificates and family trees that he showed me. Now, dear friends of *Hazefirah*, as sequel to my preceding account, I shall write a bit about the current situation of Jews in this country.

Congregation Shearith Israel, the first congregation in Canada, does still exist, but its membership is small. The only ones who boast of its strength are its own *chazanim* who sing its praises lest anyone charge them with being rulers with no kingdom to rule. It has in it neither Torah nor wisdom and, according to some, it lacks even goodheartedness.

Members of this congregation worship according to the Sephardic rite and label themselves “Portuguese”, even as the majority of its few remaining members are from Polish descent. Even its founders, so it appears from their names, were not from Sephardic extraction — as the above-mentioned son of the rabbi, grudgingly admitted to me.¹² Were it not for the aid of the Polish Jews there would be no more Portuguese in the whole country. If so, what interest does the congregation have in the Sephardic rite? I shall explain to you dear reader: one or two of its rabbis were Sephardim and they likely introduced this ritual. Since, as usual here, the congregants themselves knew nothing about matters of faith, they followed after their rabbis or *chazanim* just like sheep.¹³

The first house of prayer which the congregation chose for itself was a small room in a house on St. Jacques Street.¹⁴ Later, they left this and built for themselves a synagogue on Notre Dame Street. Finally, upon the recommendation of a congregational notable named Benjamin Hart,¹⁵ the congregation was reinvigorated and a new synagogue was built on Chenneville Street. This building

was dedicated in 1835.¹⁶ The father of the present *chazan* devoted himself to holy service here for over thirty years. His name was Abraham de Sola and he died in 1882.¹⁷ He was considered in this country to be a unique personage and he was respected by the citizenry. Whether or not he was truly learned — that I shall discuss in *Hazefirah* on another occasion.

In spite of its small numbers, the congregation will now be building for itself a new synagogue, larger than the one on Chenneville Street.¹⁸ I fervently hope that the new home will be more highly regarded than the old one, and also that the congregational leaders know what they are doing. For the Jews in this country are not learned, not faithful, and not even too sharp-witted. They change their mind whenever it suits them: now they may be Orthodox, next year Reform; today Ashkenazim, tomorrow Sephardim; this month Polish, next month Portuguese. And since they are not scrupulous about faith, they choose to belong to that congregation that most pleases their eyes rather than their hearts!

In this congregation, there still remain a few people who descend from the distinguished families mentioned above. But alas, as everyone here knows, they have grown spiritually distant from their people; some say, in fact, that they utterly despise their roots. One of their number in this city has already converted!

The second congregation in Montreal, founded in 1860, has a membership mostly made up of Polish immigrants with only a few Germans and a very few — a child could count them — native-borns. Because this congregation is composed of these three basic elements, it is called here “The English-German-and-Polish Congregation”. At the present time, it is the largest congregation in Canada. If, dear readers, you want to know the reason why it became so successful you need only look at its new synagogue, completed about a year and a half ago, and you will know. A beautiful new synagogue acts as a magnet for Jews in this country. In this congregation as in its older sister, there is no learning or wisdom, no rabbis or teachers, nobody at all expert in Judaica. It has only *chazanim*, denominated in the language of this country by the name “minister.” In all matters, these *chazanim* give the people guidance: when a baby is born, they turn to the *chazan*; when there is to be a bar mitzvah in the city, they send him to the *chazan* to learn how to read one section from the [Torah] portion of the week during which the bar mitzvah will fall; a wedding, they go to the *chazan*; when somebody dies — to the *chazan*. No matter what happens or does not happen, they go to the *chazan*. He is the mid-wife, the ritual circumcizer, the teacher, the marriage officiator, the undertaker, and so forth.

The number of Jews living in Montreal — where I now dwell — is, according to general estimates, from 700 to 1,000 families. Each and everyone of

them is, to some extent or other, a merchant. Almost all the peddlers are Jews. Small-scale merchants will yet give Jews a bad name in this country by engaging in trades deemed entirely improper by the citizens; for example, the pawnbroking business, the proprietors of which in this city are almost entirely Jewish even though their numbers relative to the population as a whole (the population of this city, according to the last census was a total of 175,000) are infinitesimal. The old clothes and second-hand-goods businesses are also in Jewish hands.

Most of the Jews in this city come from Poland and Romania. Some settled here long ago, others came just recently. No Jew holds even a minor part in the government.¹⁹ While the French vice-consul is Jewish, this is not — heaven forbid — the fault of the Canadian government, for he was appointed here by the French government. The name of this man is Schwob,²⁰ and he is a dealer in gold and silver jewelry.

The Jews in this city — and by extension others as well, since about half of all Canadian Jews live here — concern themselves little with Jewish learning and scholarship. Nevertheless, there is in this city a special school for Hebrew students, where they may learn Hebrew properly.²¹ It sits under the supervision of the city Board of Education, and the government allocates a set amount towards it upkeep. It is also supervised by the English-German-Polish congregation which provides rooms for the school and also allocates a certain amount for it. But how much good will any of this do if the parents of the children, most of them members of this congregation, will not send them every day on a regular basis? Instead after a week or a month, before the boy or girl has learned anything, their parents transfer them from there and give them over to the public schools or stop sending their children to school at all. In this [Jewish] school, there is a special division for teaching the national language and remaining subjects to beginners. If these people would only concern themselves with Judaica, then it might succeed. As it now stands, we cannot expect much to come from it.

A learned Jew who comes to this city or country will quickly discover how right Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma was in what he said in *Ethics of the Fathers*, chapter 6[:9].²² What can I possibly tell you dear readers? In this city, you will find, for example, people who expound words of Torah in the following fashion: “ ‘The impudent is destined for paradise²³; — so I found in the *Tsenerene*.’ ”²⁴ “ ‘For three days do not go near a woman’²⁵ — these are the words of King Solomon, may he rest in peace, in *Genesis 1*’ ”; and so forth.

The public does not look upon the Jews with any particular favor. In a quarrel, the epithet “Jew” or “Juif” can sometimes be heard falling out of people’s

mouths. There are several periodicals in this city that scorn Jews at every opportunity they can find. When, for example, *The Star* announced our Day of Remembrance [Rosh Hashanah] this year, it wrote as follows: “The Jewish holiday they call ‘Rosh Hashanah’ is coming. As a result, all pawnshops and cigar stores will be shuttered.”

Some other time in *Hazefirah* when I again discuss Canadian Jews, I shall write about some small leftover items, which I have omitted in this dispatch, like the Montefiore Society and other things. For now, my dear *Zefirah*, make do with these tidbits. Peace to you and your publisher.

Your faithful servant,
Alexander Harkavy²⁶

MONTREAL, 28 SHVAT [February 10, 1888]

II

The small number of Jews living in Canada are divided into three factions: The Sephardim, [sic!] who came to this country in this century from the area of Aysheshok [i.e. Yokel-land in Eastern Europe], the Reformers, and the Germans. These groups are sub-divided into any number of congregations. Only in Montreal, the city where most Jews live, are these three groups found to their full extent. Congregations in remaining cities belong only to the latter faction. The first two factions have but one congregation each; the latter — the Germans — have many. Among this faction, the foremost congregations in Montreal are: The English-German-Polish Congregation, the Congregation of The Sons of Benjamin lodge,²⁷ the Old Synagogue on St. Constant Street,²⁸ as well as private *minyanim*; and small *landsmanschaften* of Russians and Romanians who have just recently come to this country.

The *minyanim* and *landsmanschaften* do no credit to our people in this city. From time to time, we hear reports of the “good job” wrought by some man’s hands on another’s rib, and of the “marks of distinction” which some man’s fist stamped into another’s cheek.²⁹ Do not think, dear brethren, readers of *Hazefirah*, that all these good deeds and signs are carried out purely for the sake of heaven. Take, for example, the case of Jack the tailor. On Saturday mornings and holidays — on weekdays he does not pray in the congregation, nor according to some on his own — he stands swaying like a reed in his synagogue, while at the same time his store remains open on these days. Such wayward types may be found, without exception, in every congregation. How are these children of humble folk not ashamed to perform such deviant acts: appearing as strict observers of some light commandment even while being openly lax about so stringent a commandment as resting on the seventh day of the week and holidays! And if you ask them about it, do you know, dear readers, what they will

tell you? “It’s business, brother, business — business defers the Sabbath.” We have heard it said that business defers even the saving of lives. Now, if saving of lives defers the Sabbath, how much more so does business!

From such people, whose trademark is a combination of lies and nonsense, what can be expected? Can they bring any honor to the House of Israel? Can such people live peaceably with one another as human beings? They, after all, neither know nor understand what man’s function is on this earth. Can they love one another as Jews? Judaism is, after all, foreign to them. Can righteousness and justice lie in the hearts of such people? Ah, such people know nothing of honor and love in their detached state. If they honor one among their own it is only from greed or because he has a great deal of wealth, and then they honor such a man to his face and scorn him behind his back.

As for their Judaism, they display it publicly in their houses of worship but even then in a manner that tears one’s heart and guts out. Outside those portals they cannot stand anything that identifies them as Jews. Only their noses give them away, for without their long noses, that legacy of the people of Israel, natives would never know their origin,; they being too embarrassed to reveal it. They only consent to talk to our men and women kinfolk here in the national language, lost as newcomers are in it. Even if you yell bitterly in their ears that you do not understand one word! What do they care about you? Even if you talk to them about some pressing concern, where the subject matter, not the language, is essential, even then they will not bend their will to yours and speak Yiddish, even though they know it thousands of times better than they do English. For what reason? Because they are ashamed; someone might identify them as coming from the seed of Jacob. Alas for such shame! What those fools do not realize is that they are instantly recognized in any case on account of their speech, what they call English. These aliens could live in this country as long as Methusaleh and remain unable to speak it properly. Besides, they lack ninety-nine percent of its words and they must employ in their place Yiddish words. They thus speak, as the saying goes, half and half: *halbdeutsch, polvina russisch*. Do you see, dear reader, how far the folly of our brethren here reaches?

But be not downcast, for in lieu of this, our brethren in this country believe more strongly in the power of name-changing than do our brethren anywhere else in the Diaspora.³⁰ Not only Jews who are deathly sick change their name in this country, so do those who are perfectly well, and have never been sick for a day in their lives. They believe that this custom is a talisman for business. The man whose family name in his native land was Wisliansky becomes known as Johnson or Smith. You can even sometimes find two brothers, born and bred

together, who each take different names for themselves.

There are some among the Sephardic, Reform, English, German and Polish communities who behave in better fashion, for they settled here long ago. Even if the parents did not improve, the children do somewhat. Though on all accounts they lack Torah and learning, having in every case been prepared for business, in their synagogues nobody comes to blows; there is decorum and order. The young people of these congregations seek little by little to glorify the name of Israel. but they do not know how; nor are they to blame, for nobody taught them or educated them properly about being Jews. These young people recently established here a society named the Montefiore Club³¹ with the purpose of improving the Jewish social situation, for the Jews in this city do not know one another. That is the society's sole purpose; the honorable correspondent in *Ha-Asif*³² of 5646 [1886] erred in saying that the society also concerns itself with matters of Eretz Israel settlement. The membership of this society now number about 100, mostly young, single men and women. For nine straight months in the year, the society's members gather every two weeks. At their meetings, they speak little about Jewish matters; they mostly talk about matters of broad human concern and nothing that they say is all that notable. They usually choose to debate political subjects, which the debaters, being unfortunately businessmen, are rather ill-equipped to handle, they having studied nothing save financial matters. Frequently, the young men and women gather to eat, drink, and dance. To be truthful, when a talented young person can be found who is able to address them about scientific matters, they call upon him and listen willingly and appreciatively to his words of wisdom. There was here formerly another society named "Amarantha,"³³ but since its purpose was like that of the Montefiore society, it recently annexed itself to it and the two societies became one. May they only succeed in bringing honor to the House of Israel, trampled to dust in this land!

Until ten years ago, according to the Jews who live in this city, the number of Jews living here was less than half the number living here now. Jews just recently began coming to this country, mostly from the United States, when they saw that they were blessed with no luck living there.³⁴ These people are all ignorant; they never learned to read or write.³⁵ Only a few, a child could count them, either have learning or talent to learn. Here, however, they can never make use of these valuable skills, for like their ignorant brethren they came here in search of sustenance. Generally speaking, they have already been transformed into peddlers or manual laborers — businessmen.

Included among people of this latter type is a fine young man, twenty-one years old, named Isaac Rubinovich,³⁶ scion of a respected family in Georgen-

burg, in the Kovno district of Russia, who came here recently to find his fortune. This man shows remarkable talent in music; in particular he has a miraculous ability to imitate with his mouth the sounds of musical instruments, to the extent that when he performs, listeners think that he is playing the lyre, the violin, the trumpet, or all three of them together in concert. He speaks fluent German and knows Russian too. If only he had sufficient means to develop this knowledge and talent; he would become one of our stars! God have mercy!

Alexander Harkavy

MONTREAL, (Canada) [April 26, 1888]³⁷

III MONTREAL, THE DAY AFTER SHAVUOT, 1888 [May 18, 1888]

I come to you again with words about Canadian Jewry. Yesterday, I went to visit our kinsmen, Mr. Schwob,³⁸ vice-consul of France, to seek his opinion on various matters connected with the lives of our people in this country. This honorable gentleman responded to all of my questions with clear answers. I present here the full discussion that transpired between us. Before doing so, however, let me relate to our dear readers who Mr. Schwob is.

Mr. Schwob was born in 1843 in the city of Heygenheim, in the State of Alsace, which was under French jurisdiction until 1871. When this French province fell into German hands, after the [Franco-Prussian] War of 1871, he, as a loyal subject of the French government, left his now Germanized place of residence and settled in the city of Montreal where he lives to this day. In this city he formed a business in gold and silver jewelry. It expanded, prospering to the point where he attained two things: wealth and greatness. When Montreal's residents perceived his integrity, they recommended to the French government that it appoint him its consul. Mr. Schwob is devoted to his people and his face bears a Jewish visage.

Since such a man knows how to assay business and state affairs, I went to ask him his judgement on our Canadian-dwelling brethren.

I began my conversation with him with the following words: "Mon cher Monsieur, je vient au nom de la "Zephirah," journal quotidien des juifs Russes et Polonaise, redige en la langue Biblique." ["My dear sir, I come in the name of *Hazefirah*, the daily newspaper of Russian and Polish Jews, edited in the language of the Bible."] I described to him the character of "*Hazefirah*," and he was both extremely pleased and greatly astonished to see a daily periodical for Jews in the Hebrew language. Responding to my introduction, Mr. Schwob said that for the sake of *Hazefirah* he would gladly respond to anything I might ask him.

The questions and answers took the following form:

Question: Your eminence, how do you judge the material condition of our people in this country relative to 1) business and 2) politics?

Answer: 1) With regard to business, I find our brethren doing better than those of other nations living in this state. They have succeeded brilliantly in this field; almost all have money, and *no Jew in this country is actually poor*.

2) With regard to politics, they are, by law, completely equal to native borns in every respect! As a distinctive entity, however, they need people with access to the national parliament, for that would elevate them in the eyes of the citizenry.

Question: Is there any hope of members of our nation achieving this?

Answer: Yes. There are, after all, already two distinguished Jews in this city, whom citizens know and love. The first is named Davis, owner of the largest cigar manufacturing plant in this city, and perhaps in all of Canada;³⁹ the second is named Goldstain [sic] who is a lawyer.⁴⁰ Men such as these have, in due course, sufficient merit to be appointed Montreal's representatives in Parliament.

Question: Are there any Jews here who, through their wisdom, have already made names for themselves?

Answer: There is in this city one by the name of Hellbruenner [sic].⁴¹ This man is one of the chief contributors to *La Presse*, the French newspaper published in this city. He deals a lot with matters of state, and was recently chosen to sit on the state committee of labor. To be sure, his activities are not specifically for the sake of Jews; I know him to be a Jew, however. Mr. Hellbruenner is French born.

Question: What is your judgement on our Polish brethren?

Answer: I will tell you briefly, mon cher monsieur [My dear sir], I have never seen a better man than a good Polish Jew nor a worse man than a bad Polish Jew!

Question: What is your judgement on our *Zefira*?

Answer: C'est une journal tres elegant!

What can I answer him in closing? Yes, indeed it is!

A. Harkavy⁴²

NOTES

1. Harkavy wrote about his early years in his Hebrew autobiography, *Prakim Mechayai*. (New York: 1935); see Jonathan D. Sarna (trans. and ed.), "Alexander Harkavy: Chapters From My Life", *American Jewish Archives*, 33 (April 1981), pp. 35-52. Biographical sketches include [Jacob Shatsky], *Harkavy's Bio-Bibliography* (New York, 1933); A. R. Malachi, *Masot Ur'shumot* (New York, 1937), pp. 173-177; Bernard G. Richards, "Alexander Harkavy," *American Jewish Year Book*, 42 (1940), pp. 153-64; and Yudel Mark, "Alexander Harkavy,"

- Jewish Book Annual*, 26 (1966), pp. 100-108.
2. Abrahm Menes, "The Am Oylom Movement," *Yivo Annual of Jewish Social Studies*, 4 (1949), pp. 9-33.
 3. Ezra Mendlesohn, "The Russian Roots of the American Jewish Labor Movement," *Yivo Annual of Jewish Social Studies*, 16 (1976), pp. 150-177.
 4. *Harkavy's Bio-Bibliography*, pp. 8-17 list his major publications from 1886.
 5. On Harkavy's years in Montreal, see Arthur Daniel Hart, *The Jew in Canada*, (Toronto, 1926), p. 70, reprinted in slightly condensed form in B.G. Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada* (Montreal, 1965), pp. 218-220.
 6. Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada*, p. 218.
 7. *Hamelitz* vol. 27 (February 22, 1887), p. 475; *Hamagid* 31 (March 9, 1887), p. 78; (March 24, 1887), p. 91.
 8. Alexander Harkavy, "Jewish Slaughtering," *Montreal Witness* (July 6, 1887); Sack *History of the Jews in Canada*, p. 219.
 9. *Hamelitz* vol. 27 (February 22, 1887), p. 475; Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada*, p. 220 and note following.
 10. *Hamelitz* vol. 20 (March 2, 1884), p. 511; (March 5, 1884), p. 526; (March 9, 1884), p. 542; (April 11, 1884), p. 981; (October 3, 1884), p. 1205; (October 20, 1884), p. 1270.
 11. Michael Brown, "The American Connection of Canadian Jews: 1759-1914," *AJS Review* 3 (1978), pp. 28-30.
 12. Jonathan D. Sarna, "Jewish Immigration to North America: The Canadian Experience (1870-1900)," *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, 18 (June 1976), pp. 31-41.
 13. Michael Brown, "The Beginnings of Reform Judaism in Canada," *Jewish Social Studies*, 34 (1972), pp. 322-343; Jonathan D. Sarna, *People Walk on Their Heads: Moses Weinberger's Jews and Judaism in New York* (New York, 1981), pp. 4-29; Stuart Schoenfeld, "The Jewish Religion in North America: Canadian and American Comparisons," *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 3 (1978), pp. 209-231.

NOTES: ARTICLES

1. The basic account remains B. G. Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada* (Montreal, 1965). Numerous other works on this period may be found listed in David Rome, Judith Nefsky and Paule Obermeir, *Les Juifs Du Quebec: bibliographie retrospective annotee* (Quebec, 1981).
2. Denis Vaugois, "Aaron Hart," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto, 1980), vol. IV. pp. 331-333.
3. Sir Frederick Haldimand (1718-1791) was British military governor of Three Rivers (1762-1766) and later commander in chief of North America (1773-74) and governor of Quebec; See Jean N. McIlwraith, *Sir Frederick Haldiman* (London and Toronto, 1926).
4. Julius J. Price, "Proceedings Relating to the Expulsion of Ezekiel Hart from the House of Assembly of Lower Canada, 1808-09," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* (P.A.J.H.S.) 23 (1915), pp. 43-54; Abraham J. Arnold, "Ezekiel Hart and the Oath Problem in the Assembly of Lower Canada," *Canadian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 3 (1979), pp. 10-26.
5. David David (1764-1824), was a founder of the Bank of Montreal and a charter member of the Montreal Board of Trade. See Joseph R. Rosenbloom, *A Biographical Dictionary of Early American Jews* (Lexington, Ky, 1960). p. 31.
6. Henry Joseph (1775-1832), a nephew of Aaron Hart, was a highly successful merchant and one of the founders of the Canadian merchant marine. He perished in the 1832 cholera epidemic; Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada*, pp. 70-71, 93-96, 108.
7. On the history of Shearith Israel in Montreal, see Esther I. Blaustein, Rachel A. Esar and Evelyn Miller, "Spanish and Portuguese (Shearith Israel) Synagogue Montreal, 1768-1968," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 23 (1969-70), pp. 111-142; and

- Rome, Nefsky, Obermeir, *Juifs due Quebec*, #72-78.
8. David Salisburys Franks (1743-1793), born in Philadelphia, was a Montreal merchant. While he frequented the American colonies, he did not actually leave Montreal until 1776-7. He served as an officer under Benedict Arnold, rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel, and later served as an American diplomat. He never was Washington's Aide-de-Camp. See Rosenbloom, *A Biographical Dictionary of Early American Jews*, p. 39; Samuel Rezneck, *Unrecognized Patriots: The Jews in the American Revolution* (Westport, Ct. 1975), esp. pp. 27-35; and Benjamin G. Sack, "When Did David S. Franks Last Leave Canada?" *P.A.J.H.S.* 31 (1928), p. 234.
 9. The English-German-Polish Congregation, later named Shaar Hashomayim, was dedicated on May 22, 1860 as the first Ashkenazic synagogue in British North America; see Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada*, p. 156.
 10. Harkavy's source was obviously Clarence de Sola (1858-1920), author of various articles on Canada, including one that later appeared in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, as well as "The History of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation," *Montreal Star*, December 30, 1893., See N. Taylor Phillips, "Clarence de Sola" *P.A.J.H.S.* 29 (1922) 269-272.
 11. Jacques J. Lyons and Abraham De Sola, *A Jewish Calendar For Fifty Years* (Montreal 1854), pp. 156-158.
 12. Cf. Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada*, p. 50 and Jacob R. Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew* (Detroit, 1970), II, pp. 1001-1006.
 13. Harkavy's article in *Hazefirah*, 15 (1888) #29 concludes here.
 14. St. Jacques-St. James Street. See Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada*, p. 51.
 15. Benjamin Hart (1779-1855) son of Aaron Hart, was President of Shearith Israel in Montreal and a prominent merchant. See Rosenbloom, *Biographical Dictionary of Early American Jews*, p. 51 and, for Hart's role in the new synagogue building, *Canadian Jewish Archives* 1 (August 1955), *passim*, and Blaustein, Esar and Miller, "Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue," pp. 114-119.
 16. Actually the building was dedicated in 1838.
 17. Rev. Abraham de Sola (1825-1882) was the leading Jewish religious figure of his day in Canada, serving as chazan at Shearith Israel and Professor of Semitic and Oriental Literature at McGill College, while also being involved in community affairs and Jewish scholarship; see Evelyn Miller, "The 'Learned Hazan' of Montreal: Reverend Abraham de Sola, LL.D.: 1825-1882," *The American Sephardi*, 7-8 (1975), pp. 23-43.
 18. The Stanley Street synagogue was consecrated in 1890; Blaustein, Esar and Miller, "Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue," p. 123.
 19. Cf. Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada*, pp. 213-214.
 20. Moise Schwob (1841-?) founded, with his brother Alfred, the firm of Schwob Bros., importers of Swiss watches, took an active part in the Jewish community, and served as French Vice-Consul for a decade. See Arthur D. Hart, *The Jew in Canada* (Toronto, 1926), p. 207.
 21. Harkavy was referring to the school where he himself taught, the school of the English-German-Polish Congregation. See Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada*, p. 218; and *Hamelitz*, vol. 27, (January 1, January 5, March 3, 1887).
 22. "Were you to give me all the silver and gold and precious stones and pearls in the world, I would not live anywhere except in a place of Torah."
 23. *Ethics of the Fathers* 5:23, "Judah ben Tema said . . . The impudent is destined for *Gehinnom* [hell]."
 24. The *Tsenerene* is a popular Yiddish exegetical rendering of the Pentateuch, *haftarot* and Five Scrolls, composed at the end of the sixteenth century by Jacob Ashkenazi, and widely read especially by women. See *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971), vol. XVI, col. 967-68.
 25. Exodus 19:15.
 26. Harkavy's article in *Hezefirah*, 15 (1888) #30 concludes here.

27. The International Order Sons of Benjamin, a Jewish fraternal order, was founded in 1877 and disbanded in 1919. Its members met regularly in Montreal, see Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada*, pp. 233,242.
28. When Shaar Hashomayim moved to McGill College Avenue in 1886, its old building on St. Constant Street was taken over by Russian Jews who named their synagogue B'nai Jacob; Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada*, p. 213.
29. For a comparable description, see Abraham J. Karp, "An East European Congregation on American Soil: Beth Israel, Rochester, New Your, 1874-1886," *A Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus*, edited by Bertram W. Korn (Waltham, 1976), pp. 263-302.
30. Harkavy returned to the subject of name-changes in *Ner Maaravi* II (1896), p. 111; cf. Lee M. Friedman, "American Jewish Names," *Pilgrims In A New Land* (Philadelphia, 1948), pp. 196-220.
31. The Montefiore Club was founded in 1880 and played an important social and cultural role in the community, see Lawrence M. Lande, *Montefiore Club, 1880-1955, 75th Jubilee Celebration May 31-June 4, 1955*, (Montreal, 1955); cf. Bertram W. Korn, "A Preliminary Checklist of American Jewish Institutions and Organizations Named in Honor of Sir Moses Montefiore," *Gratz College Annual Jewish Studies* II (1973) pp. 60-64.
32. *Ha-Asif* was the name of a Hebrew literary annual, published by Nahum Sokolow, which favored cultural Zionism. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vo. VII, pp. 1011-1012. Harkavy refers to a notice in vol. III, p. 53.
33. The Amarantha Society, from the Greek word meaning, "everlasting," was presumably a Jewish social club.
34. See Jonathan D. Sarna, "Jewish Immigration to North America: the Canadian Experience (1870-1900)" *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 18 (June 1976), pp. 31-41.
35. While Harkavy was obviously exaggerating, the extent of illiteracy among immigrants was higher than generally believed, see *Jewish Immigrants: Report of A Special Committee of the National Jewish Immigration Council Appointed to Examine into the Question of Illiteracy Among Jewish Immigrants and Its Causes* (63rd Congress, 2nd Session (1914) Document 611) in Max Kohler, *Immigrants and Aliens in the United States* (New York, 1936), 200-228.
36. Hart, *The Jew in Canada*, p. 560b contains the biography of Jacob Benjamin Rubinovich (1869-1925), born in Georgenburg, Lithuania, who arrived in Montreal "as a young man," and achieved success as an importer/exporter. Isaac Rubinovich may have been Jacob's older brother.
37. Harkavy's article in *Hazefirah* 15 (1888) #106 concludes here.
38. On Moise Schwob see note 20 above. Note that the dates Harkavy gives for Schwob's birth and arrival in Montreal do not jibe with the information in Hart, *The Jew in Canada* p. 207.
39. Samuel Davis (1834-1895), born in London, arrived in Montreal in 1861 and founded S. Davis & Sons, cigar manufacturers. He was active in the Jewish community; see Hart, *The Jew in Canada*, p. 123.
40. Schwob probably refers either to Adolphe Goldstein (1834-1917), a cigar manufacturer active in the Jewish community, or to his son Maxwell Goldstein (1863-1939), then a young lawyer, and later King's Counsel; see Hart, *The Jew in Canada*, pp. 124-378.
41. Jules Hellbronner (1852-1921), a prominent Canadian journalist and editor of *La Presse*, wrote extensively on labor conditions; see David Rome, "On Jules Hellbronner." *Canadian Jewish Archives* 11 (1978).
42. Harkavy's article in *Hazefirah* 15 (1888) #144 concludes here.