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# Manitoba Jewish History

## — Early Times

ARTHUR A. CHIEL

### *Résumé*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

to spend his remaining days in England, where he died some time before May, 1785.<sup>1</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Synagogue of London. Franks died at Bath in 1736, four years after Jacobs was engaged by the Company, and left a fortune amounting to £300,000.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps it was through a friend (or friends) that Ferdinande Jacobs came to join the Hudson's Bay Company, for in addition to the name of Isaac Franks there appears on this list by Umfreville also the name of Capt. John Jacobs concerning whom we have no background information. Perhaps Ferdinande was related to John of the stockholders group. Whatever the case, there was a Jewish stockholder with the Hudson's Bay Company at a fairly early period of its existence.

There was also a fur-trader, Jacobs, in the employ of the Montreal Pedlars, who is involved in April, 1778, in a conflict with Indians at Eagle Hills on the Saskatchewan River. In Turnor's Journal, Jacobs is designated as an Englishman and no more.<sup>11</sup> Turnor, in reporting to Hudson's Bay Company about Montreal traders, writes: "one Jacobs which never saw an Indian before he was ingaged and now knows not anything an Indian says has 100 Pounds Sterling Pr. Annum—". Turnor goes on to suggest that the Hudson's Bay Company will therefore have to make far better offers to its inland servants, men of real experience, if they will want to retain them in their service. There was Samuel Jacobs, a Jew, in Montreal, who had arrived there immediately after the fall of that city into English hands, about 1759.<sup>12</sup> Samuel Jacobs himself married a French-Catholic woman and his children were reared as Catholics. It is doubtful that "Jacobs an Englishman" of the Turnor Journal is a son of Samuel Jacobs, but it is conceivable that he was a relative who joined Samuel Jacobs in Montreal at a later period. The handful of Montreal Jews who had come in the wake of the English conquest were steadily joined by other Jews from New York and from England.

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

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

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

Immediately after the English conquest this region of the Great Lakes was a hotbed of intrigue and uprising. The various Indian tribes who had worked closely with the French traders, many of whom had married Indian women, were suspicious of and angered by the English interlopers. In one of these periods of heightened tension (1761), Alexander Henry found himself, together with two other Montreal traders, at L'Arbre Croche, twenty miles west of Fort Michilimackinac. This village was the home of some two hundred and fifty Ottawa tribesmen, as well as the location of a Jesuit mission which catered to the spiritual needs of those Ottawas who had been converted to Catholicism. In his direct and excellent style Alexander Henry<sup>16</sup> reported:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ferdinande Jacobs and Ezekiel Solomons and Company, the earliest Jewish fur traders in Canada, were pre-dated in this thriving trade by Jews who had settled in New Netherlands as early as 1654.<sup>23</sup> If a tradition was necessary on which to base their interest in fur, then surely they had such to fall back upon, dating back for about three-quarters of a century. An

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

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

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

In the Journals of Alexander Henry, the younger, several names suggest Jewish origin. Joseph Berger<sup>27</sup> appears as a voyageur at Fort Dauphin in the employ of the North West Company. Jacob Rezner<sup>28</sup> is referred to as a trapper and trader in the Astoria region about 1812, who originally came from Kentucky and whose name was varied as Rizner, Rezner, Peznor, Regner and Resner.

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

source is difficult to know.

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

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

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

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

#### HOW A JEW GOT AT CANADIAN HIGHLANDERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The process of adjustment had begun.

#### FOOTNOTES

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

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

# How “Numerus Clausus” Was Ended In The Manitoba Medical School

PERCY BARSKY

## *Résumé*

Dans cet article Percy Barsky met en évidence les raisons pour lesquelles les étudiants juifs étaient victime de discrimination lorsqu'ils faisaient demande d'admission à la faculté de médecine dans les années 40.

En 1943 un petit groupe d'étudiants qui étaient membres de la Société zioniste Avukah se sont regroupés et ont créé le Avukah Fact Finding Committee. Le but de ce comité était de prouver, chiffres à la main, que les étudiants juifs n'avaient aucun espoir de réussite dans le domaine de la médecine.

En février 1944 lorsque M. A. Gray aborda publiquement le sujet de la discrimination contre les étudiants juifs, le comité Avukah fut obligé de présenter les évidences des recherches entreprises et de demander à M. Hyman Sokolov de les représenter. L'expertise de cet avocat et les statistiques préparées par Shlomo Mitchell facilitèrent le succès de l'entreprise. Il fut ainsi que le Comité de Sélection de l'Assemblée déclara que, dans le futur, “la sélection sera faite sans considérer l'origine raciale ou religieuse de l'étudiant”.

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Our parents and grandparents came to this country a generation or two ago in order to escape inequities, indignities and physical persecution in other lands. To a great degree, their objective was achieved. They fled from pogroms and persecution to a land where they were permitted a degree of liberty and freedom unheard of in the countries from whence they came. Very quickly there arose a new generation, who, if they chose to, could enter into professions and careers from which they were barred in the old world.

It soon became evident that in certain fields, even in America, there still existed limitations based upon racial or ethnic tenets. The specific experiences to which I refer arose from the situation which existed in the Medical School of the University of Manitoba from 1936 to 1944. I will describe the problem as it existed at that time, and methods which were used to overcome this barrier to fundamental human rights.

From 1936 onward, it had become increasingly difficult for students of Jewish origin to gain admission to the Faculty of Medicine. Whatever their academic standing, only a fixed number of Jews were permitted to enter medicine, a number which diminished each year. Before 1932 the annual average of all students admitted to the college was 64. Of these, 18 were of Jewish origin. With the appointment of a new administrative head to the Medical College, a restrictive admissions policy came into effect, which by 1936 had reduced to nine the number of Jewish students admitted.<sup>1</sup>

A vicious system was adopted and practiced for 12 years, which applied not only to Jewish students but to fully 40 per cent of the population of Manitoba, and included students of Ukrainian, Mennonite, Dutch and Polish origin. It was also discriminatory against women applicants of any ethnic origin. That meant if you were a woman and a Mennonite, it was twice as difficult to become a doctor.

The basis for admission was not scholarship, or any other objective standard which would logically constitute proper qualification. The basis for entrance was that of race. This was made evident by the fact that the application forms specifically requested the racial origin, religion and occupation of the applicant's father, and the nationality of the applicant's father and mother. The applications were then sorted into four lists. One list was for Jewish applicants, another for women, and a third for Ukrainians, Poles and other Eastern Europeans, Mennonites and Italians. The fourth list was the preferred list for Anglo-Saxon, French-Canadian and Icelandic students.<sup>2</sup>

The procedure was as follows: the applicant list contained the entire number to be admitted (60 or 64 students). If 12 or 13 from the non-preferred lists were to be accepted, they would choose four Jews, three or four women, and four or five students of other ethnic origins, regardless of how many were on the list. On the 1943 applicant list, there were only 13 Jewish male students who were even considered for admission out of a very large number of students whose general averages were very high. In those days, percentages were used (e.g. 75%, 85% rather than grades A, B, C, or D). Jewish students with averages of 77 to 84 per cent were turned down. Four were accepted, the rest were rejected, and similar rejections were made from the women's list and from the other list of non-preferred groups. As a matter of fact, in some of the other lists, students of Eastern European origin with averages of 84 and 85 per cent were turned down because the quota of four Czechoslovakian or Italian or Mennonite appli-

cants had already been filled.

Such was the general manner in which medical school applicants were chosen. The objective was to fill the balance of places in the school from the preferred list. It did not matter to the admissions committee how far they had to go in order to complete the preferred quota with students who were not otherwise eligible. Some students were actually sent to a summer school which was created like a “kangaroo college” especially for them, so they could make up the subjects which they had failed in time to fill the preferred quota for their entrance year into medical college.<sup>3</sup>

In 1943, there were at least five students who were accepted, in spite of the fact that they did not pass some of their examinations, in order to complete the quota from the preferred list. These students were permitted to go to the special summer school to take up the subjects which they had failed. This special summer school began a month earlier than the regular summer school and ended in time for Medical College opening classes, September 13.<sup>4</sup>

Here are a few examples of how medical school applicants were dealt with: student “A”: who was on the non-preferred list, applied in 1943 but was refused although his average was 78%; student “B”, a classmate who was on the preferred list, failed in zoology, chemistry and botany — the most important subjects of the pre-med class. Student “B” wrote a special exam in summer school and was even allowed to enter medical college in the fall of 1943, still carrying a subject that he had not passed in pre-med school. There are documented cases of many students who were rejected even with M.Sc. degrees, and with averages of 80%.<sup>5</sup>

Although it was rumored that discrimination existed, there wasn’t any factual evidence to prove it, and there really was no way that anything could be done.

In 1943, a small group of students who were members of the Avukah Zionist Society formed the Avukah Fact Finding Committee, whose objective was to rectify the Medical College situation, although they themselves had no interest in getting into medicine. Indeed, the person who did 90% of the work in digging out facts and figures was a lecturer in the Mathematics Department. Shlomo Mitchell, now living in Israel, was the determined man who undertook this task. He could not tolerate the injustice which was being done to all the minority peoples of this province. Mitchell developed a card index, recording the names of 1500 students who had gone through medicine from 1926 until 1943. In addition, the names of all students who had applied to Medical College during those

years were included.<sup>6</sup> Mitchell went through all the student telephone directories in the University Library, and compiled only the relevant information. These names were all sorted by ethnic origin, whether they had passed or failed. The index cards contained every bit of information that could be gathered from alumni journals, telephone directories and similar sources.

The committee worked from September 1943 until February 1944 compiling this information. Then they went about getting information concerning marks from students who had been rejected, and there were at least 50 who were willing to submit their names, marks, and related material. Also obtained were the marks of students who were admitted with failures. Some university teachers, it must be said, were opposed to this corrupt admission system. The late Professor H. P. Armes was against it, as was the Zoology teacher, Professor R. A. Wardle. They both made depositions to the Fact Finding Committee and were quite willing to appear in front of the Board of Governors of the University, their own employers, to say that these were the facts and that they were opposed to this admissions policy.

This, however, never became necessary, since, in February, 1944, just as the committee had completed its research, which was thought to be secret, knowledge of the investigation leaked out. The late M. A. Gray, MLA, rose in the Legislative Assembly to say that he had knowledge of the existence of discrimination against minority group applicants to Manitoba's medical college. The Minister of Education immediately denied this. The Legislature asked Mr. Gray to produce evidence to back up his statements within three days or to withdraw the charge.<sup>7</sup>

This posed a dilemma for the Avukah committee, who were almost ready to present their material. They were uncertain how to proceed, but decided to back up Mr. Gray's statements in the Legislature. They prepared a brief and sought legal advice. It was unanimously agreed to ask Mr. Hyman Sokolov, a well known lawyer who had no political ties and was strongly sympathetic to Avukah, to act on their behalf.<sup>8</sup>

This was actually a victory for the committee, because most of the established groups who might have helped had turned a deaf ear. Local B'nai B'rith took an attitude of benevolent neutrality.<sup>9</sup> They were afraid that the case would backfire and that it would never be possible to prove the facts. Canadian Jewish Congress was reluctant to become involved until the very last moment, when they found there was nothing they could do to stop it.<sup>10</sup> As a matter of fact, they felt this kind of exposé could never

succeed. All things considered, it might well have turned out a failure.

The Legislature referred the question to a Select Committee and Mr. Sokolov presented the brief on behalf of the Avukah Society. He made a strong appeal and said in part:

“The issues here concern the lives and careers of young people. Older people may become hardened in time but young people are particularly sensitive to injustice. This pernicious system of discrimination is apt to destroy their ideals and to embitter them for life. They are brought up to believe that this is a great country and that everyone is equal before the law and then they find that here are classes and distinctions and that there is one rule for some and another for others. The issue is even broader: it is of concern to everyone in this country. Injustice against minorities are not evils which can be limited or confined. They are apt to spread and we have seen in our own day\* how the degradation and fall of one helpless minority leads to demoralization of others until the whole world is aflame. Injustice is contagious. Usually it is the Jews who are first attacked and then come the others and eventually no one is safe. Even here it has spread beyond the sphere of the Jews and now all minorities are being attacked and it is time for us to become aware of the veil and to make an end to it.”<sup>11</sup>

Sokolov contended: 1) that the Manitoba Medical College (and this was the main point), as a public institution which depended on public taxes, had no right to practice discrimination against any race or group; 2) that such discrimination was being practiced and the method adopted was to segregate the applicants into different lists based on racial origins; 3) that the discrimination was not only against Jewish applicants but also against other ethnic groups.<sup>12</sup>

Sokolov made his presentation to a special meeting of the Select Committee of the Legislature on March 16, 1944. The Committee was non-partisan, with equal representation from each of the political parties in the House. Mr. Justice Dysart, Chairman of the University Board of Governors, was present at this meeting, as well as Dr. Sidney Smith, president of the University, and Dr. A. T. Mathers, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine.<sup>13</sup>

The first reaction by the chairman of the Board of Governors was to the effect that such a situation could not exist, but, if it did, it must be

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\*Sokolov was speaking in 1944, during the Holocaust.

eradicated. Mr. Sokolov felt this was a minor victory, because what remained to be done was to prove the discrimination.

The Select Committee referred the matter to the Board of Governors with instructions to report back.<sup>14</sup> The Board met every third week for about six months, with Mr. Sokolov in attendance. They were informed of all the facts, and recognized that the charge of discrimination was true. By September of 1944, they were prepared to propose a change in the Manitoba University Act which would add a clause saying that in future the selection of students would be made without regard to racial origin or religion of the applicant.<sup>15</sup> This was the Avukah Committee's objective.

This may have been the first time in North America that a university act was altered in this way. It had a profound effect on the University and resulted in changes in the administration of the Medical College.

The findings of the Select Committee of the Legislature were very significant. The Committee reported that "having heard the evidence presented, it accepts the contention that the present facilities at the University impose a restriction on the number of applicants accepted annually for the first year in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Manitoba."

"The Committee considers that the method of selection of applicants for admission, instituted in 1932, had, in fact, related acceptance to ethnic origin, that the 'quota system' had led to the difficulties complained of, and the whole system was in need of revision. It approves the action taken by the Board of Governors in giving to all interested parties the opportunity to present their views, in order that the matter might be discussed upon its merits and an honest and satisfactory solution of the problem might be reached.

"The Committee, whilst recognizing the autonomy of the University and the authority of the Board of Governors to exercise on behalf of the University any or all of the powers, authorities and privileges conferred on the University as a body corporate and politic, nevertheless affirms the right of the Legislation to appoint Royal Commissions or Select Committees to enquire into and report upon matters pertaining to the University, and to act upon such reports as it may deem fit and proper."<sup>16</sup>

In addition, the Committee noted with approval the insertion in the regulations as to the basis of selection clause recommended to the Board by the committee.

“The selection shall be made without regard to the racial origin or religion of the applicant.”

This case demonstrated that it was possible to modify existing legislation to eliminate a discriminatory practice without resort to violent methods. It was a good model, not only for minorities but for any group who wished to bring about needed changes in a democratic manner.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. H. Sokolov, *Avukah Fact Finding Committee Brief to the Manitoba Legislative Select Committee on Education*, March 15, 1944 p.2, par. 4, and Table 1.
2. *Ibid.*, p.4, par. 2.
3. *Ibid.*, p.5.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p.6.
6. B. Levadie, *Chairman's Report to the Avukah Fact Finding Committee, Winnipeg*, June 1944 pp.1. 2. The card index file, which was kept in Mr. Sokolov's office, was destroyed in the early 1950's when the Time Building burned down.
7. *Ibid.*, p.2.
8. *Ibid.*, p.7.
9. *Ibid.*, p.4.
10. *Ibid.*, pp.4-6, 9.
11. Sokolov, *op.cit.*, pp.8, 9.
12. *Ibid.*, p.9.
13. Manitoba Legislature Select Committee on Education, *Special Report on Clause "D"*, March, 1944, p.1.
14. *Ibid.*, p.2.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

# Jewish Immigration To Western Canada In The 1880's\*

ABRAHAM J. ARNOLD

## *Résumé*

Trois sont les facteurs qui ont influencé l'immigration juive vers le Canada entre 1880 et 1910: la persécution et les privations qui avaient décimé le nombre des juifs dans l'Empire russe, en Roumanie et en Hongrie, le mirage de liberté dans le nouveau monde et, dernier élément, la réaction du pays où les immigrants cherchaient asile.

“Le Gouvernement Canadien n'a jamais fait aucun effort pour attirer les juifs et leur arrivée est entièrement volontaire” avait écrit W. D. Scott. Dans son article, Abraham J. Arnold décrit d'une façon détaillée le développement de l'immigration juive dans les Provinces de l'Ouest en soulignant en particulier le rôle joué par le Comité Mansion House, la politique du gouvernement, les injustices dans la répartition des terrains et les résultats de l'affaire Moosomin. Il attache surtout beaucoup d'importance à l'affaire Moosomin et il prouve que si d'un côté les immigrants juifs avaient échoué dans la colonisation de cette région, de l'autre ils avaient rencontré un fort manque d'intérêt et de soutien de la part de certains membres du gouvernement.

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Three major factors affected the course of Jewish immigration to Canada between 1880 and 1910. There were the compelling reasons of deprivation, persecution and pogroms which constricted the lives and often decimated the numbers of Jews in the Russian Empire, in Roumania, and in Austro-Hungary. There was the call to freedom in a new world which attracted all who sought to escape anti-Semitism, including the Orthodox and the growing adherents of new political ideologies, as well as those who dreamed of streets paved with gold. Finally, there was the attitude and the reaction of the country where the immigrants were seeking new homes as represented by government authorities on the one hand and by the community of co-religionists or “landsleit” on the other.

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\* This article is taken from a paper presented to the annual conference of the Canadian Historical Association at McGill University, Montreal in June 1972.

The attitude of the Canadian government during these three crucial decades was summed up by W. D. Scott when he wrote: "No effort is or ever has been made by the government of Canada to induce Jewish immigrants to come to the Dominion, and the influx has been entirely unsolicited." Scott also noted that Jewish immigrants were "aided largely by their own philanthropic societies" which did "useful work amongst their own people by looking after those unable to support themselves." Jewish immigration during the late 1890's and early 1900's was not, in fact, assisted or encouraged by the government. As an immigration agent during much of this period, Scott surely wrote with authority.

As for the small established Jewish community of those decades, its attitude towards the newcomers was occasionally ambivalent, being tinged with a degree of antipathy from time to time. The Jewish tradition of "Tzedaka" — charity and justice — invariably won out however, and was reinforced by the strong drive to self-help brought to bear by the immigrants themselves.

### RESPONSE TO POGROMS

The flow of Jewish immigrants from Russia to Canada became a significant factor during the decade of the 70's. Between 1871 and 1881 the Jewish population increased from 1,333 to 2,443. In the year of the pogroms in Russia in 1881, following the assassination of Tzar Alexander II, Montreal and Toronto had 811 and 500 Jews respectively; there were more Jews however, living throughout Ontario (1,245), than there were in Quebec (989). Manitoba had a Jewish population of 31, including 23 in Winnipeg.

The Montreal Hebrew Philanthropic Society, originally established in 1847, was reconstituted in 1863 as the Young Men's Hebrew Benevolent Society with immigrant aid as the *raison d'etre*. In 1875, the Toronto Hebrew Benevolent Society was founded and the Jewish community of that city also began to play its part in immigrant aid. The cost of helping newcomers began to grow and immigrant aid work became a serious and permanent activity.

In the 1870's, the Board of Delegates of American Israelites in the U.S. began to complain to the emigrant aid bodies in Europe about the influx of destitute Jews to American shores. The Young Men's Hebrew Benevolent Society in Montreal soon did likewise, with a resolution protesting the activity of the Ladies Emigration Aid Society of London, England in "sending to this country a large number of immigrant families

in a state of destitution.” Nevertheless, the Y.M.H.B.S. (later the Baron de Hirsch Institute) became the main institution through which immigrant aid programs were initiated. In 1877, the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society was founded in Montreal to help the men’s group and similar ladies’ groups were founded in Toronto and Hamilton in 1878.

The major Jewish emigration aid body in London was the Anglo-Jewish Association, and in 1881 branches of the Association were organized in Montreal and Toronto. This helped to bring about the provision of funds by the parent body in London to assist settlement of immigrants in Canada.<sup>2</sup>

In June, 1881, the Montreal branch of the Anglo-Jewish Association deplored “the sad intelligence of the recent outburst of bigotry and fanaticism in southern Russia which has culminated in the plunder, expatriation and massacre of so large a number of our unoffending and defenseless brethren.” Confidence was expressed that the parent organization would “make representations to the Russian Tzar for the permanent vindication of the inalienable right of his Jewish subjects to the peaceful occupation of their native land and of their homes.” Not being very optimistic about the outcome of such representations, the Montreal group declared its “most complete willingness to unite in any movement for material aid” for the soon-to-be refugees.<sup>3</sup>

Early in 1882, protest meetings against the Russian atrocities were held in the main centres of Western Europe and in the United States. One of these meetings was convened on February 1 at the Mansion House\* in London under the chairmanship of the Lord Mayor, and with Sir Alexander T. Galt, one of the “Fathers of Confederation” in attendance. Galt was then the first Canadian High Commissioner in London and he accepted the invitation to serve on the Mansion House committee, or the Russo-Jewish Committee as it became known. He played an instrumental role in arranging for the first large group of Jews to immigrate to Canada and particularly to Western Canada.

The High Commissioner’s association with the Mansion House Committee was the first formal involvement of any Canadian government representative with Jewish immigration. Galt himself soon became personally committed as the agent of the Russo-Jewish Committee in Canada but his efforts to obtain government backing did not get any real support.

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\*The Lord Mayor’s residence.

## GOVERNMENT POLICY AND ATTITUDES

Canada at this time was trying to attract immigrants to settle on the land in Manitoba and the northwest, but so far there had been little success apart from some Mennonite and Icelandic settlement. Some of the Russian Jews were reported to have agricultural experience. This was partially true and some of the early Jewish refugees were inspired by "Am Olam", the Jewish "back to the land" movement\*.

On January 25, 1882, Galt advised Macdonald that he had written to Rothschild about "the feasibility of removing the agricultural Jews to Canada . . . It seems not a bad opportunity of interesting the Hebrews in our northwest." In a second letter on February 3, Galt reported to the Prime Minister on his appointment to the Mansion House Committee and wrote that the Russian Jews were "a superior class of people, partly farmers, but generally trade people." Most of them were well-off, he said, though many had been ruined, but he was confident that many would be found "with sufficient means to establish themselves . . ." Moreover, since American Jews were actively promoting immigration to the United States "what was good for them could not be bad for us . . ." And in view of the growing Jewish influence in Europe, he added "there can be no harm in cultivating them."<sup>4</sup>

At about the same time, John Taylor, who was acting as the Icelandic agent at St. Andrews, Manitoba, wrote to the Governor General, the Marquis of Lorne, asking for the same kind of consideration for the Jews in Russia and Poland as had been granted to the Icelanders. He suggested that "a suitable block of land might be obtained for this purpose from the Dominion government and placed in the hands of trustees to carry out the benevolent design of providing new homes far removed from the cruelties and atrocities so shamefully perpetrated on this people in the name of religion."<sup>5</sup>

John Taylor's letter was forwarded to Prime Minister Macdonald by the Governor General's secretary, Colonel I. DeWinton, with a covering note which contrasted sharply with Taylor's sympathetic tone. DeWinton stated that a "large and influential committee of Jews in England . . . have taken up the cause of their fellow countrymen — and it has occurred to His Excellency that if the committee were approached by the Department of Agriculture they would have no difficulty in raising 5

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\*"Am Olam" was established by Russian Jewish youth after the 1881 pogroms, and founded farm colonies in South Dakota (1882) and Oregon (1883).

or 10,000 pounds and sending out say a 1,000 Jews. They are — the Russian Jews — a very dirty lot but if the English Jew will subscribe liberally and settle his Russian brother why shouldn't the Canadian government get the benefit of the transaction.”<sup>6</sup>

### JOHN A. MACDONALD'S COMMENTS

On February 20, Macdonald advised Lord Lorne that Galt would be instructed to act for the government and said: “we are quite ready to assign the Jews lands.” On February 27, Macdonald responded to Galt with his own famous note in which he referred to the prospective Jewish immigrants as “the Old Clo' move.” He predicted that they would “at once go in for peddling and politics” and would be as much use as “cheap Jacks and Chapmen.”<sup>8</sup>

Macdonald's attitude to the Jews is even more revealing in another letter to Galt in which he wrote:

“After years of ill-concealed hostility of the Rothschilds against Canada, you have made a great strike by taking up the old clo' cry, and going in for a Jew immigration into the Northwest. By following up this subject, and establishing a Jew colony here, whether ultimately successful or not, a link — a missing link — will be established between Canada and Sidonia.”<sup>9</sup>

Macdonald's comment about the Rothschilds may be in reference to some unsuccessful efforts to obtain financial support from them for the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Sidon was an ancient Phoenician seaport whose traders were repeatedly denounced by the Old Testament prophets. It appears therefore that whether he placed them in the contemporary role of “cheap jacks” or in the Biblical setting of “Sidonia”, Macdonald really took a deprecating view of the prospective Jewish immigrants.

### JEWISH COMMUNITY CONCERN

While government representatives were exchanging views about the Jews behind the scenes, the Jewish communities of Montreal and Toronto were becoming agitated about the impending arrival of several hundred immigrants, even though it was Winnipeg which was to bear the brunt of this first large influx.

On Saturday evening, May 13, 1882, the officers of the Anglo-Jewish Association, Montreal branch, met together with representatives of the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society to plan a cooperative effort to cope with the “hourly expected arrival” of 260 Russian Jewish refugees, at least

40 being destined for Montreal. The executives of the three societies formed a joint committee to attend to the immigrants and decided to call a community conference for the next day, where a resolution was passed for the establishment of "The Jewish Immigration Aid Society."<sup>10</sup>

The new society immediately launched a fund raising campaign, and three warehouses were rented for temporary shelter. This first Immigration Aid Society, however, disbanded in the fall of 1882 and turned over its remaining assets of \$300 to the Young Men's Hebrew Benevolent Society, who carried on with the work.

In Toronto, a new organization was not established and far fewer of the newcomers remained here. On May 18, it was reported that a carload of Jewish refugees arrived the previous day and about 12 of them remained in the city, the rest being sent on to Winnipeg. A fund raising campaign was also started. On June 3, when another group of 70 refugees arrived from the east, they were housed overnight and sent on to the northwest the next day.<sup>11</sup>

### WINNIPEG'S PROBLEM

With 340 virtually destitute Jewish refugees from Russia arriving in Winnipeg during May and June, it is obvious that the brunt of the burden of assisting the newcomers fell on that young community. The total population of Winnipeg at the time was 8,000, including 23 Jews. There is no doubt why this large group was sent to the west. They had been promised land, but when they arrived no land was available in spite of the best efforts put forward by Sir Alexander Galt up to that point. The newcomers were housed in immigration sheds. The Winnipeg city council took up the problem and called for community-wide subscriptions to aid the immigrants. Church leaders voiced their support and contributed from their personal funds, and the established Jewish residents immediately raised \$360 among themselves. Some temporary employment was obtained for the men at hauling lumber and railway construction and for the women in domestic service.

By the following winter, however, the problem became aggravated. A general relief committee was organized with Jewish and non-Jewish representatives. Philip Brown announced that the local Jews had raised over \$1,200 among themselves. The subject was widely discussed in the press and the Dominion government was severely criticized for neglecting these people who had been sent to the west with government approval.

## LAND RESERVES

On July 7, 1882, Alexander Galt had again asked for land on behalf of the "Jewish Committee". He stressed the great importance "especially in view of my return to London, and future influence with leading Jews there and in Paris, that you should find the means of giving a district for settlement to these people. It cannot fail to have a good effect."

He asked for some of "the spare Mennonite townships" or some of the land which had been assigned to colonization companies about whom he spoke very bluntly: "It seems absurd to have the whole district covered with bogus application (in many cases) to the exclusion of *bona fide* settlers."<sup>12</sup>

When Galt spoke about spare Mennonite townships he knew what he was talking about. Since March, 1873, the government had passed several orders-in-council setting aside vast tracts of land for Mennonites. According to one report more than 26 townships had been allocated (a township comprising 36 sections at 640 acres per section).

The Mennonites were to have occupied all their land reserves by 1881, but in fact they had only taken up seven of the townships, and immigration had virtually ceased. By the time the deadline for Mennonite settlement passed, squatters were already occupying some of the land and the government was under pressure to open these reserves for general settlement. It was not just Galt's request in behalf of the Jews that was ignored; the government kept changing its mind for years in regard to the Mennonite reserves.<sup>13</sup>

There were similar land reserves for Scottish, French and Icelandic settlement but this policy did not prove successful. Early in the 1880's the government began providing large land tracts to private colonization companies who undertook to bring in immigrants.<sup>14</sup>

Thus when the Jews arrived in 1882, land was being held in reserve on all sides, by the Hudson's Bay Company, by the Canadian Pacific Railway, and by the colonization companies, in addition to the unfilled Mennonite townships. No one, however, was ready to make some of this land available for the Jews. One reason was obvious: at the beginning of 1882, Manitoba was at the crest of a land boom and the Jews could not pay the prices asked by speculators. If the government was not prepared to assist them by making land available quickly under the free homestead policy, it was bound to lead to difficulties and create hardships for the newcomers.



*Some of the victims of the pogroms in Russia in 1881 took refuge in the arsenal at Kiev, where they were visited by Russian friends. (Photograph courtesy of the Jewish Historical Society of Western Canada and the Manitoba Archives.)*

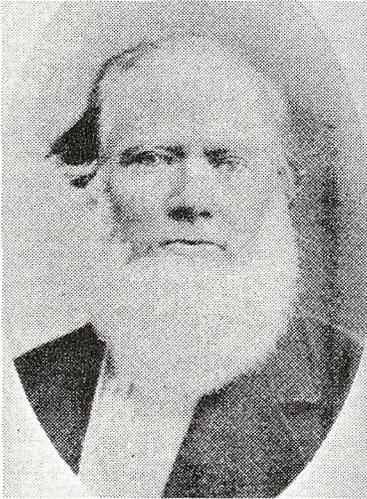


*Sir Alexander T. Galt, a Father of Confederation, was Canadian High Commissioner to London from 1880 to 1883. His association with the Russian Jewish refugees began with the meeting at the Mansion House in London in early 1882 and continued for the rest of that decade. This sketch of Galt was actually done by Robert Harris, one of Canada's most distinguished painters of the late 19th and early 20th century, who was commissioned by the Government to do the famous painting of the Fathers of Confederation. (Photograph courtesy of the Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum, Charlottetown, P.E.I.)*

Sir John A. Macdonald,  
Canada's first Prime  
Minister. (Photograph  
courtesy of Jewish  
Historical Society of  
Western Canada and the  
Manitoba Archives.)



John Taylor, the Icelandic agent at St. Andrews, Manitoba,  
wrote to the Governor General asking consideration for the  
Russian Jews. (Photograph courtesy of the Manitoba  
Archives and the Jewish Historical Society of Western  
Canada.)



\$26<sup>00</sup> 77273 17  
Moosomin May 27<sup>th</sup> 1885

I Berel Weidman hereby acknowledge  
having received since the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1885  
additional assistance from Sir A. J. Galt in  
Seed grain, potatoes, & full care provisions  
amounting in value to the sum of \$26<sup>00</sup> hereby  
making my total indebtedness to the said  
Sir A. J. Galt \$328<sup>00</sup>

Watrous }  
W. A. Kempster } B. Weidman

Receipt given by Berel Weidman, one of the pioneer Jewish settlers at Moosomin, for loans  
from Sir Alexander Galt in 1885. (Photograph courtesy of the Jewish Historical Society of  
Western Canada and the Manitoba Archives.)



*Simon Lechtzier (left) and his sons Abraham and Philip, were among the Jewish pioneers who tried homesteading at Moosomin between 1884-88. Simon is seen here with his son Philip and family in Winnipeg around 1900. (Photograph courtesy of the Jewish Historical Society of Western Canada and the Manitoba Archives.)*



*Hiram (Chaim Leib) Weidman, seen here in Winnipeg with his family around 1899, together with his father Berel and his brother Mordecai, were also among the Jews who tried homesteading at Moosomin. (Photograph courtesy of the Jewish Historical Society of Western Canada and the Manitoba Archives.)*

Macdonald's reply to Galt's letter of July 7 is apparently unavailable, but the attitude of the government is clear from certain correspondence which preceded Galt's appeal to the Prime Minister.

In a special effort to resolve the problem, the Anglo-Jewish Association in Toronto engaged a solicitor, L.M.O. Gontlee, to investigate in Ottawa the possibility of obtaining land in Manitoba for the Jewish immigrants. At the end of June, Gontlee reported from Ottawa to E. Samuel, honorary secretary of the Anglo-Jewish Association in Toronto, that "unless very great influence is brought promptly to bear we shall be able to obtain nothing suitable to our project." Four specific townships had been requested for the Jews, but these had just been assigned by order-in-council to other parties who had applied months earlier. Gontlee actually saw the plans of the Department of the Interior which showed vast tracts of land granted to the colonization companies from the 102 meridian to the vicinity of Edmonton "in a line varying from 100 to 400 miles in breadth." He also met with Senator McPherson who was in charge of the Interior Department land branch. Gontlee explained to the Senator that unless the government used their discretionary power it seemed impossible "to obtain any available tract where we could place our people before the season closed." This could only be done if the government cancelled some existing grants. This also appeared impossible, however, because Gontlee found Prime Minister Macdonald "rather opposed to granting us any special terms."

Nevertheless, Gontlee decided to petition the government asking for "a special rule" to make some land available. He described this as "one last chance" which might succeed if Galt would use his influence with Macdonald. He stressed the need to follow this course "at once" because otherwise the Winnipeg refugees would be at a great disadvantage and "compelled to go very far west for homesteads, or possibly leave the country," and this would deter others from coming to the west. He warned that there was little chance of making proper provision for the people waiting for land unless a tract was obtained within 300 miles of Winnipeg.<sup>15</sup>

Samuel wasted no time in writing to Galt, who was then in Montreal, and the latter responded immediately with his letter of July 7, to the Prime Minister.<sup>16</sup> But it was all to no avail.

As early as June 5, a press dispatch from Ottawa reported: "The government has made no arrangements for bringing the Jews to this country other than are made for bringing out other immigrants. The work of settling and providing for them will be carried out principally by the

Jewish residents in Canada.”<sup>17</sup>

The preceding January there had been a different kind of press report. A Jewish delegation from Montreal met John Henry Pope, the Minister of Agriculture, in Ottawa. On its return, the press interviewed “Mr. Cohen, president of the Canadian colonization scheme for the immigration of persecuted Jews from Russia to the Northwest,” who reported the Minister had given assurances “he would assist with all his aid.”<sup>18</sup>

After the arrival of the Russian Jewish immigrants in May and June, the *Manitoba Free Press* called into serious question the attitude of the government towards the refugees. A *Free Press* editorial charged that “misrepresentation” had been made to the newcomers regarding provision of land and the wherewithal to work the land. It predicted that the experience of the Russian refugees would be “frequently repeated” when “thousands of immigrants will be landing here who will have only their strength and the will to work as their capital.” It would be against “the interest of the country that any of these should be turned away.” Most of them would come expecting to acquire lands of their own immediately and not to work for several years “as common laborers” to earn the money to obtain their own farms. “What they will need,” the *Manitoba Free Press* urged, “is that which the Jewish refugees say was promised them. . . namely, an advance of the necessary means.” A satisfactory answer to this question was needed not only for “the present destitute immigrants . . . (but for) thousands of others.” Failure in this instance would mean a great loss to the country, the paper warned.<sup>19</sup>

A second editorial a few days later blamed “mismanagement of immigrant matters” for the measures which were then being taken “to prevent any further immigration of these people to Manitoba . . .”

“The few families who have been here for a length of time . . . but find the burden . . . more than they can bear . . . They find it impossible to do now what the Dominion government ought to have done before sending these people here . . .”

The paper suggested that in view of their language difficulties and their arrival late in the season, the immigrants should have been given special consideration. “A little assistance from the government, along with the means possessed by a minority of the people themselves would have laid the foundations for a large and flourishing colony.” Because of the absence of such help, however, “immigration will at once be checked.”

The editorial predicted that the 350 people who had come would “no doubt acquire the English language” and gradually save enough money to

live comfortably in homes of their own. For them the difficulties would soon be overcome “but the country will be a loser for all time” because of the lack “of any system for locating this class of immigrants on farm lands.” A little statesmanship “would have resulted in . . . thousands of industrious and valuable settlers instead of the small number . . . now found to be inconveniently large.”<sup>20</sup>

The editorial writer seemed to have the gift of prophecy but the immigration agents who reported about the Jewish newcomers presented a rather prejudiced view.

Writing to Ottawa about the Russian Jewish refugees on June 20, C. R. H. Warnock, acting immigration agent, noted first that “a dozen or more are utterly useless for this country.” This group included some blind people, and a few too old to work while “others are actually too lazy.” Warnock acknowledged that about 100 of the men were already “earning good wages” working for the C.P.R., but he considered their lack of English a “great drawback towards employing these people.” Another drawback was they would not work on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, and therefore only worked five days a week. For these reasons Warnock considered “the immigration of these people” was not a success and he called for it to be stopped.<sup>21</sup>

A few weeks later, in July, at about the time that Galt appealed to Macdonald “Do not forget my Jews,”<sup>22</sup> immigration agent William Hespeler wrote to Ottawa condemning the Jewish immigration as “a mistaken move.” He had already concluded that “those people are not nor ever will become agriculturists.” He also claimed they were not mechanics, made “very inferior ordinary laborers” and were simply “a *trading class*” in which capacity they could not make a living “having no means, nor knowledge of the English language.” Hespeler was worried that even the majority who had gone west to work on the railway would come back in the fall and be “on the hands of the government.” He suggested that some of them should be removed “to some more congenial part of the Dominion” before winter arrived.<sup>23</sup>

Hespeler conceded that the same difficulty would arise with “a certain class of English immigrants . . . without any experience of any kind” who were enticed by the idea of 160 acres of free land. He warned that the government might even have to provide winter help for another “practical and desirable class of immigrants” who came with what should have been sufficient means but were affected by inflation 1882-style.<sup>24</sup>

During this period many of the immigrants did find other occupations

and left the immigration sheds to find their own housing. The Jewish committee contributed to the support of those who needed help, while the officials continued to write negative reports, particularly about those few who could not or would not move out of the immigration sheds and who were coming to be regarded as a public nuisance.<sup>25</sup>

The Jews who reached Winnipeg in the spring of 1882 had actually expected to proceed without delay to assigned lands. Nothing had been done, however, except for the appointment of Victor Victorson as liaison between the Jewish community, the refugees and the Dominion immigration agent. Apart from Mr. Gontlee's efforts in Ottawa, Victorson and several of the newcomers set out for the Qu'Appelle Valley in search of a homesteading site, but they were unsuccessful.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of the original indications of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture that land would be assigned and aid provided, the first Jewish immigrants to Western Canada remained without land during all of 1882 and all of 1883. Two years later, Galt was still trying to get land for the Jews. On April 1, 1884, he wrote the Minister of the Interior, for the Mansion House Committee, that it was still intended "to place on homesteads from 40 to 50 families of those sent to Winnipeg two years ago." He explained that the objective was to test "the suitability of these people for agriculture." He claimed to have at his disposal "adequate funds" and urged the desirability of placing these people in one locality "as was done with the Mennonites and Scotlanders."<sup>27</sup>

After this incredible two-year delay, Galt's plea was at last heeded. In May, 1884 some 28 families started out for the assigned location near Moosomin. The total of about 340 immigrants who had arrived in 1882 included 150 or more adult men, all of whom had expected to take up homesteads. It is hardly to be wondered, however, that during the two year interval, as predicted by the *Manitoba Free Press*, many of them had found other occupations and were no longer interested in becoming homesteaders.

### THE MOOSOMIN EXPERIENCE

The Jewish settlement at Moosomin became known as "New Jerusalem", but its name was hardly a harbinger of success. The settlers encountered many difficulties for which they were totally unprepared. At about the same time and in the same district the experienced Scottish crofters had similar problems. Neither the crofters, the Jews nor another settlement group of east-end Londoners were prepared for three years of

bad crops in addition to poor market conditions which affected them all equally in the years 1884, 1885 and 1886. Nevertheless, only of the Jews at Moosomin does immigration historian Norman Macdonald say "they failed not because of poor location but because they had no aptitude for agricultural purposes."<sup>28</sup> For the other homesteaders who failed he advances every valid reason. Even for the colonization companies, with whom he has little sympathy, he presents all the reasons they gave for being unable to fulfill their obligations, particularly "external circumstances beyond their control." By July, 1885 the companies were memorializing the Privy Council that they had "met with unexpected and insuperable difficulties."<sup>29</sup>

At Moosomin, however, the New Jerusalemites were still hoping for their first harvest. They had surely never heard of the Privy Council, but they were learning first hand about the insuperable difficulties of settlement in the west. The reaction of the Jews to the failure of their initial efforts was different from would-be homesteaders of other origins. When the immigrants were Mennonite farmers, Scottish crofters or Ukrainian peasants, Ottawa was confident that they would stay on the land, as farming was their tradition and they knew of no other calling. The Jews were prepared to give homesteading a serious try but if they encountered nothing but failure they could not and would not stay on the land. The Jews may have been imbued with the "back to the land" ideal but they were not peasants. They came with a more varied cultural background than other immigrants, and they were, by tradition, more mobile and more versatile at earning a living.

### **GALT DISILLUSIONED**

When Alexander Galt agreed to assist the resettlement of refugee Jews in Western Canada, it is natural to assume that he felt some sympathy for them in the knowledge of the persecution which had caused them to flee from Russia. It is understandable, however, that he did not undertake to assist the Mansion House project for purely altruistic motives. He felt that the encouragement of homestead settlement by poor Russian Jews would help to bring financial investments in the west by some of the wealthy European Jews. He certainly had far more in common with the Montagues and the Rothschilds who were leaders of the Mansion House Committee in London than he did with the Weidmans, the Lechtziers and the other Russian Jews who tried to become homesteaders at Moosomin.

Probably this is why in May, 1886, Galt expressed concern not for the

crop failures encountered by the “New Jerusalem” settlers but for the fact that “they have united in a general refusal” to sign for cash advances received. He conveyed his concern to the Minister of the Interior as follows: “The conduct of these people is the worse because the committee have been most kind to them, having forgotten all the arrears of interest till May 1, instant and only requiring the principle in ten years with 5 per cent interest.” He warned that failure to settle this matter satisfactorily “will close the door upon all further effort on the part of the friends of the Jews in Europe.”<sup>30</sup>

Interior Minister Thomas White advised Galt that his information about the refusal to acknowledge advances was not entirely correct. White explained that all the settlers had acknowledged the first advances. The refusal to sign had been “only for the later ones, for clothing, provisions and seed grain, given since January 1.” The government could not compel any further acknowledgement he explained, as under the law . . . acknowledgement must be voluntary to justify the granting of a lien.<sup>31</sup>

The 27 men who took homesteads at Moosomin in 1884 had in fact acknowledged advances to a total of \$10,521 and the Mansion House Committee had been granted liens to this amount.<sup>32</sup> If they refused to acknowledge the new advances, it could be interpreted as a reaction to repeated crop failures and as a measure of self defence. Were they really doing anything more serious than the colonization companies who petitioned the Privy Council for relief?

By the beginning of 1888 the situation of the Jews at Moosomin had deteriorated even further and Sir Alexander Galt declared: “The Jewish colony at Moosomin is a failure. The Jews have sold their crops, the cattle I gave them and turned to their natural (!) avocation for peddling.” His concern now was for the Mansion House Committee “who have expended about 5,000 pounds on these vagabonds” and he now inquired whether the acknowledgements registered in Ottawa would give the London committee “any claim on the land.” In writing to A. M. Burgess, secretary of the Commission on Dominion Lands, Galt brought into question his own motives towards the Jews when he confessed: “. . . from the outset I protested against the experiment as I never thought they would make farmers.”<sup>33</sup>

Galt’s Jewish “vagabonds” undoubtedly did turn to peddling when they found that their farming efforts failed. A number of them felt, however, that in spite of their lack of success, the effort which they had put forth en-

titled them to some claim on the land. Mordecai Weidman was the first to make formal application for a patent on his homestead and others followed. The controversy over who would obtain title to the Moosomin lands lasted for many years. The position of the settlers was complicated by two factors. First, they had to establish that they had fulfilled the minimum requirements of settlement and land development. Secondly, there was the issue of naturalization. On the other hand, the Mansion House Committee and their trustees in Canada tried to obtain title to the lands on the basis of the liens which they held. This situation was not helped by government representatives trying to enforce regulations which were subject to reinterpretation and amendment over a period of several decades. The long drawn out procedures that resulted surely caused mutual feelings of disillusionment among those involved and must have colored the attitude of government officials towards future Jewish immigrants.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. W. D. Scott, *Immigration by Races*, Vol. VII of *Canada and its Provinces*, pp. 571-572, eds. Adam Shortt and Arthur Doughty, (Toronto, Glasgow, Brook & Co., 1913).
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# The Rise And Decline Of A Toronto Synagogue: Congregation Beth Am

HARVEY MEIROVICH

## *Résumé*

Dans cet article on étudie l'épanouissement de la communauté juive située dans le "Bathurst Corridor" de Toronto, les problèmes rencontrés à cause de l'établissement de l'école et enfin l'affaiblissement de la congrégation.

En 1954 plusieurs familles juives qui désiraient la vie paisible de la banlieu formèrent la Congrégation Beth Am. Ces familles venaient de plusieurs couches sociales et d'origines différentes. Les représentants de Beth Am tentèrent de s'associer au groupe de Beth David mais une divergence d'opinion empêcha cette fusion. Au printemps 1954 ils créèrent ainsi le West Wilson Community Centre et, ayant acheté la propriété Ness située sur Keele Street, ils purent avoir leur propre synagogue qui au début n'était qu'une énorme tente.

En 1955 la congrégation comptait 77 membres payant et au printemps de l'année suivante elle avait atteint les 200. Le temps était venu d'essayer d'avoir un rabbin. Plusieurs rabbins se succédèrent entre 1955 et 1958 lorsque Shamai Kanter accepta de devenir le rabbin de Beth Am. Les intérêts du rabbin se centrèrent surtout sur le domaine de l'éducation et à ce but il donna naissance à la bibliothèque d'abord et à l'école après. Les inscriptions de l'école montèrent de 169 en 1956 à 200 en 1959 et à 270 en automne 1960. Cependant plusieurs familles avaient pris l'habitude d'envoyer leurs enfants à l'école sans faire partie de la congrégation, ce qui créa une division très nette parmi les membres. En 1960 420 élèves étaient inscrits à l'école et en 1967 la congrégation comptait 322 membres. Pourtant une année plus tard le nombre commença à diminuer ce qui apporta aussi une réduction dans le nombre des inscriptions pour l'école.

Harvey Meirrovich étudie les différentes couches sociales qu'on retrouve à Beth Am et il arrive à la conclusion qu'à présent la congréga-

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tion est encore solide, quoi que l'école soit moins fréquentée. Il fait remarquer que les membres de la congrégation veulent rester fidèles à leur religion et à leurs valeurs, mais il ne cache pas une certaine préoccupation pour le futur car plusieurs familles d'origine italienne et autre se sont installées dans cette partie de la ville. L'article se conclut ainsi en soulignant le rôle considérable que Beth Am a joué dans l'épanouissement de cette communauté juive.

**De la part de l'éditeur:** Nous venons d'apprendre que Beth Am va bientôt fermer ses portes et que cette congrégation va s'unir à celle de B'nai Israel-Beth David.

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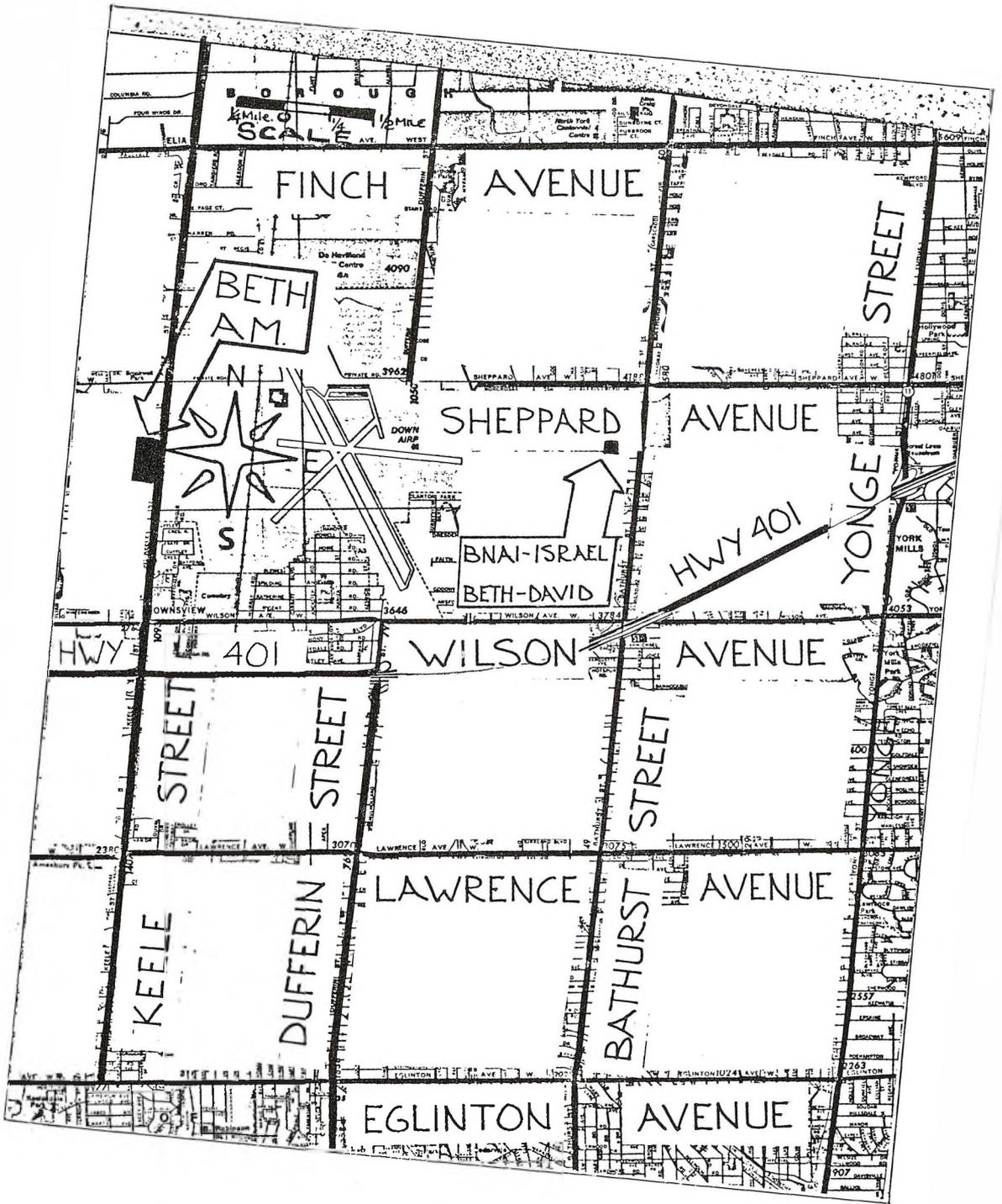
### HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATION

This study discusses the peripherally located Jewish community which evolved in the north and northwest pocket of North York Township, Toronto whose ethnic-religious centre is Congregation Beth Am.<sup>1</sup> Although the Jews in this corner of the township number some 3,000 persons, or roughly 6.5% of the general population, only scant attention has been paid to the rise of a Toronto Jewish community which lies outside what we shall term the *Bathurst Corridor*<sup>2</sup> (See map).

To be sure, Evelyn Kallen has conducted in-depth research analysis on Jews residing in the Bathurst corridor.<sup>3</sup> In the 1971 census the Jews there numbered 30.5% (i.e. 64,000 people) of the total population (of 185,000) in the area. Kallen confined her research to those Jews who affiliated with three Toronto synagogues, each representing either an Orthodox, Conservative or Reform constituency. Utilizing a stratified (non-random) sampling technique Kallen drew conclusions about the ethnic-religious patterns of the Toronto Jewish community at large.

It is our contention that her descriptive statistical research, to the extent that it can be extrapolated to the larger Toronto scene, reflects the ethnic-religious life styles of those Jews who dwell within the Bathurst corridor and not the Jews who opted for residence in the geographic area which came under the influence of Beth Am. Our study, like that of Dr. Kallen's, focuses only on those Jews who are affiliated members of the synagogue.<sup>4</sup> We begin with a history of the congregation, drawing primarily on archival data from the years 1954-1965, which reflect the congregation's period of gradual increase and consolidation in membership.

The men and women who came together to form Congregation Beth Am in the fall of 1954 were yearning for the novel setting of life in subur-



bia.<sup>5</sup> They had been preceded by middle income Jewish families of various ethnic backgrounds who had left the inner city and had established residences in the Bathurst corridor. As Jacob Spelt has noted, persons in lower income brackets desiring to flee from the inner city tended to concentrate themselves in the northwest pocket of North York Township.<sup>6</sup>

Indications are that the early members of the Beth Am community subscribed to this demographic axiom. For example, preliminary discussion of a possible merger with the recently established Beth David Synagogue, located in the Bathurst corridor vicinity, were initiated shortly after the congregation's founding. These discussions were fruitless. Aside from the peripheral geographical location of Beth Am, which did not appeal to the Beth David representatives, it soon became evident that, by and large, the socio-economic level of the Beth Am membership was below that of Beth David's.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the failure to effect a merger between the two congregations at this early date bears out the accuracy of A. H. Richmond's research: residential segregation exists not only by ethnic groups but by social class.<sup>8</sup>

The inception of the congregation can be traced back to the early spring of 1954, when about one hundred people met in Downsview Public School and formed the West Wilson Community Centre.<sup>9</sup> As the organization's name indicated, the individuals who had assembled were interested, chiefly, in forming a social and educational institution. The group leaders, however, were determined that the final goal would include the establishment of a permanent religious center. Formal steps in this direction were taken in the late fall of 1955 with the purchase of the Ness Estate on Keele Street from Mr. Percy Wright for the sum of \$45,000.<sup>10</sup> The estate was over 100 years old. At one time it had served as a horse breeding farm and country home for the Ness family, which had emigrated from Britain to Canada about 200 years before. Wright had purchased the land for development purposes. In the interim period before its acquisition by Beth Am, the estate was reputedly the scene of a gambling and prostitution operation. High Holy Day services were first held in 1955. The four hundred congregants who assembled inside a circus tent measuring some 4,000 square feet listened to the preaching of Sam Birenbaum, then a medical student. Dr. Birenbaum recalls that in one of his sermons he spoke of the tent of meeting of the children of Israel and compared it to the experience of the Beth Am congregants who were dwelling in their own temporary sanctuary. A later rabbi remembers that when he conducted services in the tent he was forced to depart "for home for the ex-

press purpose of putting on a set of long underwear".<sup>11</sup>

The synagogue's first Torah was presented to the congregation by Mr. Hans Fried, a successful Toronto restaurateur. The money for the Torah was donated by a Christian, Mr. Thomas (Tex) Mitchell, who had served as a mercenary pilot for the Israeli government between 1952-1954 and had become a zealous supporter of Zionism and Judaism.<sup>12</sup>

By June 1955, the congregation's roster totalled 77 paid up members. By early spring of the following year, membership had grown to 200 families. Although the leadership of the congregation had discussed the advisability of hiring a rabbi, financial considerations postponed any serious talk of the matter until the winter of 1955. Until this time, Rabbi David Monson of Beth Sholom Congregation acted as an effective religious advisor. In open advertisements placed in Canadian and American newspapers the congregation invited candidates to apply for the position of rabbi. Several candidates replied, most of whom had received training in Orthodox yeshivot (rabbinical seminaries). Intent on employing a rabbi with a "Conservative bent", the pulpit committee weeded out one applicant, in particular, who explicitly mentioned a talent for preaching in Yiddish. Significantly, the congregation honed in on two rabbis who were serving Canadian synagogues. In June of 1956 Beth Am hired its first spiritual leader, Jacob Shtull, a 1953 graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and a Canadian by birth. Shortly after he assumed the post of rabbi the congregation became a charter member of the United Synagogue of America, the lay branch of the Conservative movement.<sup>13</sup>

Rabbi Shtull's tenure was brief. Within the year he had handed in his resignation. At a meeting of the Board of Governors he made a point of speaking about what he regarded as the proper relationship which should exist between a rabbi and a congregational board. Reminiscing about those early years Rabbi Shtull has written:

The group of leaders at that time were newcomers to synagogue administration . . . I cannot recall ever developing a close relationship with the officers. We were all young and inexperienced. The Rabbi's role was not fully understood by the leaders.<sup>14</sup>

Another rabbi who served the congregation a few years later expressed similar sentiments:

I found the members, as a whole, to be very nice and cooperative. But the leadership was "European" and poor. Everyone, because he could "*daven*", wanted to be the Rabbi. They still have the old no-

tion of a rabbi as seen in "Fiddler on the Roof". They want to relegate the Rabbi to a secondary position while at the same time pointing to the prominence of the Beth Tzedek Rabbi.<sup>15</sup>

It would appear that during these formative years, Beth Am's rabbis exercised a restricted role in their dealings with the board. This was so because the board largely perceived its relationship with the rabbi as that which existed between an employer and an employee. Any efforts by the rabbi to involve himself in the "affairs" of the congregation, particularly as they might have related to finances, were shunned.

Over the years the congregation has gone through a gradual metamorphosis; some might call it a maturing process. Today, the rabbi, although a guest, may sit in on all discussions of congregational affairs. There is a consensus among the leaders of the congregation that he can play a role in the affairs of the congregation outside the realm of the strictly spiritual.<sup>16</sup>

With the departure of Jacob Shtull, Reuben Slonim of Toronto consented to act as a consultant rabbi to the synagogue. Lacking a full-time rabbi, Beth Am engaged Nathan Lieberman, a native of Warsaw, who had immigrated to Canada in 1948, to officiate as a cantor and teacher in the Hebrew school. He served as the congregation's cantor until 1973, when he left to assume the post of rabbi in Oakville, Ontario and today serves as rabbi in Niagara Falls, Ontario. In September of 1958 Rabbi Shamai Kanter, another Seminary graduate, became the spiritual head of the synagogue.<sup>17</sup>

## EDUCATION

Rabbi Kanter brought to his duties an avid interest in Jewish scholarship and a wish to cultivate Jewish learning among the congregants. One of his first acts was to urge the creation of a library. Financial problems necessitated postponing the implementation of this suggestion for several months. During the 1958-59 season, he introduced an institute of adult studies.

These classes, on the whole, were not well attended. He was more successful, however, in attracting a select number of youth. Working in close cooperation with the rabbis of two other synagogues, Beth David and Adath Israel, Rabbi Kanter was instrumental in the formation of a regional high school which met twice weekly at Adath Israel and once a week at the home synagogue. He enjoyed meeting with his class because, in his words, it provided him with an outlet "to be *rebbe* as well as rab-

bi”.<sup>18</sup>

Rabbi Kanter’s presence was certainly felt within the larger Christian community. When a missionary movement began to coalesce in the city, Kanter issued a statement, certain to arouse controversy in some circles, denouncing the newly established Christian group. He took care to copyright his remarks and insisted that anyone wishing to reprint his editorial had to receive his permission. On another occasion he applied to the Canadian educational system the American canon of separation of church and state. He called upon Canadian “Protestants to assume the burden of developing their own system of religious education” and thereby divorce religious teaching from the public schools which were supported with public taxes.<sup>19</sup>

The people who joined Beth Am wanted to identify with and solidify their commitment to a retention of Jewish values. Although they had rejected what they viewed as a rigid orthodoxy, they were, nonetheless, intent upon transmitting a sense of “Jewish identity” and tradition to their children. Concern was voiced early over the quality of their children’s Jewish education. The Beth Am Hebrew School began to operate officially in September 1955, with an enrollment of 40 children. The first principal was Mrs. Shoshana Kurtz. She was followed by Mr. Sholom Goodman in 1959 who held the post for two years. Aside from developing a satisfactory afternoon curriculum, the educational staff had to be on guard and take necessary precautions against the threat of fire to the wooden frame structure which housed the school.<sup>20</sup>

School enrollment climbed steadily to 169 in 1956, 200 by 1959 and 270 in the fall of 1960. However, the school was plagued by parents who, living within the school district, benefited by sending their children to the Hebrew school, but refused to affiliate as members. One survey conducted by the synagogue revealed that as many as 50 parents (amounting to almost 29% of the total school population) fit into this category. Several years later the school roster registered non-members’ children at 40%.<sup>21</sup> Another chronic problem was the poor public transportation system. Until the situation improved in the early 1960s, the Hebrew school’s peripheral location, off the main routes of the bus line, made it necessary for students and teachers to use taxis.<sup>21</sup>

The school functioned on a three days a week schedule, offering each child six hours of instruction. An effort by the principal in 1958 urging the adoption of a five day school week met with little support, although he pointed out that more intensive curriculum would likely attract highly

qualified teachers. Eventually, an honours programme was instituted. By 1958 the burgeoning school enrollment made it necessary to introduce evening class hours. Between 1957 and 1961, classroom facilities at a local public school nearby were used, rent free, for kindergarten children.<sup>23</sup>

The effort to attract girls into the Hebrew school constantly challenged the early educational administrators. Many parents, as second generation Canadian Jews, harbored the notion, prevalent among their peers, that boys alone needed to receive a Jewish education, and then only to enable them to qualify for their *Bar Mitzvah*. Four years after its doors opened, a consultant for the Bureau of Jewish Education in Toronto noted that less than 20% of the school's population were girls. Two years later Rabbi Kanter could not point to any improvement in the situation.

A step to provide an attractive package for young girls and their parents had been initiated in 1957 when the synagogue permitted girls to become *B'not Mitzvah* during services which were to be held on Saturday morning.<sup>24</sup> A year later it was decided that girls would be called to the Torah in the same manner as boys. The school eventually witnessed four of its students attending institutions of higher Jewish learning. Another student was the recipient of a prize in a national Bible contest (English division).<sup>25</sup>

Towards the close of 1962 an issue took shape which had all the potential of dividing the congregational membership. As already mentioned, a large percentage of parents, while categorically refusing to join the membership rosters of the synagogue, were quite prepared to pay a slightly higher tuition payment in order to be able to send their children to the Hebrew school. When some of these parents' children became active members in USY, the congregation's youth committee met to ponder the situation. Faced with what some members viewed as sheer exploitation by parents who obstinately refused to join the synagogue, the committee enacted a ruling prohibiting non-members' children from holding executive office and from participating in regional and national conclaves as representatives of Beth Am. Within two weeks the youth commission itself revoked this decision. The matter, however, was reintroduced the following month to the congregation's executive board. Its members recommended that membership in the youth group be open only to members' children and that non-members' children be granted associate member status. When the congregational board met, the executive's resolution was modified further and given an even more conservative tone: as of the 1963-64 season, USY membership would be restricted to members' children.

Throughout the spring, the youth commission continued to evaluate the board decision. Finally, in mid June, an emergency congregational board meeting was convened to reconsider the issue. In a vote which included a large number of abstentions the board voted to revoke the decision it had arrived at a few months earlier.<sup>26</sup>

### BUILDING CAMPAIGN

The quantity of archival data which is devoted to Jewish education and youth programming indicates the high priority these items received in the minds of most congregants. The other item which consumed members' time and energies centered on the synagogue's building campaign and the finances which were related to it.

One of the earliest synagogue records made mention of donation boxes which were set up at general meetings enabling interested members to make small contributions, aside from their dues. Such monies were, undoubtedly, channeled into repair work and renovation of the synagogue house as well as installing needed burglar and fire proofing. When the idea was seriously broached to construct a new building to adjoin the synagogue house, some members expressed the opinion that the congregation should rather rest content with an extensive renovation project. But, within three years of Beth Am's formation, ground breaking ceremonies were held for the synagogue's first new building, a social hall *cum* temporary sanctuary. However, efforts to collect pledges ran afoul. In spite of an earlier temporary loan given to the congregation by a leading Toronto businessman, construction was halted for a time. Eventually construction was renewed, and by the High Holiday season of 1958 the social hall-sanctuary was ready for assemblage.<sup>27</sup>

Within three years estimates were quoted for a proposed permanent school edifice and sanctuary. Construction of these buildings, however, did not actually begin until March of 1964. By September of the same year the school building was operational and members could worship in their newly constructed sanctuary.<sup>28</sup>

The installation of permanent pews in 1966 coincided, ironically with a visible fall in membership which happened without warning. Family affiliation actually increased gradually between 1962 (232 members) and 1967 (322 members). Moreover, Hebrew school registration had hit a peak of 420 pupils in 1966. Yet the following year the congregation's board recorded its anxiety for the first time that sixteen families had recently left the area. One year later the board noted that a loss of eigh-

teen families had been sustained and that the school population had dropped to 351 pupils.<sup>29</sup> Membership continued to decline until the early 1970's. In 1975, membership had stabilized at approximately 260 families, but school enrollment had dropped to a twenty year low of approximately 100 students.

The precipitous decline in pupil enrollment and the more gradual drop in member affiliates can be attributed to the volatile socio-economic composition of Beth Am's membership, and their slow migration to other regions of settlement. We shall have occasion to make reference to these phenomena in our sociological analysis of Beth Am's members.\*

## **SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF CONGREGATION BETH AM**

### **Socio-Economic Status**

As we have mentioned above, Beth Am's early members consisted of Jews who were striving to attain middle class status. The returns on our mailed survey questionnaire<sup>30</sup> strongly suggest that Beth Am affiliates, today, have, by and large, achieved a modicum of social and economic success. In fact, they compare quite favourably with many of their brethren who reside in the Bathurst corridor region. Kallen's research showed that the model class for income was between \$10-20,000. This figure compared with 59% of Beth Am respondents who earned between \$10-25,000 annually.<sup>31</sup> However, our statistics showed that under one quarter of our sample (including males and females) were employed as professionals. Over one quarter were gainfully occupied in sales and management while slightly more than 13% were engaged as merchants.<sup>32</sup> Educationally, a sizeable majority (62.1%) of respondents completed or received only some high school education. Under 30% have undertaken some aspect of university study.

Yet, they have entered the ranks of the middle class. Although aggressive drive and ambition are indispensable requisites for economic success, we suggest that our respondents have achieved a certain amount of economic security, mainly because they have adhered to an hypothesis posited by Merrijoy Kelner. Since World War II, Anglo-Saxon domination in Canada, albeit secure, is gradually undergoing a democratization process. While positions of prominence continue to be dominated by Anglo-Saxons "working within the bureaucratic structure", non Anglo-Saxons have penetrated previously closed economic sectors. Their ascent into elite circles, however, lies outside the corporate bureaucratic

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\*The research questionnaire is available at the Canadian Jewish Congress Central Region Archives.

framework, in high risk, innovative or technically specialized fields such as entertainment, construction, retailing and research.<sup>33</sup> While not necessarily having attained positions of social and economic prominence, over 40% of our sample have entered this type of field. They are at work primarily in the fields of crafts, retailing, financing and professions requiring technical expertise.

Over three quarters are native born and almost two-thirds are native Torontonians. In comparison with their parents, most of whom immigrated to Canada either between 1901-1913 or between 1919-1939, our respondents have indeed gained a notable level of economic stability. Today the number who work as craftsmen (4%) is small when compared to their parents' generation (35.7%). But unlike their parents the personalized skills of the second generation are highly sought after in a society which still appreciates the talented hands of a craftsman. Most of the parents of Beth Am members surveyed (42.9%) chose to enter the business world. Their establishments generally operated on a small scale enabling them to earn livelihoods. Their children, however, have often been able to enlarge their parents' operations or expand their occupational interests into sectors which were previously largely closed. They have also entered professional ranks at a far greater rate than had their parents.

Our study tends to show that, in spite of the Canadian establishment's refusal to stress social mobility as a positive virtue,<sup>34</sup> our respondents have acquired that trait, probably through a chain of transmission emanating from their parents and their Jewish heritage. Moreover, the democratization process which Kelner sees manifesting itself at upper executive levels appears to have filtered down, making it possible for ambitious working class people to acquire greater degree of power, prestige and status, and thereby become respectable members of the middle class. Indeed, a sizeable majority of our respondents perceived themselves as middle class.

### **Relocation**

In reply to the question of whether they were seriously considering the possibility of moving from their present quarters over the next few years, our survey revealed that significant numbers from all age brackets expressed the desire to remain in their present home. Seventy-five per cent (or 113 out of 150) of those 45 years of age or over and sixty-five per cent (or 69 out of 106) of those between the ages of 20-44 indicated a preference to remain in their present domiciles.

The younger age groups' reluctance to move may be attributed to the

high cost of property and housing in other sections of the city, particularly in the Bathurst corridor and east of the Don River. At present, slightly over one half of our sample reside within three miles of the synagogue. An almost equal number live from four to more than seven miles from the congregation. When broken down by age, we see that of those beyond the age of 45, over 35% dwell within three miles of the congregation, while almost 22% live beyond a radius of four miles. Our figures for the younger age set show that slightly more of them (23.9%) reside at least four miles from the synagogue than live inside of that radius (17.2%).

Hence, our data indicates that in spite of a declining school population, Beth Am retains a solid measure of stability because its membership roll comprises a viable mix of young and middle age couples who live within relatively easy walking/riding distance of the synagogue. But, should the younger aged affiliates decide in the future to relocate, presumably out of the area under discussion, then it seems likely that Beth Am would experience a precipitous decline in membership and status. As the situation now stands the congregation faces the prospect of a further loss in membership. As Jews continue to relocate to the area of third settlement, in the northeastern section of the township, the new ethnic-religious institutions which will spring up will ultimately claim the allegiance of those who are presently tied to Beth Am.<sup>35</sup>

### **Religious Attitudes**

Those Jews who constitute Beth Am's membership have a very definite sense of their ethnic identity<sup>36</sup> — they feel themselves to be ethnically Jewish. Only small factions view themselves primarily as Canadians, Canadian Jews or Jewish Canadians. Their participation in the affairs of the synagogue and their lesser involvement in Jewish organizational life outside the bounds of the synagogue bears testimony that their identity is fostered, largely, through identification with a religious institution. Hence, our data confirms the conclusions reached by the authors of the *Riverton Study*: "The Jewish Self image necessitates religious affiliation as the identifying characteristic."<sup>37</sup>

Whereas Kallen's respondents could choose their synagogue affiliation, Beth Am's congregants were compelled, largely, to join the one religious institution which existed in the area. Indeed, a majority (40.6%) cited Beth Am's propinquity to their homes as the primary reason they joined. Once having become members, however, almost one quarter of them (24.6%) cited the congregation's Conservative orientation as a decisive factor

which influenced their membership. An almost equal number (22.7%) pointed to a wish to have their children receive a Hebrew school education.<sup>38</sup>

### **Religious Observance**

A majority of respondents classified their parents' religious observances as either very strictly observant, or moderately observant. A greater percentage of mothers than fathers were ranked as observant, while more fathers than mothers were described as moderately observant. A combined tally reveals that over one half of the parents were viewed by their children as observant to moderate in religious practice while only one fifth regarded their parents as strictly observant. These figures correspond favorably with similar data gathered on parents in the *Riverton Study*.

When describing their own patterns of religious observance, our data showed that Beth Am members have retained a similar level of observance as their Conservative counterparts in Kallen's study. A most striking observation was that the principles of Kashrut were adhered to, at least in their homes, by sizeable numbers of congregants in both samples. Middle aged and older congregants tend to predominate as regular Sabbath service worshippers. But, on the whole, we noticed that the observance pattern of Beth Am congregants was fairly equally distributed according to age. We observed that younger members (representing 41.4% of our respondents between the ages of 20-44) displayed the same overall propensity to retain and/or discard rituals as did older members (representing 58.6% of our respondents 45 years of age and over).

### **Women's Role**

In light of the current discussion as to the role of women in congregational life, our survey polled the attitudes of respondents on a number of key issues. When asked whether they favoured more participation by women in the conduct of services, including reading from the Torah, we observed that at least two thirds of the male and female respondents answered in the affirmative. But when questioned whether women should be permitted to become rabbis, affirmative responses declined markedly to just over one half by women and less than one half for men. Not surprisingly, younger aged members of Beth Am expressed a much greater willingness than their older peers to entertain a change on both issues.

Although a majority of Beth Am women polled indicated a proclivity for more active participation by women in all phases of congregational life, it is equally evident that, thus far, they have made no conscious effort

to translate their feelings into practice. Hence, they constitute a silent majority prepared to abide by the status quo.<sup>39</sup> A national survey conducted under the auspices of the National Women's League (Conservative) noted similarly that the overwhelming majority of Conservative women appeared to be "unmoved by the Resolution of the Committee on Law and Standards, regarding a more active role for women in the rituals of the synagogue. . . ."<sup>40</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Social scientists who have analysed second generation American Jewish communities, most notably W. Herberg and M. Sklare, have concluded that there is a definite tendency by them to discard much of their cultural-religious accoutrements. Their progeny, in turn, reacquire much of the cultural-religious baggage their parents have cast aside. The statistical data gathered in our local study of a Canadian congregation runs counter to the above sociological principle which has gained a high degree of acceptance in Jewish intellectual circles. Rather, the second *and* third generation Jews we have focused upon value highly their ethnic identity. It manifests itself, primarily, in an adherence to eclectic forms of ritual behavior and a commitment to the perpetuation of religious institutions.

Our demographic study has sought to demonstrate that Jewish families will continue to gradually drift away from the northwest corner of North York Township. Other ethnic groups will replace them; Italians have already established residences in the area in large numbers. The long range future of Beth Am is tenuous. What remains certain, however, is that Beth Am's physical presence provided a needed setting around which suburban Jews who were committed to the retention and transmission of Jewish values could congregate. There seems little doubt that Beth Am's existence enriched the lives of those Jews who came into contact with it and who desired to see Judaism perpetuated.

## FOOTNOTES

1. As this paper goes to press, Beth Am is about to close its doors and merge with Congregation B'nai Israel-Beth David. Already in 1975 the forces of disintegration were apparent. In fact, the question of Beth Am's stability was one of the factors which prompted me to undertake this study.
2. "Bathurst Corridor" is defined here as that concentrated belt north of Bloor Street which passes through Forest Hill and continues in a northerly direction towards the northeast corner of North York. There is an inner suburb which corresponds roughly to the Forest Hill area. Jews dwelling there were generally of an upper socio-economic status: J. Spelt, *Toronto: With a Chapter on the Economic Structure of Toronto* (Toronto: Collier-Macmillan, 1973) p.103; A. H. Richmond, *Ethnic Residential Segregation of Metropolitan Toronto*, p.41 (cited later). No attempt has been made yet

to research the third area of Jewish settlement in the northeast corner of North York across the Don River. This burgeoning community, which presently numbers over 12,500 Jews, appears to be becoming a focus of a new middle and upper middle income Jewish social class. Census of Canada, June 1971 and reproduced in a memorandum of the Canadian Jewish Congress (Central Region), April 19, 1974.

3. E. Kallen, *Three Toronto Synagogues; A Comparative Study of Religious Systems in Transition*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology at the University of Toronto, (1969).
4. A study of a different sort might wish to consider random surveys of all Jewish residents including non-affiliates in the area with which we are concerned.
5. Information on the early history of the congregation was gathered from synagogue archives; manuscript pamphlet on the history of the congregation compiled by Mrs. Rosalyn Federman; interview with Dr. Samuel Birenbaum, the congregation's first pro-tem president, on October 20, 1974.
6. Spelt, *loc.cit.* :
7. Interview with Dr. Sam Birenbaum; the membership list for the year 1957 showed the following partial (179 out of 219) occupational distributions: Craftsmen — 19; Trade — 32; Business/Management — 57; Professionals — 34; Sales — 28; Clerical — 4; Labourers—6. The serious financial burden carried by the synagogue during these formative years is evidenced further by the bank's refusal to grant the congregation a mortgage so that it could build more adequate facilities to suit its needs: *Executive Minutes*, October 1, 1957 (hereafter referred to as *X Minutes*); at one point one of the congregation's creditors was about to initiate a court claim against the synagogue for an outstanding balance of just over \$1000: *Congregational Correspondence*, 1957; another instance of the congregation's economic plight is illustrated by the need for the congregation to sell the rabbi's home: *X Minutes*, July 9, 1957.
8. A. H. Richmond, *Ethnic Residential Segregation in Metropolitan Toronto* (Toronto: York University Institute for Behavioral Research, Ethnic Research Programme, 1972) p.12, 56.
9. Jewish names were compiled from lists in the possession of the local rate payer's association and voter registration lists. A door to door canvas then narrowed the actual number of Jews in the vicinity: Interview with Dr. Sam Birenbaum; interestingly, a few years later the local United Church minister requested a membership list from Beth Am so that in his efforts to canvas the Christian community he could bypass the Jewish homes: *Congregational Correspondence*, 1959.
10. This was slightly below the market value for the two storey farm house and adjacent two acres of property. The owner was prepared to sell because he was in financial straits: Open congregation letter, November 23, 1955; interview with Dr. Sam Birenbaum; congregation's Annual Report for Year ended June 30, 1963.
11. *X Minutes*, July 21, 1955; interview with Dr. Sam Birenbaum; letter to the author from Jacob Shtull, November 25, 1974.
12. Interview with Dr. Birenbaum; Federman manuscript.
13. *X Minutes*, June 23, 1955, November 23, 1955, January 17, 1956, May 28, 1956; synagogue letter, January 4, 1956; interview with Dr. Birenbaum; undated report (late spring 1956?; letter by Rabbi Shtull to Max Shechter, November 29, 1956; letter to author from Jacob Shtull, November 25, 1974.
14. Letter from Jacob Shtull, *loc.cit.*
15. Letter to author from Albert L. Raab, February 11, 1975. When evaluating the rabbi's remarks, it should be noted that he was the only rabbi to be dismissed from his post with the congregation.
16. Interview with Mr. Peter Shour, a past president of the congregation, June 8, 1975; the synagogue archives show that the second rabbi engaged by the congregation attended executive and board meetings as a guest; the present rabbi of the congregation has exer-

cised his prerogative not to vote at any meetings of the Board of Governors. Other Toronto congregations, such as *Beth Sinai* and *Temple Ari*, expressly forbid their rabbis' from voting at board meetings. Beth Sinai and Temple Ari are fictitious names for Adath Israel and Temple Sinai congregations. They were used by Dr. E. Kallen in her study: *T.T.S.*, pp. 58, 89, 166.

17. *X Minutes*, December 24, 1956; *Board of Governors Minutes*, January 14, 1957; (hereafter referred to as *Board Minutes*); *X Minutes*, August 19, 1957; Rabbi's Correspondence, 1958; *Who's Who in Canadian Jewry* (Montreal, 1965), p.141.
18. Adult Education Correspondence, 1959; *X Minutes*, October 14, 1960; Rabbi's Correspondence, March 20, 1962; *Board Minutes*, October 27, 1958; *X Minutes*, January 12, 1959.
19. Beth Am Bulletin, April, 1962 (hereafter referred to as *Bulletin*). *Ibid.*, March, 1962. In light of Rabbi Kanter's feeling, it is certainly ironic that today the educational leaders in the Toronto Jewish community are urging the adoption of a plan whereby Jewish day schools will be subsidized with provincial money.
20. Interview with Dr. Birenbaum; Federman manuscript; *Education Committee Minutes*, October 11, 1965; *General Meeting Minutes*, May 15, 1961; *Board Minutes*, November 26, 1956; *X Minutes*, July 9, 1957.
21. Federman manuscript; *Education Committee Minutes*, October 29, 1958; Synagogue Correspondence, February 21, 1957, September 30, 1957; *General Meeting minutes*, May 15, 1961; *Bulletin*, November, 1959, September 17, 1962; *X Minutes*, November 11, 1963. Kallen's data shows that Beth Am was not alone in its struggles to attract affiliates. In 1961 only a few less than 50% of the Jews living in the Hurstville corridor affiliated with a synagogue, with the greatest number joining Conservative (44%) and Orthodox (38%) congregations. The Reform numbered 18%: Kallen: *T.T.S.* p. 42.
22. Author's personal recollection; *Education Committee Minutes*, September 5, 1957.
23. Synagogue Correspondence, 1957; *Education Committee Minutes*, February 13, 1958, October 29, 1958.
24. *Board Minutes*, November 18, 1957; *Education Committee minutes*, January 2, 1958; *Bulletin*, June 1960; today a Bat Mitzvah is permitted to recite the *Maftir* and *Haftorah* portions and accompanying blessings. Furthermore, on the day of a *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* a sister may receive an *aliyah*. This practice arose out of a specific request. Beth Am's practice must be regarded as more liberal than the other Toronto Conservative congregations and the Conservative synagogue in Hamilton, Ontario. For example, Adath Israel Congregation only permits a *Bat Mitzvah* to recite the *Haftorah* and accompanying blessings, but doesn't allow them to have an *aliyah* or recite the *Maftir* portion. Beth Jacob Congregation in Hamilton is equally as conservative by permitting the young girl to recite the *Haftorah* while the father recites the appropriate blessings and receives the *Maftir aliyah*. The only congregation more liberal in this matter than Beth Am is Beth Tzedec which, while following Beth Am's procedure, allows *B'not Mitzvah* (and women) to serve as Torah readers: *Rabbinical Assembly Minutes of the Ontario Region*, March 10, 1975.
25. Three entered rabbinical seminaries, two of whom graduated as Conservative rabbis, while the third pursued studies at Orthodox Yeshivot; the fourth became a cantor, and the fifth, a woman, pursued graduate studies in Jewish History at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.
26. *X Minutes*, December 3, 1962; January 3, 1963; *Board Minutes*, February 18, 1963; June 17, 1963.
27. *X Minutes*, June 30, July 7, July 28, 1955; October 22, 1956; July 9, August 19, October 1, October 30, 1957; Federman manuscript; the cost of the social hall and new kitchen was approximately \$170,000: *Annual Report*, 1963, 1966.
28. *Board Minutes*, May 1, 1961; September 19, 1966; Federman manuscript; the cost of the new sanctuary came to over \$340,000: *Annual Report*, 1966.

29. Membership Lists, 1962; 1963 (260 families); 1966 (around 300 families); it should be pointed out that a synagogue notice (dated September 30, 1962) sent to a newspaper listed synagogue membership at over 350 members. This was confirmed by *Bulletin*, October 1, 1962; *Board Minutes*, November 21, 1966, February 30, September 18, 1967.
30. Our questionnaire was mailed to the entire synagogue population (510 adults). We received a return sample of 256, representing just over 50% of the congregational membership.
31. Of course, we were not able to monitor the economic status of Jews who left the area. However, based on the demographic facts we have established, we abide by the assumption that a move away from the area generally meant an advance in economic terms. The tables supporting the statements and conclusions made in the remaining portion of this article can be found in the Canadian Jewish Congress Central Region Archives.
32. Aside from those who did not respond to the question on occupation, over 30% of the women listed their occupation as housewife.
33. M. Kelner, *The Elite Structure of Toronto; Ethnic Composition and Paths of Recruitment*, unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Department of Sociology at the University of Toronto, (1969), p.222, 239.
34. J. Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), pp.54, 57.
35. Hence, the decision by Beth Am's leadership to merge with B'nai Israel-Beth David in 1977 was done from a position of relative strength and stability.
36. Ethnicity has been defined as "those who conceive of themselves as being alike by virtue of their common ancestry, real or fictitious, and who are so regarded by others"; T. Shibusani and K. Kwan, *Ethnic Stratification* (New York: Macmillan, 1967) p.40 and cited in *TTS.*, p.2.
37. *Riverton Study*, p.25-26; this brief study analyses a second generation American Jewish Community. The more sophisticated study is, of course, *The Lakeville Studies*, 2 vols. (1967). However, because the data therein refers to third generation Jews we have deliberately refrained from making reference to it; W. Herberg developed the Riverton theory referred to here in his book, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, (1960). The conclusion of the Riverton Study, while apt for Beth Am's membership, still leaves open the mystifying question of why Beth Am did not attract more area Jews into affiliating with the congregation. Several suggestions, all requiring research, come to mind: 1) a large number of first and second generation Jews whose priorities were economic advancement and integration into Canadian secular life; 2) the strong pull of Yiddishism acting as a surrogate for synagogue affiliation; 3) the existence of landsmanschaft societies which catered to the social, cultural, religious (i.e. burial privileges) needs of Jews; 4) the secular-cultural draw of the YMHA-YWHA; 5) the native Canadian leadership of the congregation intentionally founded a Conservative congregation which stressed decorum and encouraged the use of English in services. This style of worship service probably had little appeal to recent Yiddish speaking survivors of the Holocaust and other Yiddish speaking recent immigrants who moved into the area. I am indebted to Mrs. Victor Sefton for suggesting this last point.
38. We note that 10-15% of our respondents failed to answer the questions relating to why they joined the congregation; whereas the orthodox synagogue has a day school nearby attended by well over 90% of the children of the members of that synagogue, Beth Am presently sends only 3 children to day schools; *TTS.*, p.85, 118; Anonymous Interview, June, 1975.
39. We should not rule out the possibility that the women's responses may not have reflected their actual feelings, but rather the way they thought they should have answered the question from the viewpoint of the women's liberation movement.
40. Zelda Dick, "Light from our Poll on Women's Role", *Women's League Outlook*, vol. 45, Summer issue, 1975, p.15.

# Book Reviews

## FINDING OUR FATHERS: A GUIDEBOOK TO JEWISH GENEALOGY

DAN ROTTENBERG

New York: Random House, 1977

*Reviewed by:* BRIAN LAND

### *Résumé*

“En chacun de nous il y a le désir de savoir qui nous sommes et d’où nous venons” avait dit Alex Haley à propos de son livre *Roots*. Il est pourtant difficile pour la moitié des juifs qui habitent l’Amérique du Nord de remonter à leurs origines. Rottenberg refuse d’accepter qu’il soit impossible de dépasser les dernières trois générations et en présumant que 85% des juifs ont leur racine en Europe, surtout dans l’est de l’Europe, il prend l’année 1700 comme point de départ et soutient la thèse que les juifs de nos jours sont tous des descendants directs de la population juive de cette période lointaine. Il trace ainsi les origines des familles et s’appuie sur des documents tels que les licences de mariage, certificats de naissance et de mort, faits historiques, listes de passagers etc. Dans son livre, qui est très utile et facile à lire, Rottenberg donne une liste de 8000 noms de familles juives, leurs origines géographiques et généalogiques. “Nos ancêtres peuvent nous apprendre beaucoup. Il faut seulement les trouver” et Rotenberg nous montre comment.

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Asked to explain the phenomenal success of *Roots*, the best-selling story and television dramatization of seven generations of his family, Alex Haley has said the answer is simple: “In all of us there is a hunger, marrow-deep, to know our heritage — to know who we are and where we have come from. Without this enriching knowledge, there is a hollow yearning. No matter what our attainments in life, there is still a vacuum, an emptiness, and the most disquieting loneliness.”

The search for his own roots posed a special problem for Dan Rottenberg, a journalist and writer now living in Philadelphia. For, of the dozens of books on genealogy, none has dealt with the difficulties faced by Jews in tracing their ancestors. Even though ancestor hunting has become

a major North American pastime, very few of the books and articles on genealogy are of any use to those whose background is Jewish. Although he originally set out to compile a book that would offer everything that is known on the subject of Jewish genealogy, Rottenberg eventually settled for one that would be the first word, rather than the last, on the subject. And an excellent first word it is.

The fact that nearly half the world's Jews today are in North America, and that 85 percent of the world's Jews have their roots in Europe, especially Eastern Europe, plus the sheer volume of material available, led Rottenberg to focus his book primarily on American Jews of East European descent. Since the greatest persecutions of Jews, along with the sloppiest record keeping, took place in Eastern Europe, it is there that the problem of tracing ancestors is greatest.

Rottenberg challenges the assumption most Jews make that it is impossible to trace their ancestries back more than two or three generations. As recently as 1700, the world Jewish population was between one and two million, so that almost all the Jews living today are descended from them. This means that it should not be too difficult for Jews to link up their family with the tree of some related family that can trace itself back to 1700 or earlier.

Rottenberg begins his book with instructions on how to get started in genealogical research, by contacting living relatives, by examining marriage licenses, gravestones, ships' passenger lists, birth and death certificates and a variety of other public records in the United States. This is followed by "a quick course in Judaica" which assembles the various bits and pieces of Judaica that one may encounter as one searches further for Jewish ancestors. Included is information on Hebrew dates, consanguinity, naming of children, adoption of family names and sources of Jewish names, as well as a discussion of the interrelationships between Jewish tradition, history and the Bible.

Despite the upheaval and destruction of European Jewry, North American Jews do have some advantages in tracing their family tree. Although many records of European Jewish communities have vanished, the ones that have been preserved can be found in a few centralized locations, chiefly in the United States and Israel. Rottenberg describes Jewish sources available in the libraries and archives in the United States and points out that the best records for Jewish ancestor hunters are not to be found in Jewish institutions but in the Mormon Library of the Genealogical Society of Utah in Salt Lake City. Other principal sources

are to be found in the American Jewish Historical Society in Waltham, Mass. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York and Leo Baeck Institute in New York. Rottenberg also includes a one-page listing of "Sources in Canada" which, although useful, contains two errors in the spelling of street names (Beverly instead of Beverley, and Grainville instead of Granville).

Rottenberg describes Jewish sources available in almost every country of Europe as well as the Soviet Union, Iraq, Turkey, Algeria and Morocco, Argentina, Brazil, the Caribbean, Australia and South Africa. A special chapter is devoted to sources in Israel such as the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, in Jerusalem.

The most important feature of *Finding Our Fathers* is a 234-page "Source Guide for Jewish Genealogies." The guide is an alphabetical list of some 8,000 Jewish family names compiled by Rottenberg using geographical and genealogical information found in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, the *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, and the *Encyclopedia Judaica* as well as in hundreds of published and unpublished books of Jewish family histories. Ideally, Jews should be able to look up their family names in this guide and find information about the derivation of the name, some description of families which have carried the name and where they came from, references to family trees, records and histories, and cross-references to families which Rottenberg has found to be interrelated. In order to keep the guide manageable, Rottenberg limited himself to references to family relationships prior to 1900 and outside the United States.

The book's bibliography includes Jewish family histories, genealogical and general reference works, Jewish reference works and books on international Judaica.

*Finding Our Fathers* is an important and unique contribution to genealogy in general and to Jewish genealogy in particular. Written in a highly readable, light-hearted style, it will be a useful how-to-do-it book for both the beginner and the more sophisticated family historian. Dan Rottenberg demonstrates that genealogy can not only be fun; it can also be spiritually satisfying. For, as he states: "Each time I have uncovered the name of my long-forgotten ancestors. I have been filled with the mystical feeling that I was indeed rescuing that ancestor — not from hellfire, perhaps, but from oblivion. They did walk this earth, our ancestors, once upon a time, and they are still out there, somewhere. There is much they can teach us even now, if we can find them. So let us begin."

## A GOOD PLACE TO COME FROM MORLEY TORGOV

Kasrilevke On Lake Superior: Morley Torgov's Memories Of  
Jewish Life In Smalltown Ontario  
Toronto: Lester and Orpen, 1976

*Reviewed by:* ADAM FUERSTENBERG

### *Résumé*

Dans ce livre Morley Torgov décrit son enfance et son adolescence à Sault Ste. Marie avec beaucoup d'humour mais aussi avec beaucoup d'humanité. La petite communauté juive de cette ville de l'Ontario devient vivante et nous partageons ainsi les aspirations et les petites jalousies, le besoin de pouvoir et de notoriété de certains de ses membres.

Torgov nous montre aussi que la vie dans un centre rural ne fait qu'augmenter l'impression d'isolement qu'éprouvent les personnes d'origine juive car ils sont non pas seulement coupés de leurs racines mais ils sont aussi loins des centres tels que Toronto, Montréal etc. où leur judaïsme est encore fort et vivant. Par contre la petite communauté juive de Sault Ste. Marie ne peut compter que sur elle-même.

Le livre de Morley Torgov est très intéressant et amusant et sa seule faiblesse est peut-être un élément d'optimisme que l'écrivain ne parvient pas à cacher.

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The romanticizing of the small town or village as a "good" place to be from originates in a pastoral tradition whose echoes go back as far as Virgil and Homer. This myth received a special boost with the worship of Nature which developed during the Romantic Age, and increased in intensity as a result of the problems which arose with industrial development — in particular the problem of urbanization, the growth of the dirty, exploitative, alienating "Big" city. No doubt the more recent American political disillusionment and the publicity involving the insurmountable problems of the big cities, especially New York, have added to this tendency. In recent years, the ability of Hollywood, Broadway, and the TV networks to exploit what one might call "the romance of the commonplace" in films and programs like *The Last Picture Show* and "Green Acres", or in musicals like Rodger's and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma*, has clothed the small town with an almost sacred aura. The small town has

become part of the nostalgic escape to the “good old days”: the fact that those days may never have existed somehow makes their hold on our imagination all the more powerful.

However, this recently re-invigorated desire to go back to the land, to the simpler, presumably healthier, life in the small town runs contrary to the main current of the last hundred years. Indeed, the trend, accelerated since the Second World War, has been toward the development of ever larger urban concentrations, especially the massive megalopolis with its endless industrial and residential suburbs.

Thus it is not surprising that a critical literature satirizing the mindless nostalgia for the small town and the idealized past has concurrently developed. Its main technique is the dousing of these popular myths with liberal cold showers of realism. From Sinclair Lewis’ Gopher Prairie in *Mainstreet* to Grace Metalious’ vicious society in the hugely popular *Peyton Place*, the narrow-minded, soul-destroying horizons of the small town, with its bigotry, sexual repression, and frequently vicious competitiveness, have been challenged as a good environment to grow up in. Increasingly it has been pictured as a good place to *come* from — that is, to escape from.

It is in this tradition, although more gently than the abrasive Lewis, that Morley Torgov presents the recollection of his childhood and youth in Sault St. Marie in *A Good Place to Come From* (Totem Books, 1976). This satiric tradition is particularly comfortable for the author because the Jewish experience in the small town was usually contrary to the popular mythology of a return to endless youth, innocence and virtue. For the conscious, practicing Jew the small town was a kind of special hell, an exile on top of the great exile from Jerusalem, a *galut* within the profounder *galut*. It meant deprivation in all those communal Jewish activities which made exile bearable in the security of the larger communities like New York, Chicago, Montreal or — even fifty years ago — Toronto. Thus, perhaps echoing Dr. Johnson’s famous remark to Boswell that the brightest prospect a Scotsman could have was the highroad that would lead him to London, Torgov tells us that for the small town Jew, Queen Street (Sault Ste. Marie’s main street) was “a one way street heading eastward to Toronto.” “There could be,” he stresses, “no stops in between.”

As the dedication indicates, the book is a memorial — “in lieu of candles” — to the author’s father. But it is a rather ambiguous memorial because the figure which emerges is an unflattering portrait of a

quarrelsome, bigoted and embittered old man who felt he had wasted his life and was determined that his only son would not suffer the same fate. He felt himself in exile from Russia — a land “he loved passionately” and then from Winnipeg, never quite making it to Toronto except occasionally to buy stock for his Sault Ste. Marie store from those “whores on Spadina.” Having left a fiancée behind in Odessa, he contracted an unhappy marriage to a girl from an established, anglicized Winnipeg Jewish family, which looked down on his poverty and his European Yiddish background. With the premature death of his wife, he now found himself a widowed father of an eight year old boy, stuck in what seemed the end of the world. “I dug a grave for myself in this town,” he concludes. The result is the small town Jew’s sense of a wasted life, whose single available redemption is the ability of the next generation to escape. This explains the father’s persistent campaign, very humorously portrayed, to convince the son to go to medical school by exposing him to graduation pictures in the Sunday edition of the *Forward*. The father is understandably desperate when he realizes that young Torgov wants to enter that “luftmensch” world, the insubstantial, insecure — or, as Richler once described it in an essay — uncertain world of the writer. The son eventually becomes a lawyer, an interesting compromise not quite to the father’s liking, due to the latter’s experience with lawyers, in particular the anti-semitic, drunken WASP who serves as the local example of success in one of the more bitter satiric vignettes in the book.

Most of the other scenes evidence the gentler method associated with the self-deprecating humour of a Sholem Aleichem. The main exception is the small Jewish community’s own bigotry against the Chinese who runs the sleaziest of the local restaurants. He is defended by Torgov’s father because he recognizes in him the wasted life of the “outsider”, the total stranger he feels himself to be. The result is a quarrel with the rest of the Jewish community. This eventually culminates in the elder Torgov’s battles with the other major sponsors building the first synagogue in Sault Ste. Marie. It is this sense of fragmentation that is perhaps the underlying statement about Jewish small town life. This “Kasrilevke on Lake Superior” exhibits all the foibles of the original. The quarrelsomeness, the jealousies, the jockeying for social and community position are nowhere more effectively described than in the pathetic attempt to strike local roots by building a synagogue and moving the services from the rented Foresters’ Hall, or in the chapter which describes the plot to foist the thankless job of President on a fresh victim.

All this frantic effort only underlines the community's precariousness. The Jews are left alone because the WASPS are too busy denigrating the other ethnic groups, especially the Italians and the Slavs, who in turn are intolerant of each other. But the potential threat is there and helps to counteract the internal fragmentation. On the other hand, the paradoxically concurrent threat of assimilation is less effectively drawn in the chapter describing the dating of gentile girls. The obvious temptations are described humorously and well, but the conclusion is unfortunately too optimistic. Rabbi Stuart Rosenberg (*The Jewish Community in Canada*, Vol. I, p.104) tells us in his general historical survey of the Canadian Jewish community that in the early 1950's "intermarriages had taken place in ten out of thirty-seven Jewish households in Sault Ste. Marie."

There has been a partial revival. Television, better transportation, decentralization of industry to provide a greater variety of jobs, and the creation of new universities and community colleges have made the small town more livable. This is attracting a new generation of Jews to places like Guelph, Kitchener-Waterloo and Kingston, all of which have increased their Jewish population in recent years, and accounts for the fact that there are still more than ten thousand Jews living in small communities in Ontario. Nevertheless, the trend is clearly in the opposite direction as more and more of these communities are suffering attrition or are disappearing altogether. The new professionals who arrive tend to be even more mobile than Torgov's generation so that the community's rootlessness is hardly alleviated. As in the past the small town Jew is in transit, and so Morley Torgov's account of a vanishing era in Ontario Jewish life is a very welcome addition to the record. The fact that it is also entertaining and enjoyable reading, and well deserved the prestigious 1975 Leacock Award for Humour, only enhances its value to our social history.

# Jewish Historical Society Of Canada — Report Of 1977 Activities

W. VICTOR SEFTON

## *Résumé*

Plusieurs réunions ont eu lieu pendant l'année 1977 dans lesquelles la Société a joué un grand rôle. La première réunion en mai avait été organisée par l'Assemblée plénière du Congrès Juif Canadien et la deuxième en juin avait fait partie des réunions organisées par les Sociétés Savantes.

À l'Assemblée Plénière la discussion s'était centrée sur l'histoire juive et les archives. En outre on avait organisé une exposition historique à l'hôtel Queen Elizabeth. Le Rabin Howard Joseph a parlé de la Congrégation Shearith Israel, la première congrégation juive au Canada et de son histoire. Il a expliqué que cette congrégation est en train de devenir en partie française.

M. Bernard Wax de Boston, Directeur de la Société Historique Juive Américaine a parlé des méthodes et des techniques adoptées par sa Société pour créer et maintenir ce qui pourrait être La Société Historique Juive la plus viable et la plus active.

À la réunion de Fredericton, le Rabin Harvey Meirovich de Oshawa a parlé de la Congrégation Beth Am de Toronto. Mme Evelyn Miller de la Bibliothèque juive publique a parlé de l'arrivée au Canada de la population juive pendant le 18ème et le 19ème siècle.

Toute la communauté juive de Fredericton a aussi assisté à une réunion dont le but était de discuter l'aspect historique de cette communauté. Certains membres ont eu l'occasion de déployer une abilité oratoire remarquable et aussi de faire une grande preuve d'humour en anglais et en "yiddish".

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The Society has played an important role in two meetings this past year. The first was the 18th Plenary Assembly of the Canadian Jewish Congress, held in Montreal in May. The second, in June, was the Conference of Learned Societies, held in Fredericton, N.B.

All arrangements at the Plenary Assembly were made by Society Vice-President Evelyn Miller. A large historical exhibition was mounted on the main convention floor of the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, the Plenary headquarters. Two morning sessions, one of which was a breakfast, were allocated for the discussion of history and archives.

One morning meeting was addressed by Rabbi Howard Joseph, of the 200 year old Shearith Israel Congregation, the first Jewish congregation in Canada. Rabbi Joseph discussed the history of the synagogue and its current transition to a partially francophone congregation, with several different constituent groups, each with its own religious practices and procedures. This address, on tape in our archives, reveals Rabbi Joseph to be a man of exceptional perception and sensitivity.

Mr. Bernard Wax of Boston, Director of the American Jewish Historical Society, spoke to the second session. He gave a detailed and informative talk on the methods adopted by his society to create and maintain what is probably the most viable and active national Jewish historical society, and attempted to answer our questions and suggest directions for our own society. There was some disagreement, which resulted in a very valuable dialogue and discussion. Mr. Wax's speech is also on tape in our archives.

At Fredericton, the Society was allocated one complete day, and with the help of Professor I. Unger of the University of New Brunswick, we arranged for a morning and an afternoon programme. Our secretary, Abraham Arnold, also arranged for us to meet with the Canadian Historical Society.

The morning session consisted of a paper by Rabbi Harvey Meirovich, now in Oshawa, Ontario, entitled "A Model for Congregational History — Beth Am, Toronto". The paper, which appears in shortened form in this issue of the *Journal*, presented an unusual review of the complete life cycle of a congregation, and was well received.

Evelyn Miller, of the Jewish Public Library of Montreal, presented a talk entitled "Enter the Jew — Lower Canada in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries", which we hope to publish in expanded form in our next issue. During the discussion, Mrs. Miller produced a wealth of surprising information which she had been reluctant to include in her paper.

The session with the Canadian Historical Association was held to explore co-operative efforts at the next Conference of Learned Societies, which will be held in London, Ontario, in May 1978. Some interesting ideas and suggestions were put forward.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the events in Fredericton was the interaction with its Jewish community, and with its dynamic Rabbi David Spiro. Quite apart from the traditional but exceptionally generous hospitality of Rabbi David and Edith Spiro, and indeed of the congrega-

tion, an historic meeting took place with the entire Fredericton Jewish community, for the express purpose of listening first hand to its history.

Mr. Fred Medjuck, a local resident for a mere 36 years, delivered a short summary, which he had prepared by cross-examining the long-time residents, to a jammed meeting of every resident not actually bed-ridden, as well as officers of the Society and assorted others. The talk, which was constantly interrupted by factual interjections, was followed by personal accounts by long-time Fredericton residents, who were themselves heckled, interrupted and contradicted by their peers.

What emerged, and we fortunately have it on tape, is a model for oral history. Full of bilingual (i.e. English and Yiddish) humour, the evening at times reached the level of hilarity. Events were described, contradicted, corrected and given from several points of view. One significant event was the tale of the 1,000 "enemy aliens" from Britain, who arrived at an army camp outside Fredericton during World War II, and the unique way in which they drew the attention of the Canadian Jewish Congress to themselves *via* the Fredericton Jewish community.

It is clear that we must diligently seek out the contribution of the many who can tell the story of Canada's Jews.

THE THIRD ANNUAL MEETING  
*OF*  
**THE JEWISH HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF CANADA**

*IN CONJUNCTION WITH*  
**THE CONFERENCE OF  
LEARNED SOCIETIES**

**SUNDAY EVENING, MAY 28, 1978  
MONDAY, MAY 29, 1978  
TUESDAY, MAY 30, 1978**

**UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO**

## CONTRIBUTORS

**ABRAHAM ARNOLD** — has spent many years working for Jewish communal organizations both in Montreal and in Winnipeg. Now a prolific free-lance writer, he co-authored *Jewish Life in Canada*, with the late artist William Kurelek. A founding and long-time Director of the Jewish Historical Society of Western Canada, he currently serves as Secretary of the Jewish Historical Society of Canada.

**DR. PERCY BARSKY** — is a practicing pediatrician in Winnipeg. He was a medical student at the University of Manitoba at the time of the events described in this article, which is based on a paper presented to the Jewish Historical Society of Western Canada in March, 1975.

**DR. ARTHUR A. CHIEL** — is Rabbi of Congregation B'nai Jacob, Woodbridge, Connecticut, and Associate Fellow of Ezra Stiles College, Yale University. Author of *Jews In Manitoba* (University of Toronto Press), he is a contributor of articles on Jewish history to the *Encyclopedia Judaica* and the *Standard Jewish Encyclopedia*, as well as various learned journals. In 1961, he founded the Department of Judaic Studies of the University of Manitoba.

**PROFESSOR ADAM FUERSTENBERG** — teaches in the English Department at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, studied at Sir George Williams University, the State University of New York, and most recently at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. A member of the National Committee for Yiddish of CJC, and of the Executive Committee, Central Region, he is presently working on a study of Jewish folklore influence in the poetry of A. M. Klein.

**PROFESSOR BRIAN LAND** — holds graduate degrees in political science and library science from the University of Toronto, where he is a Professor and a former Dean of Library Science. A sixth-generation Canadian, he has published widely in the library press, and is a past President of the Canadian Library Association and a long-time member of the Ontario Genealogical Society.

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**W. VICTOR SEFTON** — is a consulting engineer practising in Toronto. He holds a Master's Degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Toronto. He has written many technical papers published in Canada, the United States, United Kingdom, and Israel. His paper on "Growing up Jewish in London, England 1920-1950" appeared in *Cultural Life of the Jews in England*. He is the President of the Jewish Historical Society of Canada.

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