

comment, although the differences he notes take him beyond his central concentration on the United States.

Despite the multiple problems facing the American Jewish community, Sarna remains optimistic. The historical perspective he provides in this book shows that throughout history American Jews have faced tremendous difficulties. For contemporary observers, these challenges often have suggested the immanent demise of the community. In his conclusion, Sarna urges readers to adopt the opposite perspective of Simon Rawidowicz, that “[w]ith the help of visionary leaders, committed followers, and generous philanthropists, it may still be possible for the current ‘vanishing’ generation of American Jews to be succeeded by another ‘vanishing’ generation, and then still another” (374).

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Shuchat, Wilfred. *The Gate of Heaven: The Story of Congregation Shaar Hashomayim in Montreal, 1846-1996*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000.

Shaar Hashomayim was the second Jewish congregation, and the first to practice Ashkenazi ritual, established in Canada. Pursuant to an act of incorporation passed in 1846, the cornerstone for the English, German, and Polish Synagogue (as it was originally called) was laid in Montreal in 1859. In 1886, the congregation's name was changed to Shaar Hashomayim (Gate of Heaven). Following a rather chaotic succession of rabbis between the 1860s and 1890s, Shaar Hashomayim experienced considerable stability in its rabbinic leadership for most of the twentieth century. Herman Abramowitz was rabbi from 1902 until his death in 1947. That same year, he was succeeded by Wilfred Shuchat who retired in 1993.

The Gate of Heaven focuses on an important subject in the history of Montreal and Canadian Jewry. During the Abramowitz and Shuchat eras, Shaar Hashomayim played an

influential role in the Montreal Jewish community, the largest in Canada until the 1970s. Shaar Hashomayim always retained the provision included in its original charter that the corporation be based on the principles of Orthodox Judaism (although its by-laws were amended in 1973 from “Orthodox” to “traditional” principles). While retaining this provision, the congregation turned to the rabbinic seminary of Conservative Judaism, the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, to secure the services of both Rabbi Abramowitz and Rabbi Shuchat. In contrast to most other congregations affiliated with Conservative Judaism, Shaar Hashomayim maintained separate seating for men and women at religious services throughout the Abramowitz and Shuchat periods.

In telling the story of Shaar Hashomayim, Rabbi Shuchat writes not as an academic historian, but as a person actively engaged in the rabbinic leadership of the congregation for almost half a century. This helps explain the strengths and some of the weaknesses of his account. Three points must be made in this regard. First, much of the strength of the book lies in Rabbi Shuchat’s informed description of many aspects of the internal history of Shaar Hashomayim over 150 years, including synagogue ritual and administration; the congregation’s approach to Jewish education; and the prominent role played by a series of lay members who served as president of the congregation for many years (for example, members of the British-born Moss family between the 1860s and the 1880s, and the Lithuanian-born Lazarus Cohen and his son Lyon Cohen between the 1890s and the 1930s).

Second, this volume’s discussion of the evolution of Shaar Hashomayim within the context of the Montreal Jewish community has some weaknesses. For the early period, the author incorrectly implies that there was a dramatic increase in Quebec’s Jewish population following the achievement of political emancipation in 1832, and he fails to point out that the Jewish population in Montreal numbered less than 1,000 until the 1880s. Rabbi Shuchat rightly highlights the leading part

played in the early Montreal Jewish community by Rabbi Abraham de Sola (a British-born Sephardi Jew of distinguished rabbinic lineage, who served between 1847 and 1882 as spiritual leader of the city's Shearith Israel Congregation and as professor of Hebrew at McGill University). But he does not make sufficiently clear the similarity between de Sola's approach to Jewish religious identity and that adopted by Congregation Shaar Hashomayim, most notably his "modern orthodox" combination of adherence to Jewish rabbinic norms with an openness to secular learning and to the preaching of sermons in English, and his pronounced Anglophilia in a city which after 1867 had an increasingly large francophone majority.

Rabbi Shuchat's account of the Abramowitz era at Shaar Hashomayim focuses primarily on cooperation, rather than conflict, between the congregation and other parts of the Montreal Jewish community. The author describes the important role that the congregation's spiritual and lay leaders had in defending Quebec Jewry against anti-Semitism; in extending aid to Jewish immigrants especially during the period of mass migration of Eastern European Jews to Montreal between the 1880s and the 1920s; and in the development of the Canadian Zionist movement. Largely missing from this account are examples of class and cultural conflicts between the more affluent and acculturated "uptown" Montreal Jews (many of whom were members of Shaar Hashomayim) and "downtown" Jews, who often were poor, first-generation Yiddish-speaking immigrants from Eastern Europe. No mention is made, for example, of the 1912 strike that occurred between "uptown" Jewish employers in the Montreal clothing industry (notably including Lyon Cohen) and their largely "downtown" Jewish workforce. As regards the period of his own rabbinic leadership, Rabbi Shuchat acknowledges with regret the growing challenge in recent decades to what he considers the traditional Jewish religious approach exemplified by Shaar Hashomayim, both from the left and the right. Within this context, he gives an informative account of the reasons for the cooling of relations between the congrega-

tion and the Jewish Theological Seminary from the 1970s onward, notably after the Seminary moved to support the ordination of women, a position strongly opposed by Rabbi Shuchat.

Finally, the use of primary and secondary sources in this volume deserves comment. On the positive side, the author has drawn extensively on the congregation's own archival records, and he has an excellent command of its oral history, especially during the nearly half century in which he exercised rabbinic leadership at Shaar Hashomayim. On the negative side, the volume is marred by a lack of footnotes and bibliography; this will make it difficult for scholars to access the text as research tool.

Overall, *The Gate of Heaven* represents a valuable contribution to the rather thin history of Jewish congregations in Canada. A religious history of Shaar Hashomayim – one of the most influential congregations in Montreal during the twentieth century – is especially welcome.

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Ancil, Pierre, ed. *Through the Eyes of **The Eagle**: The Early Montreal Yiddish Press 1907-1916*. Trans. David Rome. Montreal: Vehicule Press, 2001. 208 pp.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, there was a considerable influx of Yiddish-speaking, Jewish immigrants to Canada, most of whom were unaccustomed to the freedom of North American life. During this period, Montreal's Jewish population increased substantially and the city developed as the centre of Canadian Jewry. The new communal voice of Montreal was sounded in newspapers that reflected the maturing community. In the early twentieth century, Montreal's *Keneder odler* and *Der veg*, provide contemporary readers with a sense of how people lived within their small, semi-isolated worlds. The papers offer insight into the concerns and daily lives of Canadian Jews. Their importance is affirmed by the dedicated efforts of Pierre Ancil and the late David Rome,