SOURCES

Introduction

Eiran Harris' compendium lists Hebrew type (including Yiddish) which appeared in any printed form in Canada between 1844 and 1915, excluding newspapers and periodicals. This document is the product of years of meticulous research at the Jewish Public Library in Montreal, where Harris is Archivist Emeritus, the Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee Archives, and in private collections. This compendium complements Gerald Stone's *Catalogue of Books, Pamphlets and Printed Material: Jewish Canadiana* (Ottawa, 2008), which has a stronger orientation towards published materials. Because so much of Harris' focus is on ephemera, the items on his list display a different kind of history than printed books do. As Brad Sabin Hill has pointed out[1], Hebrew and Yiddish printing came much later in Canada than in the neighbouring United States, and its earliest use, in Toronto, points to Protestant interest in Hebrew scriptural study rather than to Jewish settlement patterns. Use of Hebrew type in a Jewish context began in 1853, and proceeded slowly until about 1890, when the pace dramatically picked up. Post-1890 we see much more ephemera, reflecting the needs of a growing community and its organizations, businesses, and religious institutions. In total, over 150 examples of early printed Hebrew and Yiddish typography are listed and described. The years covered immediately precede the great boom in Yiddish publishing in Canada, bringing to light Hebrew type that is very little known.

Harris' listing offers many prospective avenues for further research. The early printers, especially the non-Jewish John Lovell and "the first viable Yiddish-Hebrew press"[2] of Abraham Kaplansky, are intriguing. The variations in Hebrew and Yiddish vocabulary and orthography used in bar mitzvah and wedding invitations, and the different registers of Yiddish from extreme *daytshmerish* to more common vernacular fusions with

English and French, are themselves an invitation to linguists, particularly when compared, for example, to the letterhead of a rabbi, a synagogue or a Zionist organization. The programmes and schedules of services will be of interest to scholars of religion. Moreover, the history of Jewish apostasy and Christian Hebraism in Canada is hinted at in the early entries. In some cases, what is lacking is as interesting as what is found here. In contrast to the robust production of the Christian Hebraists in the United States, there are no grammars, though several incomplete attempts at language learning materials are in evidence. Some important early titles by Canadian authors were printed elsewhere due to the lack of full Hebrew typographic capability anywhere in Canada[3].

Undoubtedly this listing, the ephemera in particular, is only a tiny sample of what existed at the time, and perhaps only a small portion of what we will eventually locate in archives and personal collections. We see certain prominent rabbis' names over and over, while even some large organizations are represented by just a single item. What has survived is not entirely random—and further investigation will help us understand what the lacunae mean. Several of the items are attested only at second hand. A booklet referred to in Zalman Zylbercweig's encyclopedia and biographical dictionary of Yiddish theatre[4] has never been located, but Zylbercweig was a careful editor and we have reason to hope this item did exist and will be found (see entry dated 1897). Irrefutable evidence exists for an early Yiddish theatre poster: a photograph showing the poster hanging on a Montreal street (see entry dated 1914). It surely was not the only one, but thus far it is the earliest example we know of. And a tantalizing 1913 item from Vancouver—where Hebrew and Yiddish type is generally not seen until much later—was reported on in 1958, but has since been lost. Like the best works of scholarship, Harris' compilation is a reminder that most of our work still lies ahead of us.

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Endnotes

[1] See Brad Sabin Hill, "Early Hebrew Printing in Canada," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 38/39 (2002), 306-347.

[2] Rebecca Margolis, "Jewish Print Culture" in Patricia Fleming, et al, eds. *History of the Book in Canada* vol. 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007): 305-307.

[3] Hill notes the apostate Bishop of Huron, Isaac Hellmuth, wrote typographically complex works such as his unfinished *Biblical Thesaurus* (1884), which were printed in England, and even simpler texts such as liturgies were often printed in Philadelphia.

[4] Zalman Zylbercweig, *Leksikon fun Yidishn Teater*, Vol. 1 (New York: Elisheva Press, 1931): 736.