
THE ARCHIVES MATTER

We believe that Archives *matter*. The Oxford dictionary defines “archives” as a collection of historical documents or records providing information about a place, institution, or group of people. The place where these archival documents are housed, and from which they are catalogued, digitised, or otherwise made available, is also referred to by the name “Archives”. Archival sources are usually unique documents, often created at the time an event occurs (such as a photograph or a recording), or in the immediate aftermath of an event (such as a letter or a diary entry.) These documents therefore have the ability to speak across time to the reader, showing us what the author experienced as if those events were unfolding only days before we had the chance to read about them. This feeling of immediacy is characteristic of the excitement of using archival materials.

In this special illustrated section we have chosen to highlight a particular selection of primary matter from Archives across Canada, on the theme of Biography. We are addressing the questions: What types of archival and primary documentary sources can be useful for the re-creation of a life-story? And can these biographical resources move beyond the personal to illuminate a larger social or historical reality?

Our four featured archivists have each chosen to explore and illustrate their answer through a different biographically informative documentary medium. In some cases these personal documents comprise the entire collection a repository holds on a particular subject, while in others these tantalizing windows into the perceptions of an individual are buried within a larger, often more impersonal body of material. Users can locate these little-known sources with the assistance of Archives staff, and

by searching collection finding aids that are available either online or at the repository.

In the following pages you will find discussions of: Personal photographic collections, by Shannon Hodge of the Jewish Public Archives in Montreal; Oral histories, by Jennifer Yuhasz of the Jewish Museum of British Columbia; Personal correspondence, by Dara Solomon of the Ontario Jewish Archives; and Diaries, by me (Janice Rosen) of Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives in Montreal.

A reference list to all of Canada's Jewish heritage repositories is appended at the end of this volume.

We hope that our essays will lead you to reflect on how the use of personal documents can enhance and broaden understanding of many aspects of the Canadian Jewish experience.

Janice Rosen
Section editor

LES ARCHIVES IMPORTANT

Nous croyons en l'importance des archives. Le dictionnaire *Oxford* définit le terme « archives » comme une collection de documents historiques ou de documents qui fournissent des renseignements sur un lieu, une institution ou un groupe de personnes. Le lieu où ces documents d'archives sont conservés, catalogués, numérisés ou rendus d'une autre manière accessibles est également appelé « archives ». Les documents d'archives sont généralement uniques, souvent créés au moment même de l'événement (p. ex., une photographie ou un enregistrement), ou créés immédiatement suite à l'événement (p. ex., une lettre ou un extrait d'un journal intime). Ces documents sont donc capables de parler au lecteur à travers le temps et de nous montrer ce qu'a vécu l'auteur, comme si ces événements se sont déroulés quelques jours auparavant. Ce sentiment d'immédiateté est caractéristique de l'enthousiasme ressenti lors de l'utilisation des documents issus des archives.

Dans cette section spéciale illustrée, nous avons choisi de mettre en vedette une sélection particulière des sources primaires portant sur le thème de la biographie provenant des archives de l'ensemble du Canada. Les questions que nous abordons sont les suivantes : quels types de sources documentaires archivistiques et primaires peuvent servir à la reconstitution de l'histoire d'une vie? Est-ce que ces ressources biographiques peuvent transcender l'histoire personnelle pour éclaircir une réalité sociale ou historique plus large?

Chacun des quatre archivistes en vedette a choisi d'explorer et d'illustrer sa réponse à l'aide d'un support documentaire différent. Dans certains cas, ces documents personnels constituent l'ensemble de la collection conservée au dépôt sur un sujet particulier. Dans d'autres, par contre, ces alléchants aperçus des perceptions d'un individu sont enfouis dans un corpus de documents plus vaste, et souvent plus impersonnel. Les utilisateurs peuvent repérer ces sources peu connues en ayant recours au personnel des archives et aux outils de

recherche disponibles en ligne ou chez le dépositaire.

Dans les pages suivantes vous trouverez des discussions suivantes : Personal photographic collections (Collections de photographies personnelles) par Shannon Hodge des Archives publiques juives à Montréal; Oral histories (Histoires orales) par Jennifer Yuhasz du Jewish Museum of British Columbia; Personal correspondence (Correspondance personnelle) par Dara Solomon des Ontario Jewish Archives et Diaries (Journaux intimes) par moi-même (Janice Rosen) des Archives nationales du congrès juif canadien, Comité des charités.

Une liste de référence de tous les dépôts du patrimoine juif du Canada se trouve à la fin de ce volume.

Nous espérons que nos essais vous encourageront à réfléchir sur la façon dont l'utilisation des documents personnels peut améliorer et élargir la compréhension sur de nombreux aspects de l'expérience juive canadienne.

Janice Rosen,
Rédactrice de la section
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Shannon Hodge, Director of Archives, JPL-A

A LIFE CAPTURED: PHOTOGRAPHY IN BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

Speaking solely from the experience of the Jewish Public Library Archives (JPL) - though anecdotally many of my colleagues share the same experience – most biographers, historians and other researchers visit us to search for images only after their research and writing is completed. This means that photographs are more often than not relegated to the position of demonstrative evidence rather than being considered a primary source of evidence on their own. While this approach is, of course, not necessarily wrong, it does mean that researchers often miss an opportunity to explore photography as a valuable medium and primary source in and of itself. If photographs are considered merely as an illustration, their potential use is greatly diminished.

Photographs can provide multiple insights into the private and professional lives of people, under such themes as: change and continuity; identifying popular culture, expression and social norms; the expression of community change and growth through the individual's experience; and the influence of interpersonal relationships. While photographic materials can provide evidence of a great deal more, the above themes can be viewed in the following examples.

Jewish People's Schools

Jewish People's School (Folkshule) was founded in Montreal in 1914 by members of or people sympathetic to the Labour Zionist movement. The school provided Jewish children of Montreal



Figure 1. Exterior snapshot from below of two female students in tree possibly in Fletcher's Field, Jewish People's Schools, ca1920. Beyond the obvious necessity of documenting the date and geographic location details of a photograph, reflecting on the use of geographic locations to a community, as illustrated in photographs, becomes vital to the mapping of said community's growth and development. For the purposes of archival description it may be sufficient to simply identify Fletcher's Fields, but for descriptions in an article or research paper this type of detail should be explored and expressed more in depth. Jewish Public Library Archives, Photograph Collection, pr017817

with classes in Yiddish, Hebrew, Jewish history, Zionism as well as modified religious studies. Social and world issues were stressed in teachings alongside regular secular studies. In 1971, Jewish People's Schools merged with the Jewish Peretz School to create JPPS, an institute that still operates today in addition to its high school, Bialik.

Within the archival collection of the combined JPPS are hundreds of amateur snapshots from Jewish People's Schools, post-World War I through to the early 1930s. The images are often blurry and sometimes lack a distinct focal point, but all are



Figure 2. Exterior group portrait of the Mandolin Orchestra posed in East Greenfield Park, Jewish People's Schools, July 4, 1926. Notice the Coca-Cola hat on the student seated front row on the right. Smaller details such as the hat can often be overlooked in caption writing or text pointing to images if said detail is not immediately linked to the topic of the research. Bringing these details of popular culture into discussion plays a role of bridging elements of historical literacy, such as change and continuity, to research on a higher level. Depending on the audience for one's research, these details and historical literacy elements might otherwise be overlooked or assumed not relevant. Jewish Public Library Archives, Photograph Collection, pr017911

absolutely priceless in communicating aspects of social history for the students and teachers of the school.

Unlike formal class portraits taken in studio by a professional photographer, these images display spontaneity and social life in the school. The images document the influence of popular culture on student fashions and pastimes such as the mandolin orchestra, as well as a comfort level with technology such as the Brownie camera and the first 35mm still cameras. These snapshots are also helpful in communicating the connection of the students to the physical spaces (e.g. Fletcher's Field/Jeanne Mance Park, Mount Royal and The Main) in which their community existed.

Regent Studios (Norman Epelbaum)

Born in 1928 in Kobryn, Poland, Norman Epelbaum grew up in a culturally Jewish household, the youngest of eight children. In his early teens, Norman joined the Polish army, later spending the bulk of World War II in Siberia. After the war, Norman first went to Israel and eventually immigrated to Canada in the early 1950s. Both Norman's father and grandfather were photographers and so it seemed almost natural that his first job in Canada was working for Malak Karsh, brother of famed Canadian photographer Yousuf Karsh. Not long after his arrival in Ottawa, Norman moved to Montreal as he wished to live in a larger Jewish community. Norman worked as a technician until 1956 when he opened his own business, Regent Photo Studio. For almost fifty-five years Norman captured major life events of Jewish Montreal families as well as the multiple communities that called Parc Avenue home.

A notable element of Norman's work was that he was used by other immigrant Polish Jewish families, including survivors, because of the already-established common background and the ease that came with being able to converse in Yiddish. His photographs illustrate a re-building of this community through the celebration of major events. Over the years, the Regent Studio images of wedding and bar mitzvahs show



Figure 3. Saul and Dora Edelstein at their wedding, photographed by Norman Epelbaum. Montreal, 1967. Wedding photography, or any event photography, in a specific community can provide an interesting starting point for discussion on social norms, demographic shifts, and inter-cultural and generational changes. In using the image or creating captions, researchers should be asking questions beyond the bare description of the image. When and why did wedding photography begin to go beyond in-studio portraits? When did photographs of food and decorations become a norm? What did families see as the role of the wedding photographer? Can repeated certain posing of couples and loved ones tell us anything about familial or community priorities? Going beyond illustrative use of an image to the reasons behind its creation provides additional evidence and questions for one's readers. Used with permission from private collection.

increasingly elaborate and sophisticated events as lives, families and communities created a new normal.

Rita Briansky

One of Canada's most prolific artists, Rita Briansky, painter, printmaker-etcher and teacher, was born in 1925 in Grajewo, Poland. The Briansky family first settled in Ansonville, Ontario



Figure 4. Ida Maze, about to leave the house to wash her clothes, speaks with her son, Irving Massey. Taken between 1945 and 1955. The use and captioning of this image, as well as Figure 6, offers researchers the opportunity to make direct links between the artist's personal influences as well as how he or she may self-identify. Full exploration of the details and relevance of the informal snapshot should thus never be overlooked, especially in the examination of the personal. Rita Briansky Fonds, pr018278

in 1929, moving next to Val d'Or, Quebec in 1939 and then finally to Montreal in 1941. By then already in high school, Briansky was a keen student and already focused on art. Anne Savage was one of her teachers. When the Briansky family struggled financially and was unable to pay Rita's school fees, Yiddish poet Ida Maze, already known to the family, found her a part-time job. This job allowed Briansky to continue her education and training. This encouragement served as the beginning of a valuable friendship, and fostered Briansky's artistic career. Maze also introduced Briansky to artist Alexander Berkowitz who was giving classes at the YMHA at the time. Her training and experience quickly expanded, taking the young artist through Montreal's Ecole des Beaux-Arts and New York's Arts Student League. Briansky's work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions both in Canada and internationally and her pieces are housed in museums and galleries across the country.



Figure 5. Rita Briansky Fonds, pr018296 "Our art group", Briansky's group of fellow artists including Harry Mayerovitch and Betty Anne Affleck, ca1970-1983. Rita Briansky Fonds, pr018296

A major figure in the artist's life, Briansky's snapshots of Ida Maze in the Laurentians speak to the enormous affection she had for the Yiddish poet. The informality of the image of artist and poet doing something as innocuous as laundry is evidence of the closeness of their friendship. Briansky painted or sketched Maze numerous times, a testament to the poet's influence over the artist. Three of these pieces hang in the Jewish Public Library's conference room and children's library.

For numerous years Briansky and her husband held an art group for fellow artists, first out of Briansky's downtown studio and then, after her husband passed away, in her home. Briansky's photograph albums of the group's meetings clearly indicate a closeness and camaraderie between members; images of the influence a community can play on an individual at the same time as that individual is also a leader, teacher and mentor.

Concluding Remarks

Much of the early research into and promotion of the use of visual imagery and research in archives was thanks to the archivists at what is now the Library and Archives of Canada. The research, papers and presentations on photographs and other visual imagery by archivists such as Dr. Joan M. Schwartz, Lilly Koltun, Richard Huyda, Hugh Taylor and Jim Burant are essential learning tools in the exploration and use of Canadian archival materials.¹ Their work also contributed to furthering Canadian archival traditions in wider international arenas. Unfortunately, with the recent budgetary cuts to Library and Archives Canada coupled with the newly enacted "Library and Archives Canada's Code of Conduct: Values and Ethics", which went into effect in January 2013 and limits participation and research by LAC personnel, archival discourse in Canada will be hampered by severely reduced contributions by LAC professionals.

Promotion of visual literacy and the successful use of photographs in historical (and other) research are so because of relationships built between archives, their archivists and their researchers. When archivists treat photographs in collections we

do not *just* arrange and describe images on a basic level. Rather, like all materials we work with, we examine the creation, possible contexts, audience, bias, and uses of the image in order to provide researchers with a clear picture (pun intended) for their own potential use. Canadian archival standards of arrangement and description guide the profession in this for two basic reasons: 1) Ethically, the archives' profession is guided by principles that help to protect or expose authenticity and reliability; 2) Archivists and our users are extremely multi-disciplinary. By understanding the rich details that can be attached to photographs, we are able to better serve our diverse users.

Endnotes

¹ While not by any means an exhaustive list, articles that are useful in expanding visual literacy in the Canadian context include: Birrel et al, "On View: The Evolution of Amateur Photography" *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-1984), pp. 115-135; Hugh Taylor, "Documentary Art and the Role of the Archivist," *American Archivist* 42, no.4 (October 1979), pp.417-428; Jim Burant, "Visual Records and Urban Development" *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 12, no.3 (February 1984), pp.57-62; Jim Burant, "Visual Archives and the Writing of Canadian History," *Archivaria* 54 (Fall 2002), pp.92-117; Joan M. Schwartz, "'Records of Simple Truth and Precision': Photography, Archives and the Illusion of Control," *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000), pp. 1-40; Joan M. Schwartz, "Coming to Terms with Photographs: Descriptive Standards, Linguistic 'Othering', and the Margins of Activity," *Archivaria* 54 (Fall 2002), pp. 142-171; Laura Millar, "Touchstones: Considering the Relationship Between Memory and Archives" *Archivaria* 61 (Spring 2006), pp. 105-126; Rodney G.S. Carter, "Ocular Proof: Photographs as Legal Evidence," *Archivaria* 69 (Spring 2010), pp.23-47.



Jennifer Yuhasz, Archivist, JMABC

“WHEN AN OLD MAN DIES, IT’S A LIBRARY BURNING”¹: THE ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM AT THE JEWISH MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

What is Oral History?

Oral History is defined as an interview that records an individual’s personal recollections of the past and historical events; and/or the audio or video recordings, transcripts and other materials that capture and are associated with such an interview.²

Why is Oral History Important?

Oral history is not a traditional aspect of archival work, nor a traditional form of historical record. Many historians argue about the validity of oral history as a trustworthy form of documentary evidence due to its reliance on fallible memory and subjective interpretation. However, I would argue that neither fallibility nor subjectivity should negate the importance and relevance of oral history for scholarly research. We must not forget that for centuries, many First Nations have used oral history as the sole means of historical recordkeeping; and now with the availability of media that allows for the capture of sound and video, oral history will continue to be used by all cultures for centuries more. Therefore, archivists and historians

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can and should use oral history to their benefit.

Oral history can and does play an important role in the archival setting, especially at smaller-scale community-based archives such as the Nemetz Jewish Community Archives of the Jewish Museum and Archives of British Columbia (JMABC). Conducting oral history interviews helps to fill the gaps in the archival documentary heritage as well as providing context and a voice to history. Oral history interviews record the stories and experiences of people that might otherwise have been hidden from history, neglected or forgotten.³ Oral history allows people to inscribe their subjectivities on the historical record and offer their own interpretations of history; demonstrating how their experience fits within the historical record.⁴

Jewish Museum and Archives of British Columbia

The Jewish Historical Society of British Columbia (JHSBC) has been acquiring the artifacts, records, photographs and oral histories of individuals, organizations and businesses in BC's Jewish community since before it was officially incorporated in 1971. The mission of the JHSBC, through the operation of the Jewish Museum and Archives of British Columbia, is to preserve and tell the story of the Jewish people in British Columbia. Today the Nemetz Jewish Community Archives (inclusive dates 1860-2013) includes approximately 300 linear metres of textual records, 120,000 photographs and 700 oral history interviews.

From the JHSBC Oral History Collection

In the late 1960s, historian Cyril Leonoff wanted to research and write on a topic that was not documented or preserved in any archives in any form – early Jewish agricultural colonization and farmers in Saskatchewan and Western Canada. He documented this history through oral history. His first interview took place with Ben Barish on December 10, 1968. From this interview, the JHSBC was born. People began donating original photographs and documents along with their oral history inter-

views and by 1971, it was evident that the JHSBC needed to be officially incorporated in order to preserve the archival material that had been collected, and to continue to document history through oral history interviews and the collection of original material. To date, the JHSBC has recorded over 700 oral history interviews, totalling approximately 3,000 hours, which represents the largest oral history collection of any other Jewish museum, archives or historical society in Canada. The JMABC strives to record the diversity of the Jewish people of British Columbia, to register the significant contributions these Jews have made to BC history, and to preserve the intimate details their everyday lives. The JMABC has interviewed both Jewish and non-Jewish pioneers who have shaped this province, as well as various community members who continue to build it.

Below is one example of the 700 oral history interviews in the JHSBC Oral History Collection. This is an excerpt from an interview with Paul Heller (19.95-08) interviewed by Ron Stuart October 21 and November 11, 1995 in Vancouver, BC. Interviewing Paul Heller has ensured that his story will be preserved for future generations. Mr. Heller’s story crosses time and borders to lend insight and poignancy into many facets of twentieth century history. The Heller family story takes place outside of the boundaries of British Columbia, but illustrates the importance of human rights, which transcend geographic borders. It illustrates why and how this family chose to immigrate to Vancouver, how their previous experiences affected their decisions, and the impact that they left on the BC Jewish community. This interview has been chosen to honour the lives of Paul and Edwina Heller, who made an impact on the BC Jewish community. Their story, and the ways it weaves into the fabric of Canadian Jewish life, never had the chance to be written. Their story is analogous to so many Jewish immigrants to Canada, and yet is truly unique. Oral history allows it to be their story, how they chose to have it told, in their voices. The following excerpt discusses in detail the Heller family’s escape from Europe during World War II.

Paul Heller (December 14, 1911 - February 5, 2013) died peacefully at his Vancouver home on February 5, 2013 shortly after celebrating his 101st birthday. Mr. Heller was born in Warsaw, Poland and graduated as an engineer from Fitzwilliam College, University of Cambridge, England. Together with his wife, Edwina Heller (deceased in 2012), they fled Europe hours before the German invasion of Warsaw, escaping through Hungary to England before finally settling in Canada. After a brief stay in Montreal, the Hellers moved to Vancouver, where he and his brother Sam Heller acquired Pacific Pine Co. Lumber Mill in New Westminster, BC. In Vancouver, the Hellers raised daughters Irene and Kitty (deceased in 2011) and celebrated 75 years of marriage.⁵

You asked me about my plans as to leaving Poland. [...] In 1939 the situation was very tense but we still lived normally until the first of September at 6:00 in the morning when we were wakened up by the alarm, anti-aircraft alarms. I discovered at 5:00, an hour earlier that Hitler and his army had crossed the border and that the war was on.

From that moment on there was a lot of tension. By that time I already knew that the Polish government was evacuating the city and there were plans to move to Lublin, which is south of Warsaw, and eventually to Romania. The situation was deteriorating rapidly and we decided to leave. We could only take overnight bags so we prepared a big package of food supplies, like sardines, sausages and crackers and so on. By 9:00 we left Warsaw in complete darkness. We were not allowed to smoke or anything like that because cigarette light could be visible from the planes flying only a few hundred feet above. And that's how we left. With six people and all the small packages we had in a car that would normally take four people. We finally arrived in Lublin and we settled there for a couple of days. We spent time trying to get more gas, get

organized and plan what to do next. My wife, Edwina and I, already had valid passports and visas for France and for England. So we left Saturday after lunch and we drove right to the bridge over the river to cross the eastern part of Poland and we were stopped there. There were so many refugees on other side we decided it was impossible to cross there so we stopped and went instead to Ternopil. There we decided that [...] we would go south to Romania. Suddenly a Polish officer comes with his wounded helper and confiscated our car. He was going south to Romania and we went with them [...] but [then] he advised us that maybe we should get a cart with horses and go that way because my car was



Sam (left) and Paul (right) Heller at the Pacific Pine Company, New Westminster, BC, [1951]. Jewish Museum & Archives of BC; L.09265.

giving troubles. [...] So we found a peasant with a cart and horses who agreed to take us to the Romanian border. When the peasant discovered that the Russians were coming he refused to take us any farther and left us. Luckily we got a ride with an officer to Nadvirna where we were able to find people to take us to the border of Hungary for a charge of a hundred zlotys, twenty dollars. I could see the Hungarian patrols going back and forth so we waited and quickly crossed the border to the forest on the other side.

Then we travelled to Budapest and arrived at 1:00 in the morning; it was thirteen hours going. Another fellow drove us to the hotel and dropped us off there and we got a room and went to bed. Next morning we came down and the concierge called me over and said 'Mr. Heller, they take your passport away, they have to report; the police inspect the passports every day. I looked in your passport you have no visas, you had better go and see the police station.' I went to the police station and I told them 'I'm here, illegally, but I'm here; I want to go and my papers are here, visa to England, visa to France for one year, my documents, and I need transit arrangements.' [...] I found out that there were rumors you can go through Italy to France or you can go through Orient Express which goes Yugoslavia, Italy and Switzerland and France. So I said I'll go Orient Express, let's go that way. So I went to the Swiss Consul who sent a wire to Berne requesting a visa for us. Then I went to the English passport office and they said that our English visa was no longer valid, that all the visas have been cancelled. [...] The British did not want to let anybody in because of food restrictions and so on but I was more or less in a privileged position so they didn't want to say no but they didn't say yes and weeks passed [...] [before I finally got a] message from my brother that the [English] visa has been granted. [...] Meanwhile I found out

that the French visa had been cancelled as well. For the French visa I had to get a military visa now and for that I had to get an introduction from the Polish consulate to get the French visa. Then I had to get the Swiss permit which was fine. At this time Italians [...] did not require Poles to have a visa for transit but about ten days after the war started they also required a visa. So I needed the Italian transit visa, but to get that I had to have an Aryan certificate [...] Meanwhile I met [with] a Jewish lawyer who was the legal advisor of the Polish Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and [he had his assistant get the Aryan certificate for us from the Polish consul]. [...] So I now had the Aryan certificate but I still needed to get the Italian visa. Meanwhile the Yugoslavian visa was no problem.

Meanwhile my permit expired after ten days and extended another five days and after that no more extension. If you were Jewish you had to register in a different department as a refugee and I knew that if I registered as a refugee they would send me out of Budapest and I would be stuck there. I was not a refugee; I came from Poland but my residence was London. I had papers from London and I was going there. [...] So I spoke to another friend. When I arrived in Budapest without anything I went to the tailor to get a suit made at a place that was well known in Vienna and other places. He was a Jewish tailor and I was talking to someone as I was trying the suit on. His name was Emil Kalos and was a lumber importer, mainly from Rumania and we became very friendly. This Emil Kalos had another friend, a Rumanian fellow, Mr. Tilia, who was an ambassador to St. James’ court in London. So I told Mr. Kalos my problem [and the next day] he helped me get the exit permit. We had already arranged a sleeping car on the Orient Express, [...] That is officially how we got out of there and then we went on the

train to Switzerland. The whole thing took us over two months.

During our time in Budapest, I had also tried to get a Palestine visa in case we have to run away we could run away in that direction. So I went to the Turkish foreign minister and we walked out with Turkish visas in our pockets. While I was at the Turkish foreign ministers office, you know who I met there? Zsa Zsa Gabor⁶ and her older sister. Then we went back for Shabbat dinner at the grandmother's, Jolie Gábor, the mother of Zsa Zsa Gabor.

So from Switzerland we were going to France with my mother coming from Lyon to Paris to meet us in Paris. The problem was that I couldn't get any information about connections from Paris to London and finally I found out why: because in Paris the trains, ferries and planes were changing schedules every day so there was no pattern. So to fly in I had to get a permit. So I went to the minister of aviation and got a permit and then we flew to London. The British came and opened the luggage: 'Do you have anything to declare?' I said: 'Everything.' 'What do you mean everything?' 'We escaped from Poland we brought everything.' 'Oh, so you have to pay duty; what do you have?' 'I have the coat I am wearing.' 'No, no, that does not count.' 'A few shirts.' 'That's enough then.' Anyhow they took the formalities and so on and that is how we finally got to London.

The oral history goes on to explain the difficulty the Heller family had in gaining entry to Canada:

After escaping from Poland I was thinking about emigrating to another country, I wasn't interested in going to South Africa but I was told that Canada is closed especially for Jews and the same apparently was for Australia. United States had a quota system and the waiting period for

Polish born citizens was about two to three years. [... I had a serious interest about immigrating to Canada; I enlisted the help of my lawyer but] it was indicated that the chances of us getting immigration visa [to Canada] were practically nil. [... However we finally received a call to say that, pending passing the medical exam] the Canadian government is willing to allow us to come to Canada as permanent immigrants on certain conditions providing that we will be able to transfer certain amount of funds and to have possibility of starting business in Canada.

Once landing in Canada and after a brief stay in Montreal, the Hellers settled in Vancouver where they raised families, lived their lives and left an indelible impression on Vancouver and the Jewish community of British Columbia:

When we came to Vancouver we found that the [...] Jewish community was operated [...] mainly by volunteers and only in about 1942 I think or '43 when the community decided to hire a full time person to look after [things] this was an agreement with the Canadian Jewish Congress and Zionist organization in the community to share their salary and then at that time when Lou Zimmerman was hired he stayed in Vancouver for the rest of his life and did an outstanding job with every section of the community without antagonizing anybody which is not an easy thing. A group at the time approached me, I became quite active as well and later on I served two terms as chairman of the Jewish community centre at the time which actually was a combination of Congress work and the centre in a much more limited way than is done nowadays and after that I spent two years as chairman of the Zionist organization. [...] Meanwhile we were building up our business [Pacific Pine], we were working very hard and we had to work on a shoestring to start because of the financial



Paul Heller, Vancouver, BC, 1995. Jewish Museum & Archives of BC; L.06975.

situation as well as because at the beginning of the war with Japan and the real effects of it on this continent of shortages of different materials, metals and so on, I remember we had to rebuilt a certain section of the mill by using junk from a small mill in Esquimalt and even their supplier had to weld pieces of shaft together to have one shaft for a roll, and things like that.

We also had a timber controller who was distributing orders for war purposes, paring the prices extremely low and without regard to the facilities of the mill, some of them that were beyond our ability to produce even at that time. However we went through those things, we built the mills and first there were two small mills, we expanded one, automated and developed quite well, later

on we ran on a two shift basis, there was a time when we employed as many as 350 people and as work progressed we found out it was necessary to completely modernize one mill, we considered it the small mill but actually it became the big one, the main mill and finally in the ‘60s it became one of the most economical mills and progressive mills in B.C., at that time we closed down the other mill and were producing with about 160 people three times as much lumber as we initially did with 350 people.

Conclusion

This is only one example of the stories that have been recorded and preserved in the JHSBC Oral History Collection. Please contact the archives if you are interested in accessing this collection: archives@jewishmuseum.ca.

Endnotes

¹ Amadou Hampâté Bâ, 1960 at l’UNESCO: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amadou_Hamp%C3%A2t%C3%A9_B%C3%A2; Last accessed May 6, 2013.

² “Archives Terminology – Select Terms”; Archives Society of Alberta, 2006: http://aabc.ca/media/5403/ASA_Archives_terminology_2006.pdf. Last accessed March 13, 2013.

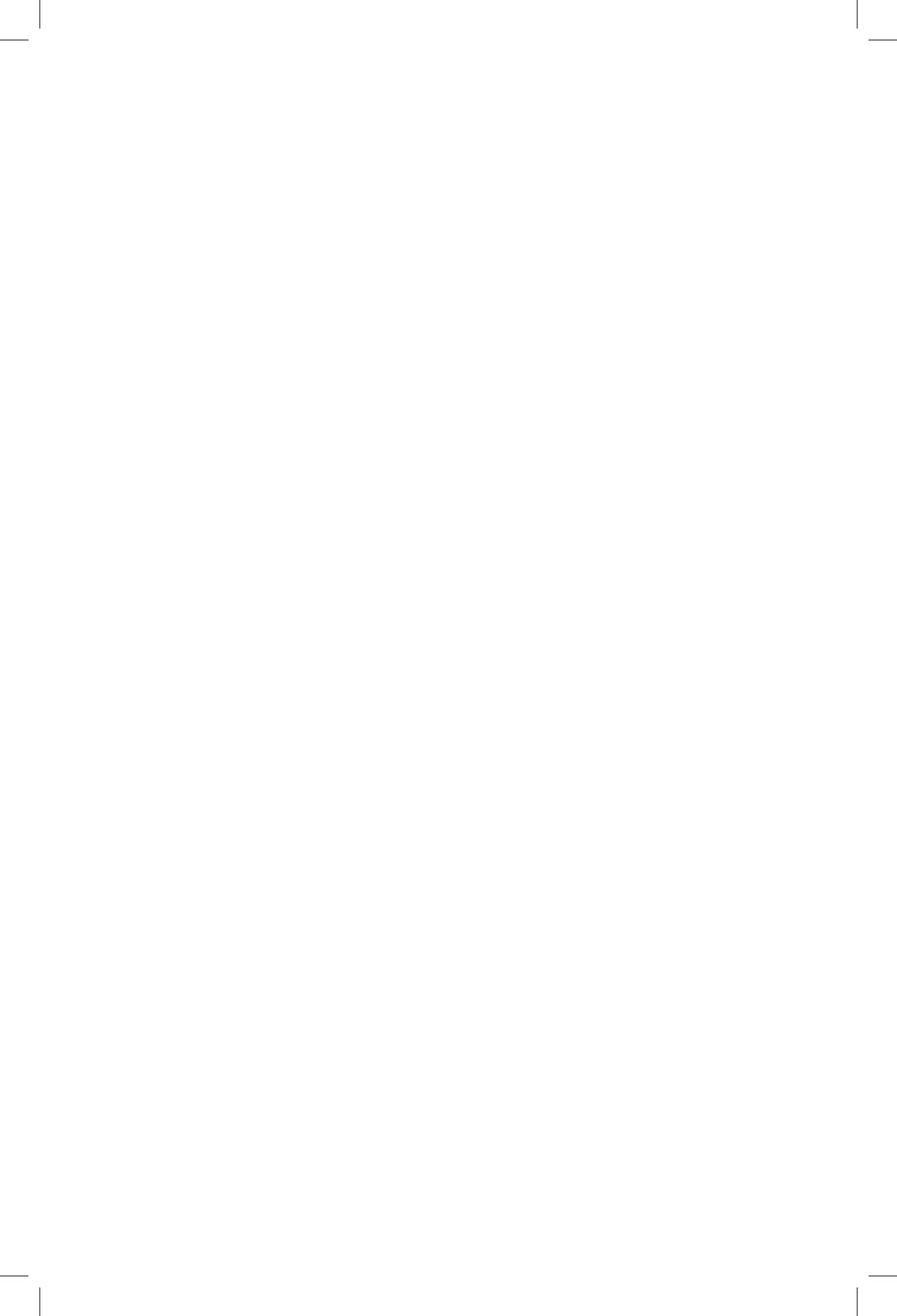
AND “Glossary”; Society of American Archivists: <http://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/o/oral-history>. Last accessed March 13, 2013.

³ Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History*, London: Pluto, 1973.

⁴ *The Oral History Reader*, second edition, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, Routledge, 2006: page IX.

⁵ *The Vancouver Sun*, Obituary: http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/vancouver/vancouver_sun/obituary.aspx?pid=162912613#fbLoggedOut. Last accessed March 12, 2013.

⁶ Zsa Zsa Gabor’s birth name was Sári Gábor.



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**ALL ABOUT THE BENJAMINS: A STUDY OF
BENJAMIN DUNKELMAN'S AND BENJAMIN
KAYFETZ'S CORRESPONDENCE IN THE ONTARIO
JEWISH ARCHIVES**

While the keyboard and printer are increasingly replacing pencil and paper, the Ontario Jewish Archives (OJA) remains home to an impressive collection of hand and type-written letters from as far back as the 19th century found in the personal fonds (collections) of various members of the Jewish community. Correspondence of community leaders, business people, mothers, and fathers help shape the story of the persons who both wrote the letters and received them. Not only do we learn about the period in which they were written, we can also begin to construct a narrative of the person's life through their self-expression. While we can easily know the facts of one's biography, their letters help fill in the blanks, adding colour, tone, and the emotion to the lives they lived.

In these pages, the correspondence of two prominent "Benjamins" in the OJA collection are reviewed – Benjamin Kayfetz (1916-2002) and Benjamin Dunkelman (1913-1997), two important Toronto Jewish community leaders and builders from the second half of the twentieth century. Their lives touched upon nearly all the major issues affecting the Jewish

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tome 20, 2012

community over the century, including the Jewish military experience in the Second World War, the Israeli War of Independence, anti-Semitism, Canada's relationship with Israel, anti-discrimination laws, and Jewish culture in Toronto.

Dunkelman's records include his fight against the Arab Boycott in Canada. In his role as National Commander of the Jewish War Veterans of Canada, Dunkelman wrote to Prime Minister Trudeau in 1977, advocating that the government take stronger actions against the Boycott. "We most respectfully request that you and your Government consider enactment of adequate legislation with appropriate penalties, to ensure elimination of the practice of discrimination against Canadian Jewish citizens by the Arab boycott which is now in force." (Fonds 2, Series 4, file 5, item 23). Also found throughout Dunkelman's records is evidence of his efforts to ensure that the official Israeli history of the War of Independence includes his leadership of the 7th Brigade, which took the Galilee and the city of



Dunkelman on a horse in Palestine, 1930s. Ontario Jewish Archives, Fonds 2, series 2, file 2

Nazareth, arguably, the region's most advantageous centres. He implored Ben Gurion to correct the records in this 1968 letter: "In all the published records, Chaim is given credit for being commander of the 7th brigade and in charge of the operation. These simply are not the facts. If the official records do not concur with this I would appreciate the opportunity to have an official inquiry made to set the records straight." (Fonds 2, Series 6, file 6, item 8).

In a series of correspondence from 1968 with Teddy Kollek, then Mayor of Jerusalem, Dunkelman was involved with a proposal to build a Picasso Museum in Jerusalem. (Fonds 2, Series 3, file 3, item 2). A patron of the arts and a gallery owner in Toronto, Dunkelman corresponded with Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Picasso's famed Parisian dealer on this issue demonstrating Dunkelman's confidence in the State of Israel and perhaps his vision for Jerusalem as a cultural centre. At the same time, Dunkelman continuously expressed disenchantment with the practical aspects of making a life and doing business in Israel. In a letter to David Ben Gurion in 1968, he writes, "By the way, I once promised you I would come to live in Israel. I did everything that a human being could do to fulfill that promise. I was not allowed to bring in any of the machinery or equipment or to get any business started that I attempted. My association with Israel was disastrous financially and it has required many years for me to recoup my losses." (Fonds 2, Series 6, file 9). In a letter of March 9, 1977, Dunkelman further expressed his frustration with Israeli life when he wrote to Yitzhak Rabin, the newly elected Prime Minister, "I understand from Mr. Mizrahi that you could not contact me by phone. I was promised a phone within a few months when I originally ordered the house at Ramat Poleg and every time I come to Israel, I am told that it will be ready the next time I am there... It really makes it impossible to get things done." (fonds 2, series, 2, file 28).

Ben Kayfetz graduated from the University of Toronto in modern languages and worked as a high school teacher before joining the Canadian war effort. During the war, he was respon-



Benjamin Kayfetz, 1960. Ontario Jewish Archives, Fonds 18, series 1, item 20. Photo by Mendly Studio

sible for reviewing prisoner of war mail and later worked as a censor of telecommunications with the Control Commission until 1947. Upon returning to Toronto, he was hired as the National Director of Community Relations by the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), where he worked in various capacities until his retirement in 1985. Throughout his career, he fought tirelessly to protect the rights of minorities worldwide. A humorous and thoughtful writer, Kayfetz's correspon-

dence ranges from personal correspondence during the war to professional correspondence with colleagues in the Jewish professional community around the US and Canada.

One particularly engaging long-term correspondence is with Murray Shiff, a colleague and friend. In addition to their discussions on topics relevant to their respective communities and Talmudic ponderings ["All this is probably old hat to you but you must recall my cheder training was very inadequate, not having even been given Rashi..." (Fonds 62, series 2 file 3)], they reminisced about old friends, local gossip sprinkled with *Yiddishisms*. Kayfetz and Shiff, share thoughtful reflections on their professional service to the Jewish community. This blending of professional and personal life, typical in Jewish communal service, is evident in these intimate letters.

A consummate writer, Kayfetz's letters also reveal that he was a lover of language and the written word. And as such, he was a stickler for proper grammatical usage, Yiddish and Hebrew spelling, and the transliteration of Hebrew to

English. He commented on words, transliterated “incorrectly” with Yiddish instead of Hebrew. His frequent letters to editors document this fixation, along with his sense of humour and his constant infusion of the personal into his writing. In February 1978, he wrote to the Editor of B’nai Brith Lodge, “Knowing you are a Hebraist may I suggest that the Bulletin use a correct transliteration: *refuoh shley moh*... The other word has reference to a monarch that had much wisdom and many concubines.” (Fonds 62, series 2, file 6). And, in September 1981, Kayfetz wrote to the esteemed writer William Safire of the *New York Times* to tell him that he incorrectly ascribed the origins of the word “hooligan” to the Soviet Union during the Communist era. Kayfetz corrected him, stating that it must have been used earlier, in the Czarist days, because his mother used the term and she left Russia in 1907. (Fonds 62, series 2, file 6).

In a particularly arresting letter received by Kayfetz, a Russian resident of Calgary, Alberta provided various instructions and warnings for Kayfetz’s imminent trip to Russia. This document is an astonishing window into the challenges faced by Jews living in in the USSR during this time.

Tell your wife not take along any excessive jewelry. Without any jewelry you may, at times pass as a native....If you take along a small prayer book (your wife should carry it rather than you) Do not give it to anyone, just “forget” it in the synagogue...You are not to get involved in discussion of any sort unless you know the people very well....Do not visit any relatives unless they invite you. If you call them do it from a public phone. You will not find a public phone... Let them leave the hotel (if they have the courage to visit you) alone. Do not walk them to the corridor or to the elevator... If and when you must speak, turn on your little radio and let the water run.... This letter is to be put to fire and destroyed after reading.... (Fonds 62, series 2, file 6).

The correspondence found in the fonds of Dunkelman and Kayfetz in the collection of the Ontario Jewish Archives provide valuable insights into the personalities of these two

figures, and about the state of Jewish life in Canada and around the globe. While publicly, they held strong convictions on various topics ranging from the serious to the mundane, their letters (both received and sent) point to their commitments to the Jewish community in their personal and professional lives. They reveal the emotion that accompanies such principles and convictions. The Ontario Jewish Archives holds a rich collection of original documents that continue to teach us about ourselves, and about the Toronto Jewish community's place in the context of the larger global Jewish community.

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**THE MOST BIOGRAPHICAL OF ARCHIVAL
MATTER – EXPLORING DIARIES AT THE
CANADIAN JEWISH CONGRESS CHARITIES
COMMITTEE NATIONAL ARCHIVES**

In approaching this subject, I was inspired by a 1992 article by Rob Michel in *Fontanus* (Vol. 5, p. 33: 1992). Michel sampled 17 of the McGill University Archives collection of at that time around 50 diaries, with a view to exploring their “biographical, psychological and historical value and, most of all, their human interest.” I would like to posit that when the author of a diary is writing Canadian observations from a Jewish perspective, a socio-cultural dimension is introduced as well.

If I may be permitted to begin this article about personal archives by making a personal observation, as someone who has filled 43 notebooks with diary entries over the past 40 years, I have always had a special interest in the diaries that can be found among the CJCCC National Archives collections. However, in researching this survey, even I was surprised at the quantity and variety of diaries that we currently house. Including those that are in photocopy form, they range in time from 1837 to 1980, and speak in the voices of Canadian Jews aged under 15 to over 70. They were written by men and women, rabbis and businessmen, distant soldiers and stay-at-homes, naïve students and erudite scholars. Some of these diaries have already been

Canadian Jewish Studies, Volume 20, 2012 / Études juives canadiennes,
tome 20, 2012

the subject of study, but most are still unexplored. However, the potential to become familiar with them is now increasing with the help of the Canadian Jewish Heritage Network (<http://cjhn.ca>), which CJCCCNA has been using since 2011 as a platform for descriptions and sometimes the full texts of these documents.

Abraham Joseph's diary is the earliest of all the personal journals available for study at CJCCCNA. Although the efforts of Joseph's great-granddaughter Annette Wolff to publish around half of its content as a book never came to fruition, this voluminous diary has attracted interest for many years. The Joseph/Wolff family collection includes a photocopy of the original diary as well as extensive typed transcriptions done by Wolff. Her highlighted passages draw our attention to myriad details of Joseph's daily life, including his participation in the militia during the Rebellion of 1837. Most of his entries detailed everyday occurrences likely experienced by many others in his surroundings:

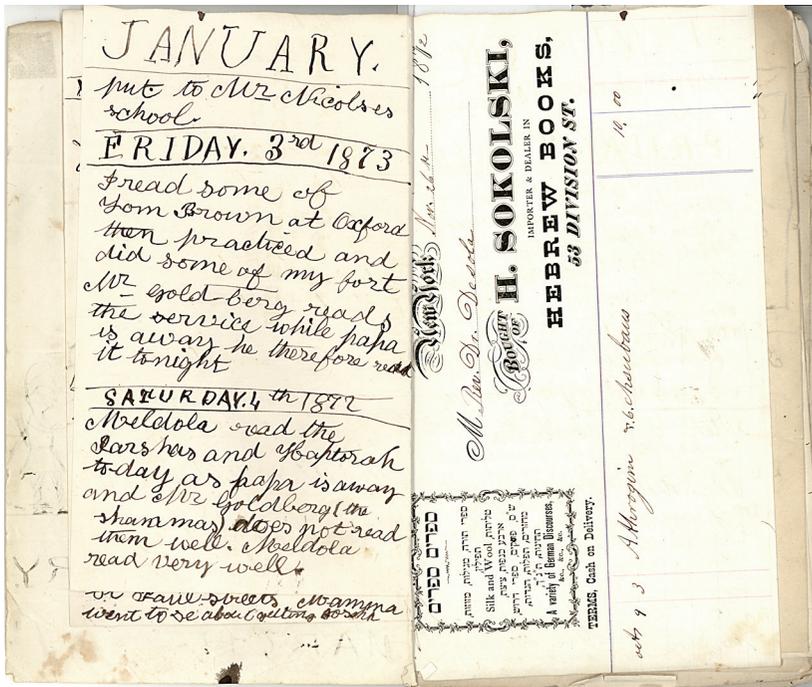
Thursday 27th December (1938) – Rose at 8¼.
Breakfast at 8¾. Drill at 9. I received no less than 5 letters this morning from home (...) at 1P.M. went to drill – a General Drill day – by order of Col. Hope commanding the Volunteers of Quebec, from the Parade Ground we were marched into square of Jesuit barracks & afterwards marched to Esplanade (...) A greater quantity of snow on the earth before New Year has not been witnessed for many years.

We also find occasional references to his Judaic practices. Following the Day of Atonement on October 9, 1837, he noted "*Have fasted very well at I.C.H's*"; and on 21 December 1838: "*Received an invitation to Dr. P.'s for this evening. An apology of course sent – I am determined to keep up that old rule of our family i.e. not to go out Friday nights.*"

The collection of diaries that I find most interesting in the CJCCC National Archives is one that does not seem to have attracted much attention by scholars to date: the journal books of Montreal businessman and Zionist leader Clarence de Sola

(1858-1920), the third son of Rabbi Abraham de Sola of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation. Deeply interested in the world scene as well as in the Jewish people, Clarence de Sola served in Montreal's consular service on behalf of Belgium and was the author of numerous articles on Jewish history. The original diaries held at CJCCCNA cover 1873-1875, 1879, 1880, 1904, and 1919. Prior to their donation, in the 1970s they were microfilmed by Library and Archives Canada (then PAC), and therefore can also be consulted via microfilm through that institution.

Clarence de Sola's first diary was written when he was 14 years old. It is interesting not only for his words but also for its form. His writing was interspersed with childish pen and ink drawings of theatrical, mythological and military scenes, composed on the backs of scrap pages from his father's book selling and synagogue-related activities. In it we already see



A page from Clarence de Sola's earliest diary (1873), made from the backs of scrap paper

the beginning of many of his later themes. For example, he commented on his reading material: "*Friday January 3rd 1873 – I read some of Tom Brown at Oxford then practiced and did some of my fort*" (Being written in mid-winter in Canada, the building of what was apparently a snow fort is a recurring theme in this volume.) This first diary also included notes about British politics, with special attention to the activities of Benjamin Disraeli: *March – Gladstone will resign tomorrow – I hope he will. Disraeli is getting cheered by nearly* (*added later) everyone. He has telegraphed for LORD DERBY who is abroad to return immediately. The result of this commotion will soon be known.*" He noted his father's travels "Saturday January 4th – *Meldola read the Parshah and Haftorah today as Papa is away and Mr. Goldberg (the shammas) does not read them well*"; and mentioned his father's publishing endeavors: "Saturday 11th – *Papa brought home a lot of Mr. Leeser's Bibles as he has bought the plates and is going to publish them.*" He also described the presents he received on the holiday of Purim (with the holiday name written in Hebrew script.)

By 1875 his handwriting had become smaller, allowing for more description per page, and his accounts provided intriguing glimpses of Montreal upper middle class life with a Jewish flavour:

March – Tuesday 23rd 1875. I went in the afternoon to the "motza" bakery with Papa and Gershon to see them make the "motzas" for Passover. The same man is making them this year than last year, but the machinery is worked by steam this year. They always used to work it by hand before. Near the "motza" bakery there is a place where they make candies so I went with Gershon and saw them making sugar fish. We both got some sweets there. The "matzas" appear to be pretty good this year.

His diary of 1879 began with a listing of the months covered in it, first in the occidental calendar and then in the

Hebrew one (“*Tebet, Shabat, Adar, Nisan, Iyar, Sevan. 5639.*”) Mixed in with commentaries on world events, this volume contains many details about theatrical plays in which he participated, as well as flattering comments about a female friend named Stella (with two paragraphs, apparently describing notes she had written to him, carefully crossed out and erased).

By 1880-81, already in business with his brothers, de Sola wrote of his travels through the Eastern Townships and Ontario, and of the eventual departure of brother Joseph from the partnership. He praised French opera, and lamented the passing of Benjamin Disraeli. In the summer of 1881 he noted:

Large numbers of Jews are now fleeing from Russia and our organizations are aiding them to emigrate to America and other more hospitable shores. A fact worthy of note is ... that King Alfonso would be pleased to welcome Jews suffering persecution in other countries, to Spain... Time certainly works wonders. Who would have ever dreamt of Spain as a refuge for persecuted Jews? Well done, Alfonso!

Closer to home, he began the year 1882 with the words

On the 1st of this month I began to take charge of the Hebrew Sunday School of our congregation. I have always been a very strong advocate for the higher education of Jewish children in Hebrew, Jewish History, Hebrew literature, and above all in the Jewish religion... Of course I will have to begin with them with the most elementary lessons but I am in the hopes of being able to gradually train them up to possess a good grounding in these subjects and thus to become Jews and Jewesses in more than name.

The last year of the diary, written a year before his death, shows him as involved and interested as ever, in a rapidly modernizing world. On Saturday, 6th September 1919 he recounted:

The monument erected on Fletcher's Field in this city to Sir George Etienne Cartier was unveiled this afternoon by the Governor General, the Duke of Devonshire – the actual act of unveiling was performed by King George V who was at Balmoral Castle Scotland today. An electrical connection by cable was made, between Balmoral and Montreal, and connected with the British flag which veiled the figure of Cartier, and at a certain agreed-upon moment the King pressed a button which sent an electric current to the monument and caused the flag which veiled it to fall and reveal the monument.

He commented on business matters (“*Very busy at the office with contracts for many thousand tons for shipment...*”); his new house on Pine Avenue (“*Occupied with Belle re furnishing the drawing room...*”); honours received (“*I am daily receiving congratulations on being created Chevalier*”); political matters, synagogue business, and he made what appears to be the standard comment about the Day of Atonement: (“*Saturday 4th October – Yom Kippur. All fasted well.*”)

Some of our more contemporary diaries are in languages other than English: Judith / Yehudit Oberman née Braslavsky (1901-2000), raised in the Land of Israel before settling in Montreal with her husband Morris Oberman, wrote a diary in Hebrew detailing her Zionist involvements in Canada. Pages can be seen online at <http://cjhn.ca/permalink/224>. The CJCCC Archives also has an extensive collection of Yiddish diaries written between 1920 and 1975 by Sarah Mindes, a Lithuanian-born Montreal grocery store owner and literature enthusiast who kept a diary from the age of 15 until her death at age 71.

We have a small diary written at the Jewish farming settlement of Lipton Saskatchewan in 1936 by the then-teen-aged Rebecca Dresher. She began with a brief biography:

I was born in the year 1919, in Lublin, Poland – there I have most of my relations. I am the youngest of our family of six. Maurice, the oldest,

is in Rio de Janiero, Brazil. Barbara, the second oldest, who was such a talented artist married in Winnipeg, had two children and last May on the 24th of 1935 was found dead by the railway tracks. Our sorrow over her cannot be expressed in words. Her two daughters are at our place.”

The diary includes mentions of Jewish holiday preparations “April 6 – *We were busy cleaning for Passover*”; comments on farm life, and reactions to events overseas: “April 26 – *In the morning I disked and after that Papa drilled so as I had a chance to go to the synagogue to the ladies tea – Pogroms on Jews are held everywhere, in Poland and even in Palestine. It’s terrible.*” Excerpts from this diary can be seen online at <http://cjhn.ca/wpp-images/CJCCCNA/docs/P0153RWerner-diary-excerpts.pdf>.

The Canadian Jewish War effort during WWII is well represented in diaries owned by CJCCCNA. The most notable and detailed of these is a home-front chronicle typed virtually every day between 1939 and 1949 by Westmount businessman and writer Percy Jacobson, whose son Joseph served as a pilot in the RCAF. Brief excerpts from each year of Percy’s diary can be seen at <http://www.cjhn.ca/permalink/200>. Several of his son Joe’s diaries from both before and during the war are also in the Jacobson collection, including his RCAF operations diary of August-December 1941, which can be seen at <http://www.cjhn.ca/wpp-images/CJCCCNA/docs/P0094-01-18-JAJ-op-diary-Aug-Dec1941.pdf>. Diaries from several other servicemen add contrast and dimension to the impressions given by this family’s writings.

When using resources that are as personal, terse, and cryptic as diaries often are, it is especially important to examine and compare other contemporary writings in the same vein before drawing any general conclusions. The value of diaries for the historical record are not universally accepted, due to their subjective perspective, and an individual’s potential for self-delusion, self-aggrandizement, or other possible distort-

ing elements. Nonetheless, when used in conjunction with other types of data, diaries are natural sources of biographical, cultural and historical information. The case can be made most strongly for their use by biographers, who characteristically want to examine both their subject's subjective perceptions and the external world which they reflect. As for their value beyond the biographical, while none could be used alone to document a given era, I believe that their addition adds a unique and poignant dimension to the mix of sources used by historians.

Those interested in learning more about this type of resource at the CJCCC National Archives are encouraged to contact us (archives@cjccc.ca), and to search www.cjhn.ca under the keywords "diaries" and "journals". _____

Endnote

Reference cited: Michel, Robert. "Diaries from the McGill University Archives – a sampling," *Fontanus* 5 (1992): 33-53.