

**Gladstone, Bill. *Only Yesterday: Collected Pieces on the Jews of Toronto by Benjamin Kayfetz and Stephen A. Speisman*. Toronto: Now & Then Books, 2013. 205 pp.**

Bill Gladstone's work, *Only Yesterday*, published by the author's own press – Now and Then Books – brings together published and unpublished pieces written by the late Ben Kayfetz and Dr. Stephen Speisman. Kayfetz was a prominent and well-respected community leader and amateur historian. Speisman, in turn, was a scholar who wrote the definitive history of Jewish Toronto and was the founder and Director of the Ontario Jewish Archives from 1973 to 1999. Both men were also pivotal actors within the Canadian Jewish Historical Society, the predecessor to the Association for Canadian Jewish Studies.

In addition to the 18 papers and articles produced by Kayfetz and Speisman, the book also includes a foreword by Jack Lipinsky, an introduction by the editor, 144 photographs and illustrations derived from a number of different repositories and private sources selected by Gladstone, along with a glossary of Hebrew and Yiddish terms, photo credits and an index. The first half of the book includes a biography of Ben Kayfetz along with 12 of his works. The second half, in turn, consists of a biography of Stephen Speisman with 6 of his articles. The editor explains in the introduction that the two men's writings are extremely different but complement one another, describing Speisman's work as objective and scholarly and Kayfetz's as charming and idiosyncratic (6–7). Based on the imbalance of pieces included, it is apparent that Kayfetz was more prolific than Speisman when it came to shorter pieces.

These writings were produced for a variety of sources such as a CJC centennial pamphlet, a tribute book, bulletin, presentations, mainstream newspapers, CJR/CJN, Polyphony and a book. They range from reminiscences of early Jewish Toronto and its institutions and synagogues to pieces examining eclectic Toronto figures such as politician and community leader, J.B. Salsberg, boxer Sammy Luftspring, architect Benjamin Brown and early Toronto Rabbis. The book also features popular seminal pieces such as Kayfetz's "Recollections of the Jewish Press in Toronto" and Speisman's "St. John's Shtetl: the Ward in 1911" and "Yiddish Theatre in Toronto". While the shorter nostalgic pieces are colourful and revealing, the longer published items are truly the gems that hold the book together and give it substance.

Despite the fact that some of the published articles are available on-line, Gladstone unearths a number of hidden treasures, draws all of the pieces together in this book and makes these writings more accessible to the public. The illustrations are quite lovely and provide helpful visuals that complement each piece. The main shortcomings, however, are that it relies on far more articles than are required and meanders a bit, likely due to Kayfetz's writing style as well as the organizational structure imposed by the editor, which is not especially clear or organic. Since the articles are not

arranged chronologically by era, by date of publication or even by theme, it doesn't always flow very well from one piece to the next. Perhaps the inclusion of descriptive inserts to contextualize and draw together some of the writings could have resolved this problem. There are also far more images of synagogues than are required – based on the content of the texts, as well as some oddities that appear, such as a piece in the Kayfetz section that includes references to footnote 1 several times yet doesn't provide any footnote descriptions. These editorial issues diminish the overall quality of the work, which could have benefited from more stringent selection, arrangement and editing.

As someone who possesses the greatest respect and admiration for these two accomplished individuals, I truly feel that *Only Yesterday* succeeds in bringing to light many important historic papers and articles produced by Ben Kayfetz and Stephen Speisman. It also serves as a wonderful tribute to these two historians who significantly contributed to Canadian Jewish scholarship and likely did not receive the type of attention and accolades that they deserved during their lifetime. Despite the editorial issues noted above, this book would be appealing to and a worthwhile purchase for community members, students, scholars and educators interested in Toronto's rich Jewish history.

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