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**Archiving the Canadian Jewish Congress:
New Views From a New Vault**

Working at the Canadian Jewish Archives, originally known as the Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives, means that archival evidence of the history of CJC is never far from our awareness and sight. The Congress organizational records include more than 1875 banker's boxes of paper files, in addition to hundreds of audio recordings and videos, many thousands of photographs, and a varied collection of artworks and artifacts.

Our recent move from the Samuel Bronfman House, site of CJC's national headquarters from the building's opening in 1970 until its donation to Concordia University in 1999, to another location also in Montreal, has brought to light some hitherto unexplored parts of the Canadian Jewish Congress documentary legacy. Numerous departmental filing cabinets, locked with lost keys, were broken into during the pre-move sorting and packing. This led to several discoveries of note. One of these was a treasure trove of several hundred photographs from the Small Communities Committee of Canadian Jewish Congress, enough to more than quadruple our previously paltry visual records about Congress' contact with Jews living outside major centres. These images, which had never been catalogued, include extensive pictorial documentation of developments in the Kelowna, B.C. Jewish community in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as pictures from Atlantic Canada, the Eastern Townships of Quebec, and communities in Saskatchewan.

Another notable find was a series of files in boxes labelled "UJRA unprocessed." These files were bursting with lists of postwar immigrants who immigrated with the help of CJC as part of group projects for tailors and other skilled workers, as well as additional details about the groups of Jews who arrived in Canada via Shanghai. These files include both Congress correspondence and documents created by the CJC offshoot organization, the United Jewish Relief Agencies (UJRA). There are numerous original letters written in 1949 by H. Frank, director of the CJC Winnipeg office, addressed to Manfred Saalheimer at the CJC national office in Montreal. Writing about the second group of Shanghai arrivals in 1949, in a letter dated October 19, 1949, Frank detailed the difficulties he encountered:

From the very outset all the technical arrangements had to be handled by Bud Lando and myself. The women did very well in preparing breakfast, dinner, and many members of the community volunteered in taking the refugees out sightseeing. But the staff of the Vancouver office was very busy with the current Campaign and all I could avail myself of was the services of a third rate stenographer. (...) my long report to you (...) took her until 4-o'clock to type it. Apparently she wanted to make a good job and found it difficult because she could not read her shorthand. (...) I boarded the sealed train [ed. note: from Seattle, Washington] together with the Canadian customs officials and the trip to Vancouver began at 1:45 a.m. (...) I arrived two

hours ahead of time with 176 people, who were all tired and hungry, and no one was at the depot to take them off my hands. I started arousing the keymen from their Sunday morning slumber and at 8:00 a.m. the first cars arrived and started to transfer the group to the Centre for breakfast. Then the ordeal started all over again. (...) When the last refugees had departed at 8:00 p.m., Bud mentioned to me that I had not had anything that day except a cup of coffee and a piece of fish at breakfast. Furthermore, the total sleep I had during 48 hours was five hours. I shall never again go through an ordeal like this.¹

Information about items in CJC's artifact collection has also come to light since the Archives' move. A magnificent shofar, formerly mounted on a wall in the Samuel Bronfman House Board Room, is now a prominent feature of the Archives' décor. Archives Chair Dr. Norma Joseph happened across a mention of the circumstances surrounding the shofar's donation by World Jewish Congress to Samuel Bronfman in 1970 "in tribute to his distinguished services to Jewish communities throughout the world."² From this notice we learned that the shofar is of Yemenite origin.

Inspired by the centenary of CJC's founding in 1919, we have recently embarked on a project to digitize audiocassette recordings in the collection which discuss Canadian Jewish Congress history and the social context of its formative years. Among the recordings made available in this way thus far are several hours of interviews by Eiran Harris, Archivist Emeritus of the Jewish Public Library in Montreal, with historian David Rome in 1989, and an interview by David Rome with then-retired Executive Director of CJC Saul Hayes in around 1979. Hayes joined CJC in the early years of the Second World War, beginning as director of the United Jewish Relief Agencies. He continued to be involved with CJC until his death in 1980. David Rome, in addition to being the CJC's first paid archivist in 1973, was a member of the CJC Archives Committee starting in the late 1930s. Rome's perception of the organization was shaped through serving as Congress' Press Officer through the war years, under the presidential leadership of Samuel Bronfman.

It is interesting to contrast these audio recordings with the paper records that document the events of that time. The high-minded and ambitious ideals stated in the founding minutes of Canadian Jewish Congress were belied by the subsequent inactivity of the new organization between its founding in 1919 and its re-convening in 1934 – an inactivity, David Rome opines, which was a result of conflicting views about what the organization was meant to represent and accomplish. Rome noted:

At that time [ed. note: 1918–1919] the American Jewish convention also convened (...) on the condition that this total permanent body that they were establishing would not be permanent. (...) They were not able to implement

it. (...) They didn't have to do anything, they didn't have to come with knives, they just let the people talk, talk, talk. Some people acted in other directions, but the Congress thing died, bingo. (...) It was an agreement, they all agreed, that 'we're going to meet (...) and have our convention but we didn't say that would lead to its permanence.' (...) It was a compromise. Some people didn't want a convention, and some people did. So in order to have peace in the world 'We're going to meet, and we may adopt certain resolutions about which we have common consent' (...) in Canada it was about Israel and about the liberties and rights of the Jews in Europe (...) they passed resolutions (...) and they said look, 'you're a nice man and I'm a nice man and we met, and we're all fellow Jews and we found an agreement, and one of the areas which we disagree; on the permanence of a permanent democratic American or Jewish congress.' (...) there are many people who in principle do not believe, and do not today, in a democratic representative body of Jews. (...) If you are going to have a body like this it cannot be democratic because they don't have taxing power. So eventually you're going to have to come to the money people and give them more than one vote. Which is what happened in Canada. When it was reorganized in 1934 it was a nothing body, until they called up Sam Bronfman and made a deal with him.³

Hayes' recollections pick up the Congress narrative at the time that he joined the organization, which coincided with both the election of Sam Bronfman as President and the CJC's move out of the Baron de Hirsch building which housed the Jewish Federation. Hayes mused:

When I came in and when Mr. Bronfman came in, it wasn't possible that we would work out of ... firstly there wasn't room, and secondly Mr. Bronfman had other ideas. So (...) for the hard core members of the Canadian Jewish Congress (...) to agree to move west of Bleury street was a revolution. They feared so much two things; 1) that we were having meetings at the Montefiore Club, and 2) that we were having premises on Ste-Catherine street, near Stanley street - this was, in a geographic sense, *'traif'*. And it took a lot of doing, and a respect for Sam Bronfman to get that far. Then to add a third dimension, they were used to conducting their proceedings to some great extent in Yiddish. I was not (...) fluent in Yiddish, I knew very little Yiddish - not my fault, simply because it wasn't used at home. Therefore (...) I had to overcome the suspicions of a very important section of the Canadian Jewish Congress, among the founders of the Canadian Jewish Congress; (...) people such as Hirsch Wolofsky of the *Eagle* (...), the leadership of the Polish Farband, or the *landsmanschaften* (...) - these people were used to dealing in a Jewish environment. Headquarters was usually St Lawrence Boulevard - nothing like Ste-Catherine street or Stanley street. (...) What I did have was

a feeling that there was a friendship and a hostility – that I'd have to prove myself as being really a Jew.⁴

These and other digital recordings can now be conveyed to remote researchers efficiently and at minimal cost via electronic file transfer. The interview excerpts from which these quotations were taken can be heard online at <https://www.cjhn.ca/en/permalink/cjhn89593> and at <https://www.cjhn.ca/en/permalink/cjhn89592>.

In our new Archives space on Rue Jean-Talon Ouest at the corner of Victoria Avenue, the Canadian Jewish Congress collection is organized in a much more linear fashion than it had been in our former location, where box locations had more closely reflected the era in which they were catalogued rather than their relationship with any adjacent materials. The new arrangement makes retrieval much easier, highlights possible redundancies, and brings the less-organized material to our attention as well.

Although Canadian Jewish Congress is no longer active, its legacy is alive and continuing to develop at the Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives.



Inauguration of the "Gates of Peace" Jewish cemetery of Kelowna BC, 1989.



"First sukkah ever in North Hatley Quebec", October 1987. Organized by Richard Sevak of Beebe, Quebec, the sukkah was a community effort, constructed at the Alan and Beverly Fein home in North Hatley.

1

Canadian Jewish Archives, UJRA Series LD
Box 106 File 16 "Immigration from Shanghai
Part 5 (2nd Shanghai group), 1949".

2

Canadian Jewish Archives, CJC collection
Series ZB, Alan Rose file 1: Press Releases.

3

Canadian Jewish Archives, CJC sound collec-
tion item SC 1104.

4

Canadian Jewish Archives, CJC sound collec-
tion item SC0033.