

**Pierre Anctil and Richard Menkis, eds.,
*In a "Land of Hope": Documents on the Canadian
 Jewish Experience*, vol. 1, 1627–1923 (The Champlain
 Society, 2023), 437 pp.**

The discipline of Canadian Jewish studies makes its way under particular pressures. Many interested in subjects related to Canadian Jewish history, culture, and contemporary life do not see a great distinction between what might be studied below or above the 49th parallel, though this tendency may be fading with the chaotic realities of President Donald Trump's America First policies. Formulated in the 1970s by historians at a time when no such discipline existed, Canadian Jewish studies is now a well-established undertaking, with specialists young and old, most of them based in Canada, who work in such varied disciplines as literature, oral history, visual arts, and music. Some of them are supported by centres of specialized study in the area, the lead example being at York University in Toronto.

The editors of *In a "Land of Hope": Documents on the Canadian Jewish Experience, 1627–1923* are both founding figures in the creation and growth of the discipline. Richard Menkis, raised in Toronto and trained as a historian at Brandeis, has had a long and influential role in the Department of History at the University of British Columbia, where he teaches in areas as diverse as Holocaust and museum studies. There he has mentored students in areas related to west coast Jewish lives. Pierre Anctil, now retired from the Department of History at the University of Ottawa, has worked to move materials related to Montreal and Yiddish in Canada into French-translated versions for scholars who might not otherwise gain access to materials on early Canadian Jewish life and culture. Anctil's mentoring has helped create a generation of scholars interested in examining the Canadian Jewish experience with a distinctive Quebec-centred focus. The pairing of Menkis and Anctil in the production of a book of "documents on the Canadian Jewish experience" represents a best-case scenario of broad but also specialized attention to what should be seen as salient, unique, or in need of further attention in the realm of Canadian Jewish materials and daily life. With a second volume in the works, this first volume highlights earliness. The volume reaches back to a date most would not think of in relation to the subject at hand. The chosen concluding date is a moment in the interwar years when Canadian Jewish life had reached a kind of status quo, with immigration numbers falling, urban and rural patterns attaining reliable rhythm, and numerous important institutional and cultural organizations actively serving what was, at the time, Canada's largest ethnic minority drawn from outside the country's own borders.

The introduction to the volume offers a portrait of influential Canadian Jewish historians, depicting the scholarly and personal styles of early practitioners Benjamin

Sack, Louis Rosenberg, and Simon Belkin. Here Menkis and Anctil point to the importance of archival collections in the ability to gather documents for their study. This is an important sub-narrative, which highlights how Canadian Jewish research and writing has been made possible by communities and organizations that provided for well-funded archives. The volume's introduction considers, as well, how broader trends in the country in the 1960s and 1970s, including a heightened interest in Canadian studies and the influence of multiculturalism, fed the work of interdisciplinary researchers and teachers focused on Jewish life in Canada.

Reflecting on their own partnership, the editors take account of the periods in which there was an absence of interaction between scholars working in English and in French, and then examine the steps taken in the 1960s to attain a shared focus, leading to key early work in French from Quebec-based scholars on the history of Jews in New France. One of Menkis's own early-career essays examined the arrival in New France of Esther Brandeau, disguised as a male emigrant from Bordeaux. These events are portrayed in the volume by way of a letter written by the "Intendant Gilles Hocquart, Quebec, to the Minister of the Navy, Paris, October 26, 1738." The cinematic details are presented as follows:

This past September 13th on the Boat St. Michel commanded by Sr de Salaberry, there arrived a young Jewish girl disguised as a boy named Esther Brandeau who made before me the declaration attached hereto. By chance her condition was discovered during the crossing. . . I entreat you, Sir, to advise me as to how to proceed with regard to this girl. (55)

With the volume offering space to stretch out at key historical points, Menkis and Anctil can set up the Brandeau incident with documents related to other French colonial developments, including the Company of One Hundred Associates and the activities of early French Catholics in the colony. This provides an example of how subjects that have been studied in limited ways are more fully contextualized via the volume's inclusion of rarely seen documents.

The areas around which the editors have gathered chosen documents include: "Origins to 1881"; "The Great Migration – 1881-1914,"; and the period between 1914 and 1923, which included increasingly difficult access to the country by European Jews. In this last area, included materials relate to Jews in the war effort, the rise of modern Zionism, immigration, community building, and the experiences of women.

These latter sections of the volume signal where its follow-up volume might be headed. It's in the period following World War One where readers will find familiar touchpoints, including the heated discussion in the 1920s over how the nation's immigration regulations should treat Jewish newcomers. The documents included

on this front are plentiful, with revealing, too little seen transcripts of parliamentary discussion on the subject. Here, Liberal and Conservative voices, once and past prime ministers, as well as the impressive long-time Jewish Member of Parliament from Montreal, S.W. Jacobs, orate in ways that are not heard today. Not only the times, but the character of Canadian leaders come into view.

In the section titled “Women’s Voices and Experiences,” the reader catches a glimpse of early aid and social welfare organizations, as well as political activity. One document exemplifies the kind of social activism that was undertaken by Ottawa-based Lillian Freiman, as she offers her president’s address, circa 1921, for the founding of the Canadian branch of Hadassah, the women’s Zionist organization. Freiman’s role in a variety of early twentieth-century activist movements is well known, but her own words are not often included in earlier research related to her life and times. For the women gathered to hear her address, Freiman takes account of the moment when “Palestine [was] not officially open for immigration,” yet:

thousands of our suffering people, spurred on by the double desire to leave the countries that have inflicted such terrible persecutions on them and to come under the beneficent influence of our own dear England, have left their homes and started on the perilous journey to Palestine. There are, I’ve heard, at the present time, about three hundred immigrants a week getting into Palestine. (410)

Freiman was, at the time, involved with rescuing Ukrainian Jewish orphan survivors of pogroms and wartime calamity, for adoption by Canadian Jewish families. Her work in favour of emigration to Palestine was complemented by her ongoing efforts, continued until her death in 1940, to help European Jews gain access to Canada

The volume’s documents related to Zionism recover a period when Canadian Jews were developing an early, and what would prove to be a sustained, dedication to the movement, with greater dedication than that found in the United States. Documents included reflect the range of Zionist affiliation, from religious to left-oriented labour Zionism, expressions of the movement that were evident in communities across the country. In 1918 the Labour Zionists of Montreal cannot help but pronounce that the:

glorious Russian Revolution has brought us and the whole world the great tidings of liberty. Unfettered were also our chains, and the Jews of Russia there have gained together with political freedom also the national right for themselves, and national and cultural autonomy. (329)

At the first conference of Mizrachi, the religious Zionist organization in Canada, a host of rabbis are elected to key positions and offer blessings for the efforts of “traditional Judaism” in the “Land of Israel.” One finds, at a final session of the conference, a

proposal directed at their Labour Zionist competitors, proposing as it does a “protest levelled against the persecution of Jews in Russia and Poland” (337).

These excerpts from the volume suggest how documents from these periods convey a moment, an event, personalities, and long forgotten Jewish styles, habits of thought, and commitment. One way to read *In a “Land of Hope”* is to alight in a particular era, with the additional consideration of place, so, let’s say, Toronto in 1921, as the rabbinic figures motivated by religiously inspired Zionism take a poke at their far-left would-be compatriots. By close reading of the documents, social history and lived lives, not often easily recovered beyond the rare photograph of such an event, come sharply into focus.

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