



## Jacob Diamond – Portrait of a Patriarch

By Jack Switzer

*Part of the information in the following biographical sketch is well known to our readers. We have added less-familiar material, culled from Calgary newspaper reports and JHSSA archival material with the aim of providing a more complete portrait of the "patriarch" of Calgary's Jewish community.*

The city building inspector was surprised that the plans submitted to him featured the heading "House of Jacob".

"Why in thunder do you want to plaster the man's name all over the plans?" he asked the contractor. He then learned that the building was a synagogue, that Jacob was a Biblical patriarch, and that the building's name might not be meant to honour well-known Calgarian Jacob Diamond.

The evidence is ambiguous. The group's minutes from March 1908, translated from Yiddish, state: "It was moved that the congregation should carry the name Beit Ya'akov – House of Jacob – and that the first synagogue to be built should have this name and that it never be changed. This motion was passed. Mr. Diamond said that since his name was Ya'akov, he would therefore give the congregation a gift of five dollars, and he promised them that when the synagogue is built he would try his best."

In any event, Diamond was well worthy of such an honour. His was the first Jewish family to settle in Calgary. He founded the House of Jacob congregation, presided over its governance for many years, contributed substantial funds to its construction and upkeep, and gave Calgary's premier and oldest synagogue the continuity and leadership that made it the spiritual and physical centre of the pioneer Jewish community.

Jacob Lyon Diamond was born in Oshmana, Russia in 1859. The family name was then Tabarisky. To avoid conscription into the Tsar's army, Jacob immigrated to England about 1880. He spent several years there and moved on to Canada in 1884. As a peddler in southern Ontario, he met Maria Stoodley, a domestic worker for a rural Jewish family, and married her in 1886.

Maria converted to Judaism, became Rachel Diamond, and the couple headed west. Rachel had a sister in Calgary, married to a NWMP officer. The Diamonds settled in Calgary in 1889, the only Jews in a dusty town of about 4,000. Jacob bought furs from natives and ranchers, and then opened a pawnshop. The Diamonds had three children in the 1890s – Joseph, born in 1892; Myers, 1895; and Rose, 1897.

Jacob's younger brother William Diamond (1863–1945) emigrated in 1890, joined his brother in Calgary, and later moved to Edmonton to become a prominent leader of that city's Jewish community. Younger brother Philip Diamond (1867–1943) came in the early 1900s and lived in Canmore for many years.

During most of the 1890s Diamond's main business was his pawn shop on Stephen (Eighth) Avenue. The store was also the base for his many real estate and investment ventures. These were boom years for Calgary, and Jacob Diamond was a busy and well-accepted part of the business scene.

The hand-written journal of Calgary's mayor, Wesley Orr, mentions the good character of the then-34 year old Jewish businessman.



*A distinguished Jacob Diamond in his bowler hat. This photo is enlarged from the photo of the 1912 Talmud Torah picnic in Bowness Park. Photo: JHSSA #639*

*"April 28, 1893 – re J. Diamond and Geo. Seaberry, farm brokers in Calgary. Diamond ... has continued to make money in his moderate way. ... Diamond*

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## Jacob Diamond

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Jewish National Fund Golden Book Certificate presented to Jacob Diamond "on occasion of his sixth successive election as President of Congregation House of Jacob" by the Calgary Zionist organization, Agudath Zion, in 1913. JHSSA Acc. 98-011

is a youngish married man (a Jew) very close, sober, and solid."

In the fall of 1894 Jacob and William Diamond rented the Masonic Hall for High Holy Day services, which Jacob led. They managed to assemble a *minyan*, the ten men ritually required for most religious services. In attendance were the two Diamond brothers, five commercial travelers, a Lacombe-area farmer, and two Edmonton Jews.

The Diamond home on Tenth Avenue East became the small Jewish community's social and religious centre. He quickly assimilated into the local business milieu, and became active in non-Jewish affairs. He joined the Anglo-centric Oddfellows in 1895 and the Masonic lodge shortly thereafter.

Jacob's feisty character and his faith in Canadian legal institutions was displayed in 1900, when he challenged the actions of Calgary's police chief in what he felt was a form of assault on his person. (See sidebar on page 3 for more on this episode.)

In 1901 the Jacob Diamond family moved to Edmonton, staying until 1904. He was a merchant there, and daughter Hattie (1902–1982) was born during this period. On May 19, 1904, the *Calgary Herald* reported: "Jacob Dia-

mond has moved back to Calgary from Edmonton, and has bought out the Matthews grocery business. He says he is now here to stay." The store soon became Diamond Grocery. Jacob stayed and resumed his prominent role in the Jewish community.

Later in 1904 Diamond took the lead in acquiring land for a Jewish cemetery, when the infant daughter of his friend Nathan Bell died. It was the community's first infrastructure initiative. They formed a Jewish burial society, the *Chevre Kadisha*, which officially incorporated only in 1914.

Jacob Diamond, leader in the founding of the cemetery, next devoted his efforts to the formation of a more-encompassing organization, a synagogue.

Diamond closed his grocery business in 1905 and turned the space, at 232 Eighth Avenue East, into a liquor store. "J. Diamond, Wholesale Wines, Liquors, and Cigars" was also a retail store, identified by a large beer-barrel sign.

Religious services continued to be held in the Diamond home (now on Eleventh Avenue East) and in rented halls. After 1905, the Jewish population grew rapidly, as did its communal activities. A Zionist organization, Agudath Zion, was very active. Incoming Jewish

immigrants were sheltered and aided, including those headed to homesteads in central Alberta.

In 1905 Jacob and William Diamond headed a committee to raise funds for the relief of Jewish *pogrom* victims in Russia. Many non-Jews also donated. Also in 1905, William Diamond, then a clothing merchant, presented Calgary's Jews with their first *Sefer Torah*, the gift of a Montreal garment maker.

But the sacred Torah scroll had no home. Jacob Diamond had a wish list – a kosher butcher, a synagogue, and a rabbi. Rabbi Hyman Goldstick was soon hired to serve both the Calgary community and Edmonton's Beth Israel congregation.

In 1908 Jacob Diamond headed an ad-hoc synagogue committee that had begun holding regular meetings. They supervised kosher meat sales and began fund-raising for a building. The synagogue site was purchased and in 1909 a small multi-use building, which also served as classroom space for afternoon Hebrew lessons, was erected on a rear corner of the land. That year the congregation was incorporated as "The Congregation of the House of Jacob", with Jacob Diamond as its first official president.

The synagogue building was constructed in 1911. Jacob Diamond officiated at the cornerstone ceremony. His friend, Calgary MLA Richard B. Bennett (later Prime Minister), addressed the large crowd in attendance. The large synagogue opened with more ceremonies in September 1911, in time for the High Holy Days. It served as the Jewish community's focal point for almost two more decades, hosting most visiting lecturers and other community-wide events until the opening of other communal buildings such as the Hebrew School, in 1920.

A photo of the first Calgary Stampede parade in 1912 shows Diamond with his daughters, Rose and Hattie, in front of his store among a large crowd of viewers. He is neatly dressed in a suit, wearing his trademark bowler hat, with his graying beard well trimmed. There is a touching aspect to the scene. Jacob is seen holding the hand of a little black girl, thought to

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## Jacob Diamond

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be the daughter of their maid.

He was then 54, well off, the operator of a prosperous liquor business, and owner of several local properties, a house in Banff, and a farm on the Elbow River just west of Calgary.

The 1914 news item announcing Jacob Diamond's re-election as House of Jacob president states, "He was the live wire of the Calgary Jewish community from its birth right up to the present time." He was re-elected as House of Jacob president annually until 1916, when Charles Malkin replaced him. Diamond served one more term as president, in 1922–23.

Many thought Diamond resembled King George V, then on the throne of England. His daughter, Dorothy Diamond Goldin (1911–2004), recalled in an interview that her father "loved all things British," a legacy of his early years in England. The experience also left Diamond fluent in English, a language skill lacked by many of the Jewish newcomers to Calgary. His fluency in English and in Yiddish, the language of most Jewish immigrants, allowed Diamond to serve as an interpreter in

Calgary's police court. He was present at several cases, beginning in 1912, in which magistrate Gilbert Sanders said he did not trust the testimony of Jews, that many had committed perjury. Diamond was among those who condemned Sanders' anti-Semitic attitude.

Jacob Diamond supported the reorganization of the Hebrew School in 1912 that saw the school begin operating independently of the synagogue. He distributed prizes to students at the Chanukah ceremonies held at the synagogue, and was termed "one of the best patrons of the school." He was the top donor, pledging at least \$25 a month towards scholarships and school expenses.

Diamond sold his liquor business in 1914, apparently advised by R.B. Bennett that prohibition was coming. He became semi-retired, involved with various realty and business ventures, but no longer going to work every day.

A year earlier, Jacob Diamond had moved his family to a large new house at 823 Sixth Avenue West. He felt it fitting for a man of his stature to leave the east-side Victoria Park district and relocate at a west-end address. The Diamond prop-

erty had a stable, home for many years to Nelly, a liquor-delivery horse that Jacob refused to sell when he disposed of his store. He owned a red Haynes automobile, and drove his large family on excursions to Banff and the Elbow River farm. Family members occupied the house until 1950; it still stands, renovated to house Brinkhaus Jewellers.

Even in semi-retirement Jacob Diamond maintained his British-gentleman appearance and demeanor. He ceded active leadership of the House of Jacob to others, but he continued to offer counsel and financial support. He was undoubtedly pleased to see the era of stable and effective rabbinical services that began with the arrival of Rabbi Simon Smolensky in 1917.

Jacob Lyon Diamond died late in 1929, at the age of 70. Calgary's pioneer Jewish community builder was widely mourned. Rabbi Smolensky conducted a funeral service at the Diamond home. Six of his Masonic lodge brothers – all prominent non-Jews – were pallbearers, and a Lodge official presided over a Masonic-rite burial at the cemetery Diamond had founded.

## Jacob Diamond vs. police chief Tom English

*On June 5 and 6, 1900 both the Calgary Daily Herald and the Albertan ran reports of "Mr. Diamond's Complaint". Jacob Diamond's response to this small legal spat reveals much about his character and his attitude to his adopted homeland.*

In May of 1900, Stephen Avenue merchant Jacob Diamond was in the midst of a civil lawsuit with his ex-partner Andrew Carson regarding their shuttered clothing store. We know little about the dispute, but it seems Diamond was avoiding being served with a legal paper and, for some reason, a key to the store.

Carson, unable to pin down Mr. Diamond (a reporter said he couldn't walk as fast as Diamond), wanted his lawyer to give the letter and key to the reluctant plaintiff. The solicitor then asked Chief of Police Tom English to get the material to Diamond. The merchant refused to

accept the envelope, whereupon Chief English placed it in Diamond's pocket.

Diamond was outraged at what he felt was a violation of his person, and complained about the police chief and his "most insulting act" to city council, which convened a special meeting.

Diamond was passionate about his rights as a British subject and his expectations of respectful treatment in Canada. "I desire to know if your council permits its chief officer to assault a citizen of the city in broad daylight in this unprovoked and insulting manner.

"I lived in Russia at one time and came to this country for the purpose of enjoying immunity from official and arbitrary terrorism and tyranny. As long as I lived in Russia I was never made the victim of more insulting treatment than this act, by any official.

"It may possibly seem a slight matter to

*the Chief of Police, but to be thus stopped upon the street while with my family and in the presence of a large number of people and have a parcel thus forcibly thrust into my pocket is something that a resident of this city is entitled to be protected against. – Calgary, May 31st, 1900."*

Council "filed" the complaint, apparently waiting for the lawsuit to be settled before taking any action. By mid-June the civil case was settled out of court, with Carson paying Diamond for losses suffered while his store was closed. Diamond then re-opened the business as a sole proprietor.

There is no record of any official reprimand against Chief English for his behaviour. (Historian Max Foran says English "had a cavalier disregard for rules or procedure." English was fired in 1909; he was apparently soft on prostitution and gambling in Calgary.)

# Rose Chetner – Memories of Montefiore

*The Montefiore Institute building, the Little Synagogue on the Prairie, which served the Montefiore farming colony at Sibbald, will be officially opened in Calgary's Heritage Park on June 28, 2009. The following article is an excerpt from an oral interview of one of the farming women who shared fond recollections of her farming days despite the many hardships she had endured.*

Rose Chetner (1899–1997) lived only a few years on a Montefiore Colony homestead, but many of her memories of that period were vivid, informative and colourful. She and her daughter, Belle Viner, were interviewed in Calgary in 1977 by Reevan Dolgoy, an Edmonton-based historian. Rose was the about 75 at the time.

Rose Karsh – she was also known as Rosie and the family name had been spelled Karsch – was born in Russia. Her father, Baruch Karsh, came to Calgary in 1911, worked in a Jewish-owned lumberyard, and brought over wife Ida and their seven children a few years later. One infant died during the trip.

On June 6, 1919 in Calgary, Rosie Karsh married Montefiore farmer Israel

Chetner (then Cheterener, 1895–1973) and moved to his farm. Israel Chetner's homestead, a half section – 320 acres – was a mile north of that of his parents, Joseph and Fanny Chetner. Another brother, Abe Chetner, had his farm four miles to the east of his parents. Younger siblings Clara, David, Nathan and Minnie lived with the senior Chetners.

Israel and Rosie's first child, Isobel (Belle), was born late in March of 1920, in Calgary. She was brought into a make-shift house at their farm. In mid-September of that year, near-tragedy befell the young Chetner family. The house and its adjacent sheds burned down.

Rose and baby Belle were home at the time. Israel was working in a distant farm field. Rose's narration begins with the fire.

"I was awaiting for him to come back for lunch and my baby was asleep and I looked up on the roof and there was a fire – just like a candle. My house, the shack, caught on fire. What shall I do? I didn't lose myself. I grabbed that baby and I ran out from the house. We couldn't save a thing. Afterward we cried.

The neighbours were wonderful.

They came over and offered us clothes and everything. They were very good to us. Not just the Jewish people.

We stayed for a while with my husband's parents. Then an older farmer moved back to Winnipeg. They had a little shack. We bought it and moved it to our farm. About six months later a man from Calgary, Mr. Rootman, I think, came out and built a house for us, and he built a house for Abe Ullman, and I think for the Segals.

When we got together we talked about what we all had in common, just like in the city people talk about their business. We talked about how you are making out and how we are making out. With the Jewish people and the Gentile people, that's what we talked about – the land, the farm.

As far as a Kosher home, we tried. My husband tried to get meat in from Calgary, and in the summertime by the time we got the meat it was almost spoiled and we didn't have any way to keep it. We did put shelves on the side of our well to keep things cool, but it didn't always work. We had to get our meat from town, from Sibbald. It was not kosher.

I always lit candles on Shabbat, and we kept *Yontif* (the Jewish Festivals). The relatives came and we went to synagogue.

My husband showed me how to milk the cows. I could milk the cows and churn butter. We made enough butter to take into town and exchange for groceries. And I took eggs to town. We used to get thirteen cents a dozen, I think. We went into town maybe twice a month.

We bought salt in cotton sacks. When they were empty I would wash them out and make handkerchiefs for my children. Flour sacks were the best. We made clothing out of flour sacks. We made sheets out of flour sacks. We made pillow cases out of flour sacks, and sugar sacks.

We had a rabbi, Sugarman, for a while, but he went back to Saskatoon.



Rose Chetner with the Chetner family, c. mid-1920s. Standing, left to right: Clara Chetner Austin, Dave Chetner, Lena Chetner, Abram Berger, Nate Chetner, Abe Chetner, Rose Chetner holding the hand of Dorothy. Seated: Fanny Chetner, Joseph Chetner, Belle Chetner. Missing in this Chetner family photo are Minnie Chetner Berger and Israel Chetner. Photo: JHSSA # 2050, courtesy of Rudy Berger.

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## Rose Chetner

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And then we got somebody else, I don't remember his name. My children were too young to go the Hebrew school.

A lot of Jewish boys used to come out in the fall and help us harvest. They came from all over, from Calgary, and all over. One worked for us. It was Rootman's son – the Rootman that built our house. He helped my husband stook.

Our farmyard, with the new house, was just beautiful. When you drove in, it was just like a little mansion. It was nicely laid out and we had a fence. Everything was nice and clean. We had a vegetable garden. We would try to grow flowers, but it was pretty hard. And we tried to plant trees, but they just didn't grow.

We did have others' trees, though. On the way to my in-laws we had a quarter section in pasture, and there was a lake – a slough – with all kinds of trees alongside.

We had a pony named Bob. I used to hitch him to a wagon and drive. Once when I went visiting, I got out to open the gate and left the baby on the buggy. When I opened the gate the horse ran through the gate, and I had to chase it, all the way to the house.

He was a smart horse; he knew where to go. But he didn't do that for my husband; he knew who was driving.

In the winter time we used to go visiting, and people used to come to our place. When people came to the farm they stayed for the day. You have to feed their horses and you have to feed them. No one was fussy. We had a few

cans of salmon in the house, and you'd open one up and make salmon patties. There was lots of butter and eggs.

In the fall the farmers used to buy a 40-pound boxes of apples. The guests came and you couldn't give them a whole apple. You cut them in quarters and passed the pieces around to the people. We couldn't afford to give them a whole apple.

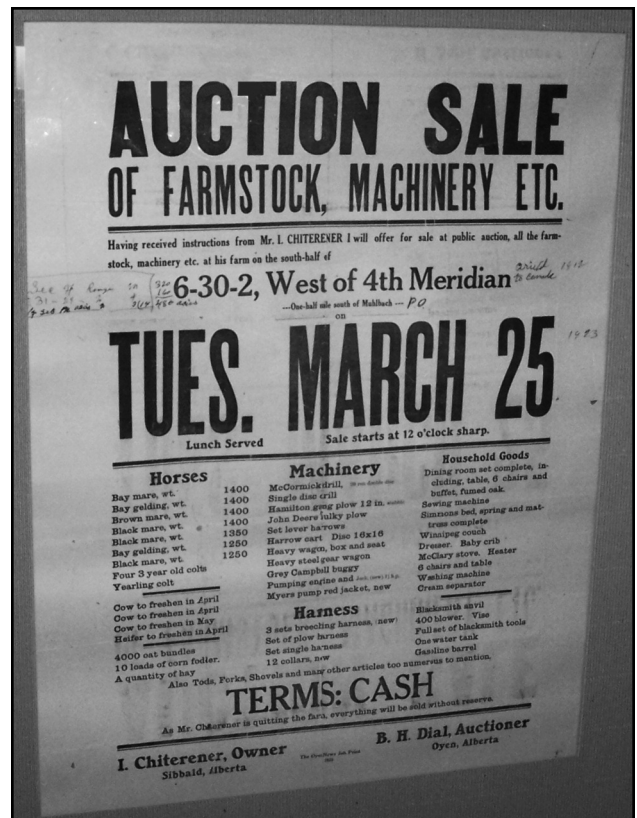
We used to play cards. The cards were quite old and when they tore we would sew them together.

At Chanukah time my husband would make *dreidlach*. He would cut a wooden thread spool into two and put a stick through the middle. The *dreidl* was round; it wasn't square.

Matzos for Passover we got from Winnipeg. All the Jewish farmers got together and ordered from Winnipeg.

We had a Ladies' Auxiliary for the synagogue. We would plan the socials, Chanukah concert, Purim concert and sometimes play cards.

I really enjoyed the farm, and I didn't want to leave. But we just couldn't make a go of it. It was very tough land.



Israel Chetner farm auction notice, March 1924. Photo courtesy of Ian Viner.

No rain and lots of stones. It was in the dry belt.

We enjoyed life on the farm. When we left the farm I sat on the steps with my children and I sat and cried. I knew how hard my husband worked and how hard I worked. We got nothing for the farm; we couldn't sell it. We left it for the taxes."

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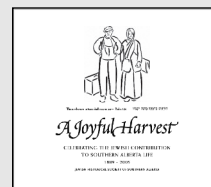
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# A Jewish Hobo King Visits Calgary, 1929

By Jack Switzer

*Today's economic downturn has been compared to the Depression. The following item, based largely on local newspaper items, paints a colourful picture of that difficult time.*

Leon Lazarowitz, America's self-proclaimed "Hobo King," made good use of the Jewish community's hospitality when he visited Calgary in 1929. (One source gives his full name as Joseph Leon Cohen Segal Lazarowitz.)

Not many of Canada's hobos were Jewish, but a few were, of necessity or choice, part of the drifter fraternity.

Hobos – itinerant homeless men (and a few women) – were part of the social milieu since the West was settled. In pre-Depression decades there was short-term work available in the frontier economy, on construction gangs and harvest crews, and at logging, fruit picking and other seasonal jobs. But they were far apart. Railway boxcars were the preferred means of travel between job sites, although not all hobos sought work.

Lazarowitz was an experienced self-publicist and *shnorer*. He shamelessly admitted his dependence on hand-outs. His motto was S.O.S. – Sponge on Someone, and he said his coat-of-arms was an outstretched palm. He visited the offices of both Calgary newspapers, where he displayed his press clippings, club membership cards, and autograph collection.

The title of Hobo King was acquired at an annual "Hobo Convention" in the States.

"King Lazarowitz came to Calgary from Claresholm, where he was the guest of a Scotsman, and he is proud of the fact that as an orthodox Jew he was able to obtain hospitality from the Scotch" (sic). During his four-day stay in Calgary, Lazarowitz was the guest of the Calgary Jewish welfare committee, made up of Rabbi S. Smolensky, S. Freedman and M. Wener.

His next stop was to be Edmonton; he was on his way to Alaska. The wandering Jew told the *Calgary Herald* that

Canadians were more sociable than Americans, and that only in Regina had he not been welcomed.

Leon Lazarowitz was in Winnipeg in 1931, and briefly abdicated his Hobo King title. He took a job, apparently to please a Jewish girl he wanted to marry. The marriage did not take place, however, so Leon resumed his transient lifestyle.

He was arrested for vagrancy in Fargo, North Dakota, and was the city jail's only prisoner on Thanksgiving Day. "The hobo king was given a turkey dinner at noon Thursday," a local paper reported, "but for religious reasons he wouldn't eat turkey. When supertime came the main dish was roast pork. ... Two Fargo Jews visited Lazarowitz, with the intent of bailing him out, but after a few minutes conversation, during which they received his views on life and the world generally, they decided to let him stay in jail."

In a 1983 memoir of Jewish life in Saskatchewan, a Jewish hobo king finds a warmer welcome. Ruth Lercher Bellan was then living in Regina; her father had a business in Weyburn. She recalls:

"The doorbell rang and a most unkempt man said, 'Mr. Lercher told me I would receive hospitality in this house.' Amazed at this message my mother invited him in. It turned out he was a Jewish 'king of the hobos.' It was around 1930 and many unemployed were riding the rods (rail cars). My dad had met this man in Weyburn and found him an unusual character with great pride in his role ... he told him that his family would entertain him in Regina. We had always had our share of unemployed asking for hand-outs during the Depression, but none of them had ever expected to be invited in before.

"Mama rose to the occasion and asked him to share a meal with us. My sister, brother and I had never sat down before with anyone who looked as he did. We were polite, enjoyed his conversation about his travels, and were intrigued to see that after lunch he took out his ledger and credited the city of

Regina with having received him well. He pointed out entries in red for other centres where his welcome had not been so warm.

"After he left we showed mama the black marks on the tablecloths where he had rested his hands. My father was happy that mama didn't let him down."

Ruth Bellan's hobo was not named; he may have been Leon Lazarowitz.

Beggars and the homeless were an unpleasant but common part of east-European Jewish life, and every community had an organization to assure some level of charity for these unfortunate. And individual Jews felt an obligation to the poor, part of their effort at *tzedaka* – charity – and *tikkun olam* – repairing the world. Pious Jews knew of 36 notations in the Torah where Jews were urged to welcome guests. "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt, is a well-known example of this principle, known as *hachnasat orchim* – welcoming of guests.

These humanitarian ethics crossed the Atlantic with the Jewish migration to the new world, where poverty, though less severe than in Europe, was also prevalent.

In Europe, a Jewish vagrant was known as a *trombenik*. And every Jewish town had its share of *luftmenshn*, people who survived on "air", with no visible skills or work ability. Both types appeared in the U.S. and in Canada.

A 1916 "King of the Hobos" (there were many in newspaper accounts, movies and popular literature) told a Florida newsman there were four types of hobos. "The top-of-the-line hobo travels from place to place looking for work. The tramp is a 'tourist in rags' who refuses to work. The bum is a poor relation to the tramp, a victim of drugs, booze, or illness."

Finally there was the "intellectual hobo, a sort of dilettante who is looking to avoid honest work while thinking up important stuff." Calgary's visiting hobo king Leon Lazarowitz seems to have been in the latter class.

# Switzer's Grocery – Sam Switzer's Early Enterprise

By Jack Switzer

Calgary's Heritage Park now has two tributes to Alberta's Jewish community. After its move and restoration the original Montefiore Institute – The Little Synagogue on the Prairie – will open to the public this season. Also open this year is Switzer's Grocery.

The store is not a replica or the original building. Switzer's Grocery is part of the retail and administrative building – the Haskayne Mercantile Block – at the Park's entrance. It offers visitors high-quality teas, jams and jellies, confections, baked goods, and similar food items.

Switzer's Grocery was named to honour Betty and Sam Switzer, who made substantial contributions to Heritage Park in recent years. (Betty Switzer passed away last year, as the grocery and its adjoining retail outlets were being completed.)

The original Switzer's Grocery was in an old building at 112 - 14th Avenue East. Sam's parents, Myer and Chaya Switzer, purchased the business in 1939. It had the advantage of having upstairs living quarters, and was near the homes of married daughters Becky Mendleman and Lily Fishman

"Feter (uncle) Myer" and Chaya, who had emigrated to Canada in the early 1920s, were not able to look after the store by themselves. Both had poor English skills, and they were still grieving the tragic death of their third child, Jessie Sanofsky,

who died of a brain tumor in 1939 after being married only a few months. Chaya (c. 1880–1962) was nearly blind, and Myer (c. 1885–1964) was spending more and more time in the synagogue, so their children's help was a necessity for the store, and the home above it, to survive.

Much of the store's management was thus left to Sam, just a boy, and his older sister Diane (Dinah), as well as to Becky and Lily, who by now had children and husbands with their own businesses. When Diane married Harry Shore in 1942, 16-year old Sam had to drop out of high school and run the store full-time.

The store had only a modest trade, but became the base for the extended family's summertime concession business – a food stand at the Calgary Stampede and other prairie exhibitions.

About 1948 Sam Switzer undertook his first construction and realty project. The 22-year old erected a two-storey apartment building directly behind the store. He was encouraged by a buddy, wealthy Montrealer Ed Bronfman, in Calgary with a family oilfield venture. It was a valuable learning experience.

Sam stayed at the store until 1952, when he opened a restaurant next to the Palace Theatre on 8th Avenue West. (The site would later become Switzer's Jewellery, run by his brother-in-law Morris Mendleman.) Switzer's Grocery was sold.

Switzer's Grocery was one of more than 50 Jewish-owned confectioneries



A natty Sam Switzer, aged about 20, c. 1946. Photo courtesy of Ron Switzer.

and grocery stores operating in Calgary in the 1940s. Many, like the Switzer store, had upstairs or rear living areas, and were staffed by family members. And many nurtured men and women who became academics, professionals and business leaders.

Switzer's Grocery at Heritage Park is a modest tribute to these hard-working Jewish families and their children (like the writer), who moved out of the little stores and into a bigger world.

(The writer's father, Mendle Switzer, was a cousin to Sam Switzer. Both are grandchildren of Wolf Baer Switzer.)



Switzer's Grocery, Heritage Park, Calgary, 2009. Photo: Shel Bercovich.



Switzer's Grocery, 112 - 14th Avenue SE, Calgary, c. 1949. Sam Switzer's first realty development, a small apartment building, is seen behind the store. Photo courtesy of Ron Switzer.

## JHSSA News

### Hymie Davids<sup>z"l</sup>

The Lethbridge Jewish community lost a prominent member with the passing of Hy Davids on February 24, 2009. Hy and Mickey, his wife of 65, years were active in every aspect of that community. Material donated to the JHSSA in 2007 includes Hy's curling sweater from a Calgary Bonspiel. Hy served as a director of the JHSSA for a number of years, regularly making the drive in from Lethbridge to attend the board meetings. He was an important link in the history of the Lethbridge Jewish community and his contribution will be remembered.

### Alberta's Rabbi, Rabbi Abraham Postone<sup>z"l</sup>, 1915–2009

From the JHSSA file on Rabbi Postone it is clear that he attended many community tributes in his honour, both in Edmonton and in Calgary. A final tribute was held in his memory at the Calgary JCC on March 22, 2009. For that occasion and in his honour, the JHSSA mounted a display at the JCC to illustrate his wide-ranging career and his many contributions to Jewish life in our province. Rabbi Postone was a proud member of JHSSA and maintained his interest even after he and Mrs. Postone moved to Vancouver in 2003. His memory will be long cherished by all those Albertans whose lives he touched.

### New books on Western Canadian Jewish History

Recent publications will add to our knowledge of the development of the Jewish communities across Western Canada. Cyril Leonoff's *The Rise of Jewish Life and Religion in British Columbia, 1858–1948* was published as the latest issue of *The Scribe* (Vol.28) by the Jewish Historical Society of B.C. While the focus is on Vancouver, there are number of chapters on Jewish life in rural and small-town B.C.

The Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada in Winnipeg launched Allan Levine's book, *Coming of Age – The Jews of Manitoba*, on May 14, 2009.

### Don't Let History Become a Thing of the Past!

With costs rising for the publication and distribution of our newsletter, we would like to remind our readers of the various sponsorship opportunities available to help the JHSSA continue to distribute *Discovery* to the entire Calgary Jewish community. Sponsorship of one issue is available for \$1,000. The sponsor's name is printed across the front page of the issue.

Other sponsorships include a page in our Heritage Book (\$100), a library book with a dedication bookplate (starting at \$36) and our tribute cards, which can be sent out for any occasion (starting at \$10) through Carey Smith, 403-253-5152. We are grateful to those readers who are regular user of our tribute cards. The easiest way to support our activities is to become a member – or even a patron or benefactor!

There are also a number of JHSSA projects in the works that are waiting for sponsors. For example, we are planning to photocopy all the issues of the *Jewish Free Press* since 1991 to complete our Local Jewish Press collection. This is necessary since newsprint is fragile. Please contact our office (403-444-3171; [jhssa@shaw.ca](mailto:jhssa@shaw.ca)) for further information about sponsorship possibilities.

### Additional 2009 Members

The following are JHSSA members whose names were inadvertently omitted in our last issue or who have joined since February.

#### Members

Allen County Public Library (Fort Wayne, IN), William Aizanman, Emanuel & Donna Cohen, Barry Finkelman (Medicine Hat), Mel & Deana Fishman (Toronto), Allen & Wendy Mendelman

#### Patrons

Miriam Meir, Dave & Evelyn Viner, Stan Guttman (Toronto).

### Recent JHSSA Activities

JHSSA co-sponsored the screening of the Yiddish film *Amerikaner Shadkhn* at the Beth Tzedec on April 26, 2009. On May 13, 2009, JHSSA hosted a presentation by Dr. Beryl Zaitlin on *Jewish Geography and your DNA*.

### Seeking 80 Year Olds in our Community

Once again at our AGM on October 19, 2009, the JHSSA hopes to honour those members of our community who have turned 80 in the past year. Please contact our office at 403-444-3171 or [jhssa@shaw.ca](mailto:jhssa@shaw.ca) to give us names for our list of honourees.

## DISCOVERY

#### Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta

Founding President: Jay Joffe  
President: Sheldon Smithens  
1<sup>st</sup> Vice President: Jack Switzer  
2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President: Maxine Fischbein  
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Editors: Jack Switzer, Agi Romer Segal, Maxine Fischbein

The editors welcome submissions for publication relating to areas of Calgary and Southern Alberta Jewish history. All articles should be typed, documented and sent for consideration.

Statements of fact or opinion appearing in *Discovery* are made on the responsibility of the authors alone, and do not imply the endorsement of the editors or the JHSSA.

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