



DISCOVERY

The Journal of the

תגלית

# JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## of Southern Alberta



A JOYFUL HARVEST SPECIAL EDITION

NOVEMBER 2005

## THE JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN ALBERTA WELCOMES YOU TO

# A Joyful Harvest

by Jay Joffe

It is my pleasure to welcome you, our viewers, as together we reap a rich historical harvest.

Two years in the making, *A Joyful Harvest: A Centennial Exhibit Celebrating the Jewish Contribution to Southern Alberta Life* shows how one relatively tiny ethnic group grew and prospered here, in turn giving back to the larger community and helping to build the province we know and love.

This history has deep personal meaning for me, since it was my grandparents, Jacob and Rachel Diamond, who planted the first seeds of Jewish communal life when they arrived here as the area's first permanent Jewish settlers in 1889.

Many of the early Jewish settlers quite literally sowed in tears, but their efforts were not in vain. They built our Jewish community's institutions and organizations, and their children and children's children have shared the fruits of their own subsequent success in every imag-



Jay Joffe - 2005.  
Photograph: Impressions  
by Switzer.

inable field of endeavour within and beyond Alberta.

The story of the Jews of southern Alberta has come full circle as we celebrate, together with all our friends and neighbours, Alberta's centennial. We feel blessed that our forebears came to a province that provided the fertile ground where we could all grow and prosper.

Of necessity, the first Jewish institution established in Calgary was the Chevra Kadisha, a Jewish burial society whose roots predate the province's birth by a year. Over one century later, construction has just been completed on the Chevra Kadisha's new memorial chapel and cemetery.

Other early institutions continue a proud history of service to the community, while many new ones have also taken root and flourished.

Meanwhile, many members of the Jewish community have distinguished themselves not only as builders of Jewish institutions but as volunteers, leaders and generous philanthropists who have contributed toward the betterment of our society at large.

I know that those affiliated with the Jewish community cannot help but see their re-

flection in the panels of this exhibit as we pay tribute to 100 people, places and organizations that have defined Jewish life here in southern Alberta.

While the history presented in *A Joyful Harvest* is not intended as a detailed or exhaustive one, it does provide some snapshots in time that allow us to look back, with pride, on the accomplishments of our community and forward, with hope, to even greater achievements in the future.

We are thrilled that Alberta's Lieutenant Governor, the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, is officiating at the opening of *A Joyful Harvest*. We thank him, Premier Ralph Klein and Mayor Dave Bronconnier for supporting the exhibit as our honorary patrons.

Special thanks to our sponsors, led by the Government of Alberta's Lottery Fund - Community Initiatives Program, who shared our vision and generously supported this massive undertaking.

Many thanks to all those who helped bring this exhibit to fruition -- the board, members and staff of the Jewish Historical Society, the exhibit steering committee, the *Joyful Harvest* team and all our volunteers.

The JHSSA truly appreciates the efforts of all those who shared their stories, photographs and archival treasures with us. We hope to tell many more stories in the future, so we urge all members of the community to share their oft-hidden treasures with us and to give us your comments as we work toward our next exciting project, a book based on this exhibit.

Finally, I want to thank you, our viewers, for joining us in celebrating our heritage and this province's centennial. It is your enthusiastic participation that puts so much of the joy in *A Joyful Harvest*. ♦

*Jay Joffe was the founding president of the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta when it was incorporated in 1990. He continues to serve as our president.*



# A BRIEF HISTORY OF JEWISH LIFE IN SOUTHERN ALBERTA

by Jack Switzer

It all began when Jacob and Rachel Diamond became Alberta's first permanent Jewish settlers in 1889. By the time the province of Alberta was born in 1905, some 50 Jews had followed in their footsteps and settled in Calgary. By 1911, the community numbered over 600. Most came from Russia and Romania, anxious to leave pogroms and persecution behind them and to embrace the freedoms and economic opportunities that were the twin hallmarks of the west.

The newcomers bought land for a Jewish cemetery in 1904 and built their first synagogue, aptly named the House of Jacob, in 1911. By then, the growing community was influential enough to attract local politicians and dignitaries to participate in the cornerstone ceremony.

Jewish families also settled in Medicine Hat and Lethbridge during the decade following Alberta's establishment.

Many Jews became homesteaders, mostly in "block settlements" near Trochu and Rumsey (1905-1906) and Sibbald (1910). The Trochu and Rumsey farmers were generally successful and participated fully in their local communities, though most left farming after a generation, attracted by the economic opportunity and Jewish life in the cities.

Immigration slowed during World War I, but Jewish communal life flourished. The Talmud Torah (Calgary Hebrew School) provided after-school Judaic classes for children. Zionist organizations became active, as did member organizations like B'nai Brith and Hadassah.

The 1920s saw an increase in Jewish immigration from eastern Europe. Supporters

of Yiddish culture built the I. L. Peretz Institute in 1929 and, soon thereafter, established Calgary's first Jewish day school. Another group built the House of Israel as a Jewish community centre. It opened in 1931, although the Depression and World War II delayed its completion for nearly two decades.

In 1931, Calgary had 1,600 Jews, representing two percent of the city's population. Lethbridge and Medicine Hat each had over 100 Jews and boasted synagogues, Jewish cemeteries, and a surprising variety of Jewish organizations.

Alarmed by the rise of Nazism in Germany and escalating anti-Semitism in Poland, the Jews of southern Alberta tried - without success - to have the federal government liberalize its restrictive Jewish immigration policy. They were also apprehensive about the ideology of Alberta's new Social Credit government, which included in its ranks some openly anti-Semitic members. Many Jews felt the sting of exclusion both professionally and socially.

At the time, Jewish men and women were still largely engaged in small business though a few became successful in the professions. Extended families, mutual-aid societies and individual enterprise kept many members of the Jewish community afloat during the Depression.

One in 10 local Jews - 250 in all - joined the Canadian armed forces during World War II. Many were wounded in action, 10 fell while serving their country, and several were decorated for their valour.

Jewish veterans quickly applied their newfound skills to civilian life. They attended university, opened businesses, and contributed to the post-war development of their communities in both Jewish and civic spheres. Many entered professions

and some played a role in the development of Alberta's oil industry.

Holocaust survivors, some left alone in the world and others related to Calgary families, started new lives in southern Alberta.

Calgary Jews enjoyed a major building boom beginning in 1959. Over three years, they built two synagogue buildings, two schools and a memorial chapel. By 1961, nearly 3,000 Jews lived in Calgary. Their move from the city's centre to the southern suburbs was well underway.

Within 20 years, Calgary's Jewish population doubled. Alberta's economic growth attracted newcomers from Ontario and Quebec, as well as from other countries, including Israel, South Africa and the United States. Large numbers of Jews from the Soviet Union also found their way to Calgary. Population shifts proved

bittersweet, however, as the Jewish communities of Medicine Hat and Lethbridge dwindled during these decades.

Calgary Jews enjoyed a banner year in 1979. The Calgary Jewish Centre and an adjoining seniors' residence opened; a Reform congregation was established; and Congregation House of Jacob was revitalized by a new leadership.

During the decades that followed, the Jewish community experienced much change as well-established synagogues and schools merged while new Jewish institutions and organizations continued to emerge. Meanwhile, members of the Jewish community became increasingly active in the community at large as volunteers, leaders and philanthropists.

The Jews of southern Alberta have much to be thankful for. We have successfully integrated without losing our religious and cultural identity. Our community has produced two senators, two MLAs, a long-serving mayor, a city counselor, fifteen members of the Order of Canada and a number of honorary doctorate recipients. Many Jews have excelled in diverse fields including academia, healthcare, business and the arts.

Today, some 8,000 Jews make Calgary their home. Some are the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the pioneers who came to this land of promise a century ago. All have reaped a truly joyful harvest. We are strong, successful and proud of the role we have played in building a vibrant community for all Albertans. ♦

*Jack Switzer serves as a director of the JHSSA and an editor of Discovery.*



*House of Jacob Synagogue - 1968.  
Photograph: Matthews Studio & Photo Lab Ltd.*



# A Joyful Harvest

A Joyful Harvest Title Panel	Dedication	Sponsors	Viewer's Guide	A Joyful Harvest Introduction	Immigrant Western Embroidery Opposition
Agudas Zion Society Hebrew Ladies' Aid Society	Decade Highlights 1910-1919	Decade Highlights 1910-1919	Homesteads	Charles Malkin Martin (Cohn) Nordegg	Rabbi Smol House of
Grigori Garbovitsky & Jascha Galperin I.L. Peretz School	Decade Highlights 1930-1939	Decade Highlights 1930-1939	Lethbridge	Marcia (Calmenson) Goldberg Polish-Jewish Family Loan Assoc.	Young
The Home Front	Shaie Jaffe Israel (Izzy) Florence	Mizachi Women House of Israel	The Moscovich Family Morris Shumiatcher (Smith)	Holocaust Survivors & War Orphans	The State
Calgary Jewish Community Council I.L. Peretz School	Camp B'nai Brith (B.B.-Riback)	Decade Highlights 1960-1969	Decade Highlights 1960-1969	Leo Sheftel Shaarey Tzedec	Mozah (C Zem Jack E
Decade Highlights 1970-1979	Decade Highlights 1970-1979	Decade Highlights 1970-1979	Jewish Immigrants from Abroad Eastern Canadian Jews	Beth Israel Players Harold Hanen	Rab Lewis N. Hil
Miriam (Switzer) Winston Maurice Paperny	Calgary Jewish Centre	Decade Highlights 1980-1989	Decade Highlights 1980-1989	Jewish Journalism Temple B'nai Tikvah	Esther (M Rob Akiva A
Decade Highlights 1990-1999	Jewish Historical Soc. of S. Alberta Chabad Lubavitch of Alberta (Calgary)	Ron Ghitler Marsha (Pearlman) Hanen	Jenny (Lavin) Belzberg Jewish Genealogical Soc. of S. Alberta	Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary Jewish Community Mikvah (Ritual Bath)	Decade H 2000-
Epilogue	Acknowledgements	Acknowledgements	<b>EXHIBIT SHOW</b> <b>Beth Tzedec Synagogue</b> 1325 Glenmore Trail South West, C		

For further information contact: Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta, 1607 - 90th Avenue S



# EASY VIEWING GUIDE

Immigration to Western Canada	Immigration to Western Canada	Decade Highlights 1875-1899	Decade Highlights 1900-1909	Jacob Diamond Henry Frank	Chevre Kadisha (Holy Society) Jewish Cemeteries
Embracing opportunity	Overcoming Obstacles				
Rabbi Simon Holensky House of Jacob	B'nai Brith Calgary Lodge No. 816	Decade Highlights 1920-1929	Bella (Switzer) Singer Talmud Torah (Calgary Hebrew School)	Hadassah- WIZO	National Council of Jewish Women Aleph Zadik Aleph (AZA)
From Judaea	Medicine Hat	Pioneer Women (Na'amat) Histadrut	Small Towns	Decade Highlights 1940-1949	Decade Highlights 1940-1949
State of Israel	Decade Highlights 1950-1959	Decade Highlights 1950-1959	Charles Waterman The Charles Waterman Talmud Torah	William Epstein Harry Veiner	State of Israel Bonds Jewish National Fund
Goldberg) Emmans Edelson	Calgary Jewish Family Service Bureau Beth Israel	Ted Riback Meadowlark Club	Sam Hector Chevre Kadisha Memorial Chapel	United Jewish Appeal Dr. David Lander	Aron & Ida (Zysblatt) Eichler ORT
Rabbi N. Ginsberg Hillel	Carl Safran Canadian Council of Christians and Jews	Martha (Block) Cohen Harry B. Cohen	Sydney Kahanoff Jewish War Veterans of Canada	Lily (Belzberg) Faider Frank and Sophie (Aizenman) Kettner	Muriel (Libin) Kovitz Ayala (Hanan) Manolson
(Manolson) Robins Academy	Sheldon M. Chumir Beth Tzedec	Mazkeret Batia The Calgary Jewish Academy	Holocaust Education Symposium House of Jacob- Mikveh Israel	Phyllis (Maerov) Switzer Holocaust Memorial Park	Decade Highlights 1990-1999
Decade Highlights 2000-2005	Decade Highlights 2000-2005	Sid and Bronia (Karafiol) Cyngiser Martin Cohos	Alvin Libin David Bercuson	Sam Belzberg Jacob (Jack) Austin	Morris Cyril Shumiatcher Bernard Ghert

VIEWING AT  
Synagogue  
Calgary, Alberta

## VIEWING HOURS

November 15 - December 15, 2005  
Mondays & Thursdays 10 am - 4 pm  
Wednesdays 7 pm - 9 pm  
Sundays 10 am - 5 pm

