



JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY of Southern Alberta

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FALL 1990

Looking Back – Looking Forward ^{by Jay Joffe}

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the first edition of the Jewish Historical Society's Journal — Discovery. We hope you will find it interesting and informative. It represents just one of the projects our new society has undertaken in order to preserve our history. For those not familiar with the society, we were recently formed to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Jewish settlement in Alberta. To date we have created a Summary of the History of the Jewish Community. This has been put on the computer at the Jewish Centre and soon will be available for distribution.

We have also completed recorded interviews with fifteen of our elders and we plan to make these oral histories an ongoing project.

Whether your family arrived here in the 1880's or the 1980's we feel it's important that their records be main-

tained for future generations. To this end we have started our own limited archives at the Jewish Centre. Dedicated volunteers have been meeting to file the material that we have collected. We hope to continue this on a regular basis so if you have material that you feel is important, please bring it to the Centre. If you have time to help, please join us.

As we are also planning an exhibit of photographs to celebrate our centennial, we would be most interested in pictures that you might have of our early pioneers. Please contact Riki Heilik at 253-8600 with any information or photos that would assist the committee in compiling this vital material.

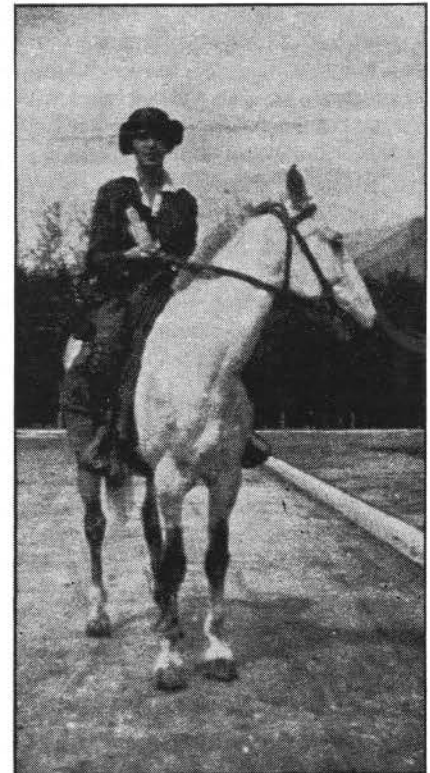
We hope you enjoy "looking back" at the stories and photographs that we have included in this first issue. There is a lot more to tell so we hope we can "look forward" to your support.

these are the "Sereth Story" donated by Mel Nagler and the "Baltzan Story" donated by Marvin Horwitz. Both are first hand Journals of our early pioneers. These narratives make fascinating reading and illustrate the spirit of adventure and the hardships experienced by these pioneers.

If you have material on your family which would you would like to have included in our archives please contact Jay Joffe at 243-2152 or Riki Heilik at 253-8600.

Recollections of a woman reporter from Banff in 1918

by Therese Nagler



Reporter Stella Sereth in the Saddle. [No Motor Cars allowed in Banff in 1918]

Stella Sereth Sameth was the fourth of five daughters born to Henry Noah and Rachel Sereth. This lively family came to Canada from Zbaraz, Austria-Poland in 1905.

They travelled from Montreal to Calgary to join their father "H.N." who, since his arrival in the "new world" in 1900, had established a successful lumber business. Their comfortable home, open to visitors of all ages, soon became known as a source of warmth and hospitality.

Pioneer Journals make interesting reading

We have been fortunate to receive some wonderful photographs and manuscripts previously held in private collections.

Two very interesting examples of

Featured in this issue

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[Here in her own words is a brief excerpt from the Sereth Story recalling experiences in Banff and Calgary.]

"I had worked for the News-Telegram for nine months when my parents told me I would have to quit because a house had been rented in Banff for the summer vacation. We would have it for one month and the Alex Sereths for the second month. I wrote to the weekly newspaper in Banff, the Crag and Canyon. Mr. Luxton, owner of the paper accepted me immediately as the "editor." This was an honorary title because there was a fine old gentleman who had been running the paper for many years. He taught me how to set type by hand since that was the only way that we could transcribe the news. I learned which type to use for the headlines and how to fit them in. The Luxtons, and later the Brewsters owned almost everything in Banff, the livery stables and many concessions for the tourists, such as the shops of Indian curios.

Banff was the most beautiful spot in North America then. No motor cars were allowed because they wanted to retain all of nature there — wildlife, rare birds and all. When I visited Banff in 1970 — if the mountains had not still been there I would not have believed it was the same place, with its traffic lights, concrete highways and many cars.

I had no feelings of inadequacy but just a lot of chutzpah. I wrote to papers in British Columbia, the Manitoba Free Press and of course the News-Telegram offering to be their Banff correspondent for the summer. I sent them stories, which when accepted, were paid for by the line. Of the stories accepted were interviews with celebrities visiting Banff and staying at the Banff Springs Hotel, a story of an attack by bears, and just news in general. The Winnipeg paper had a story about me together with a picture of me on horseback. Because no cars were allowed in Banff I had to ride horseback across the mountain to the town of Bankhead once a week to get news and advertisements.

When Jim came a-courtin' to Banff I suggested that I could get a horse for

him and we could both ride to Bankhead. He refused to get on a horse because he said the last time he tried he had been thrown, so I asked Mr. Luxton for a horse and buggy; I have a picture of us taken that day with Jim holding the reins!

That was the most beautiful summer. I did not work too many hours a day. As a reporter I could go as a guest to the swimming pool at the Banff Springs Hotel, so I went every day. I stayed with Aunt Sophie (Mrs. Alec Sereth) when mother and Clara went back to Calgary to prepare for our departure to Seattle. Throughout the summer everybody came to visit, even our parents' eldest grandson."

♦♦♦

In 1920 Stella married Jim Sameth and the couple, along with younger sister Clara and her parents, eventually settled in Seattle, Washington. She and Jim had two children — a son, Irwin and daughter, Emily. Stella, now resides in a Home for the Aged in Seattle. She is fondly thought of by many nieces and nephews including Justice Samuel Lieberman, Q.C., and Ethel Freed of Edmonton, and cousin Sabine Helman of this city. This photograph has been kindly supplied by Stella's nephew, Stanley Weinfield of Vancouver, B.C. Further information may be obtained through the Jewish Historical Society's copy of The Sereth Story. ♦

JHS Thanks for their help

Arla Friedman, Edith Gelmon, Dorothy Goldin, Sid Macklin, Elsie Maerov, Therese Nagler, Moritz Rosen, Dinah Spindel and Leo Sheftel.

Oral History Committee by Trudy Cowan

The Oral History Committee of the JHSSA had a very busy first year, with the completion of the tape outlines on the interviews done during the previous year's Shorashim: Roots project. In addition, a two-part workshop on gathering oral histories was attended by eight members, and research was begun in preparation for ongoing interviewing. We hope that this work will continue, and that more of our elders' stories will be recorded over the coming months. If you are interested in working with the Oral History Committee, or have suggestions to make about people who should be interviewed, please call Trudy Cowan, 253-0250.

Discovery

Editor **Sid Macklin**
Associate Editor **Jay Joffe**

Jewish Historical Society
of Southern Alberta

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 J.H.S.S.A.

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Switzer Family Reunion^{by} Dinah Spindel

450 people, 4 generations of descendants of Wolfbaer Switzer from Radom, Poland, were here in Calgary from August 30 until September 2 to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the first family members to arrive and settle in Calgary.

Friday afternoon as family members arrived in the city a hospitality suite was set up at the Carriage House Inn. On registration, members received colored ribbons with their Branch name and an agenda for the weekend activities.

Out of town guests attended dinners at family homes for Shabbat.

Saturday morning services were held at the Beth Tzedec Synagogue where the morning was shared with Stephen Jacobson, son of Byron and Lesley Jacobson, great, great, grandson of Wolfbaer on the occasion of his Bar Mitzvah.

On behalf of the family Andrea Spindel gave a short sermon on Jewish family, "their meaning and love." She presented Stephen with his own copy of the "A Switzer Family Tree and Register."

Brunch followed in the Hinda and Abraham Belzberg Social Hall. There was a great mingling of family.

Saturday afternoon a social time and sports activities were enjoyed at the Calgary Jewish Centre.

On Saturday evening each Family Branch displayed panels of photos of their heritage at Canada Olympic Park Gardens. Family members represented were the Singers, Aizenmans, Fishmans, Bleivisses, Belzbergs, Cyngisers, Mendel, Jacob, Myer and Gershon Switzer and offspring.

This magnificent memorabilia was

collected by family members from all of the centres where members live; Israel, California, Texas, Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg and other Canadian centres and Calgary.

Dinner and family entertainment followed.

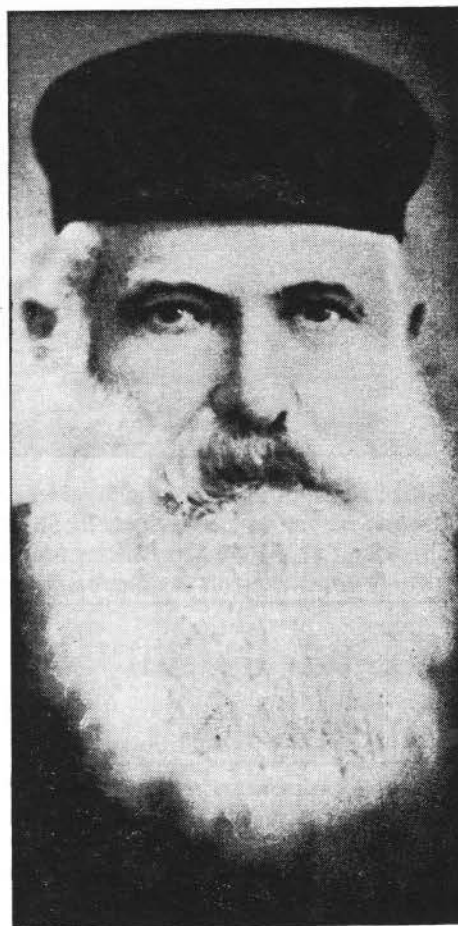
On Sunday morning family members were entertained at the Bragg Creek ranch of Betty and Sam Switzer. Darlene Switzer-Foster and her able committee served a great barbecue lunch to more than 450. There were hayrides, races, and competition activities for the children.

The magnificent location of the ranch added to the enjoyment of so many meeting for the 1st time, or after many years — finally putting faces to names of people heard of from family stories for years.

Paul (Paulo) Finkleman entertained for an hour, singing specially composed songs for the reunion. His renditions were enthusiastically received, with a special song for coordinators Annie Brodsky and Dinah Spindel.

Group photos and videos were taken all day.

Aron Eichler took the mike for an hour of hilarious humor and to award special draw prizes which had been arranged by the committee. Charlie Switzer won as the oldest member present at 92 years. Ethan Duprey was the youngest at just 4 months. Sid Cyngiser won the golf stick with balls. Joe Aceman won the T.V. cabinet and Mo Kowall won a dinner for 6 which was a live chicken, with potatoes, onions and the fixings. This was the most exhilarat-



Forefather Wolfbaer Switzer, 1843 - 1924

ing ending to a perfect day.

The weather cooperated by being magnificent for the whole weekend. People returned to the hospitality suite to bid farewell to the many friends they had made and renew old friendships, and promised to return in the year 2000.

Time to Renew Your Membership!



Your Jewish Historical Society is a non-profit community organization dedicated to the preservation of the history of the Jews in Calgary and Southern Alberta.

Your membership and/or donations help us in collecting and researching the history of the Jewish people, individuals and organizations, with particular emphasis on the collection of oral history from our elders.

It allows us as well to undertake and encourage public information programs, including publications such as Discovery, displays, lectures, and special events.

— see reverse for membership renewal form.



Back to School Probably the first Hebrew School picnic at Bowness Park. To date we have been able to identify the following: far left in bowler hat, Jacob Diamond; next to him in a white panama hat, Mr. Jack Bercuson; far right, Mr. Shackter; to his right Mr. Charles Malkin; the boy in the centre with a tie and beanie cap, Sam Medwinsky. If you can identify any others in this picture, please let us know.

A Coat of Many Colours by Trudy Cowan

It was a pleasure to be able, finally, to put on the "Coat," and walk through two centuries of Jewish life in Canada. I had watched the exhibition develop from a concept, through the many trials and tribulations that every project of this type faces in its more than five years of research and preparation.

The decisions that were made along the way — what should the exhibit "say" to people? What should be the focus? What objects should be shown? — all these decisions were made seriously, and thoughtfully, and with a sensitivity that now shows in the final result. The show is filled

with bits and pieces of our past; it is a very personal and positive glimpse into the lives of people, events, organizations and institutions. It presents the effect that Jewish people had on Canada, as well as the effect that Canada had on the Jews who came here. It presents the stories of Jewish fur traders, fishermen and farmers, of Jewish merchants and musicians, people in trades and professions, in sports, politics, and the arts, in every walk of life. It gives us a glimpse of both the religious and secular sides of Jewish life.

Sandra Morton Weizman, the curator of the exhibition, was in Alberta on a number of her research trips across the country, and has made every attempt to balance the collection to present material from every part of Canada. The objects she has

found are as varied geographically as they are in age, depicting the full two centuries. They show our roots in Canada as well as the traditions our families brought with them from Europe. It is an exhibition well worth seeing, and the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta will be arranging tours to the exhibition when it is in our part of the country.

Following its showing at the Canadian Museum of Civilization over this past summer, A Coat of Many Colours: Two Centuries of Jewish Life in Canada will travel to Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton (early in 1992), Halifax, Montreal, New York, and, finally, to the Museum of the Diaspora in Tel Aviv in 1993.

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The Founding of a Congregation

by
Agnes Romer-Segal

The Synagogue's First Year

Over the past year, two early minute books of the Congregation House of Jacob have been located in addition to the minutes book from 1936-62 which is in the present congregation's possession. These earlier books date from the periods 1908-13 and 1927-32 respectively and they are housed in the Beth Tzedec Synagogue. The minutes from 1914-26 have not as yet been located.

All three books contain the minutes of the meetings, both general and executive of the congregation as they were recorded in Yiddish by the various recording secretaries.

The documents are interesting not only for the valuable information they contain about the early history of the Calgary Jewish community and its social structure, but also for what they reveal about key individuals in the development of the community. It is also fascinating to see the differing styles and linguistic abilities of the respective secretaries.

This article will focus only on the first 9 months of recorded minutes from the House of Jacob, March 1, 1908 - December 13, 1908. These few months saw the initial consolidation of the earliest Jewish organization in Calgary, although the congregation did not receive its formal incorporation until 1909. It moved into its first specially built synagogue building in 1911.

Minutes of the House of Jacob

The English translation of the minutes to December 13, 1908.

The minutes of the newly formed synagogue start on March 3, 1908 and the highlights of the first year's activities are as follows: Literal translation from Yiddish by Agnes Romer-Segal.

Where a '?' appears it indicates that we were not able to read the handwriting in Yiddish.

cont'd next column

March 1, 1908

Present - Brother Jacob Diamond, President and Brother Mac Cohen and other members of good standing.

They debated how the Shochet (ritual slaughterer) should be paid. Should he be paid by the congregation or by the butchers who sell the meat? To solve the problem the meeting agreed to have the president set up a committee of five members to supervise the preparation of kosher meat. This committee would pay the Shochet \$40 per month and charge the butchers a levy for the preparation of the kosher meat. The minutes suggest a levy for different meat e.g. 50¢ per calf, etc.

March 22, 1908

The Shochet, Mr. Sosinski complained that he had too far to travel to slaughter. (To ranches where cattle, etc. was purchased in and around Calgary.) It was agreed that he was not obligated to travel further than five miles from the city. This was presented as a motion and was carried. It was also moved that no strangers would be allowed in the meetings. This was also passed.

March 27, 1908

It was moved that the President should appoint two members to be in charge of bringing in new members. This motion was passed. It was also moved that member's dues should be 50¢ per month. This was also passed.

It was moved that a member who is behind three months in his dues cannot be suspended from membership but will not get a vote. He will get twelve months to pay. This motion was passed.

It was moved that the congregation should carry the name Beit Yacov - House of Jacob and that the first synagogue to be built should have this name and that it may never be changed. This motion was passed.

Mr. Diamond said that since his name is Yacov he would therefore give the congregation a gift of five dollars and he promised them when the

synagogue is to be built he will try his best.

The motion was passed. It was then moved that the President should find out how much it would cost to get a charter. Motion carried.

April 3, 1908

The President was asked for a report by the Kashrut committee about kosher meat. Mr. Cooper read all the complaints about slaughtering (not recorded). The President called on Mr. Sosinski to answer their complaints. He reported that he did everything according to the rules. It was agreed that the members would write to a Rabbi to find justice. A vote of thanks was moved for the efforts of the Kosher committee.

May 17, 1908

It was moved that Shochet Sosinski should be paid one hundred dollars from the congregation for acting as Cantor and that the payment should be made in two payments. Fifty dollars on Sukkas and fifty dollars on Pesach. Motion carried.

June 14, 1908

David Cohen resigned from his office as collector. It was moved that the President should appoint a committee to find a suitable site for a synagogue. Motion carried. Mr. Malkin, Mr. Bercov and Mr. Greisman were appointed.

August 30, 1908

Mr. Malkin elected vice-president until after next Yom Tov. Mr. Sosinski presented a fee of one hundred dollars for cantorial duties to the congregation. It was moved that Mr. Sosinski should be freed of membership dues. The treasurer is to have \$25 cash for working capital and money spent above \$25 must carry three names, President, Vice-President and Treasurer. It was moved that the President should rent a hall for the High Holidays. He was the authority to choose the best option.

September 13, 1908

The secretary, Mr. Greisman, asked the board

members to let him resign. Mr. Cooper was elected to replace him (by acclamation). A vote of thanks was recorded for the former secretary. It was moved that a committee of three be appointed to meet with opponents of the congregation. They should try to come to an accommodation so that everyone will be together and there will not be a separate Minyan. Mr. Sosinski, Mr. Greisman and Mr. Cohen were appointed.

October 11, 1908

[Although it does not say so it sounds like an open meeting.] The audience demanded speeches should be given by important speakers. Mr. Sosinski and Mr. Cooper spoke about matters at hand and the importance of building a synagogue and they were applauded.

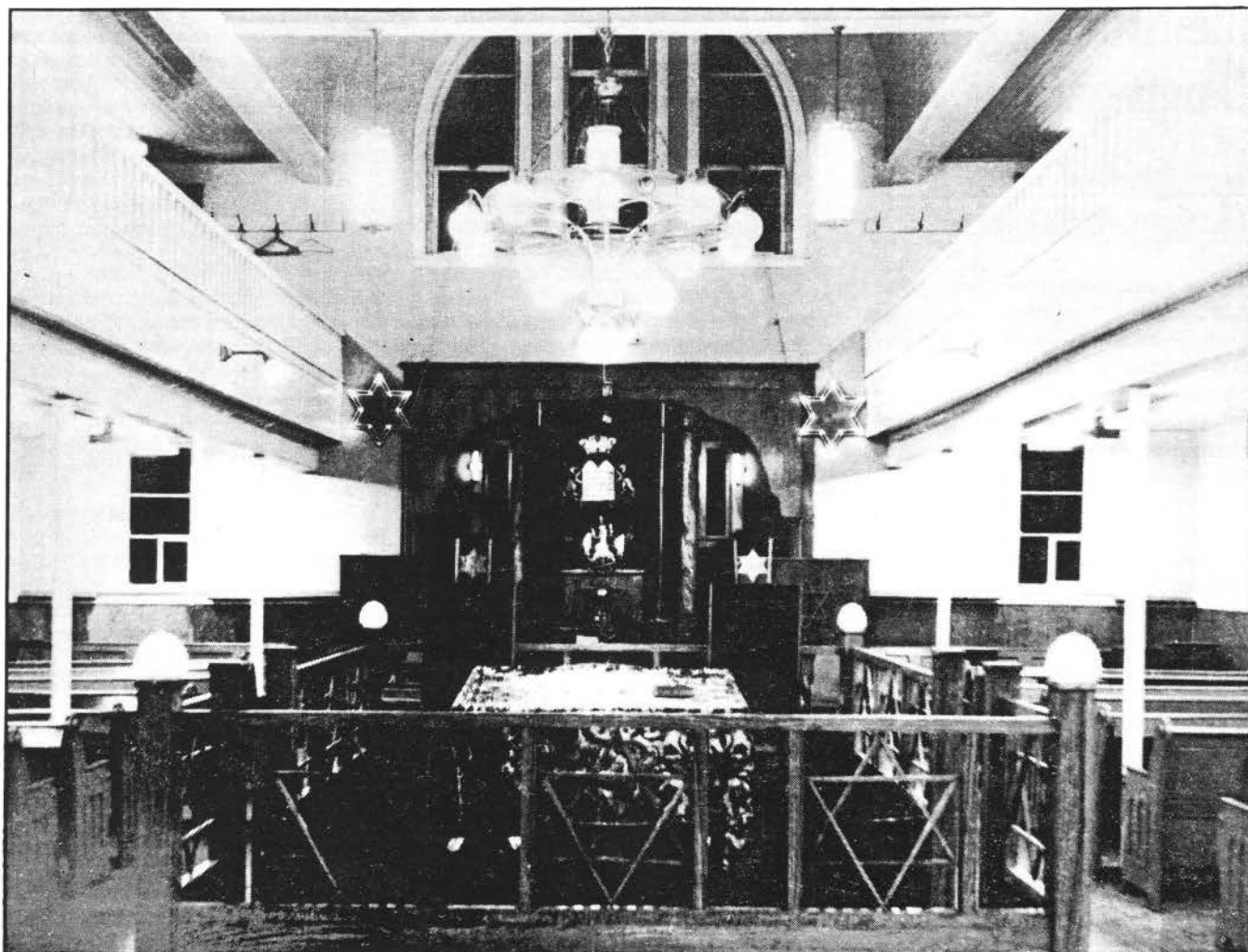
No minutes were read as it was still Yom Tov.

The President opened nominations for new officers. Jacob Diamond was nominated and elected by acclamation. Vice-President Charles Malkin was elected in a closed ballot (11 to 6) and thanked members for the honour. Mr. Cooper was nominated as Secretary-Treasurer by acclamation. Nominated for trustee were Mr. Geffen - 9 votes, Mr. Justin - 11 votes, Mr. Sirot -, Mr. Cohen, and Mr. Bercuson - 13 votes.

Mr. Geffen expressed the need to organize an evening party in a hotel and to invite everyone. Mr. Diamond donated a large barrel of beer to this goal. Mr. Geffen also donated a barrel of beer. Mr. Cooper donated four dozen Selter Water and Mr. Malkin one box of apples. Mr. Sosinski donated one barrel of herring. Mr. B(?) ten pounds of pickled meat and Mr. Kravitz also donated ten pounds of pickled meat. Mr. Bercuson gave a dozen bread. All accepted with thanks.

It was debated whether the secretary-treasurer should be one position. Vote 10 to 4 to remain together. Mr. D. Cohen was elected collector by acclamation.

cont'd Minutes pg. 6



Many old time Calgarians will recognize the beautiful interior of the original House of Jacob Synagogue. Located at 323- 5th Avenue S.E. This institution served as Calgary's only synagogue for many years. As such the building became the focal point for the new community. It seemed appropriate therefore that we use a line drawing of the building's distinctive exterior in the symbol which we have developed to identify our society.

Minutes cont'd from pg. 5

October 15, 1908

The president explained that in audition to celebrating the "Festival of Water Drawing" the purpose of this gathering is to raise money in order that the congregation can buy property for a site for the synagogue. He asked everyone to pledge as much as possible both in needed cash now as well as what they could pledge later. Each one went up to the table to pay cash and make a pledge. Twenty-eight people pledged a total of \$1,057 and \$295 was received in cash. The audience was overjoyed. With great hopes everyone went home at 11:30 p.m.

October 25, 1908

The secretary read the report of

the great success of the October 15th meeting. He reported the \$1,057 in pledges and \$295 in cash.

The audience applauded with great joy. A motion was made to create an executive committee of eight people. This would be composed of the President, Vice-President, Secretary plus five trustees. Mr. C. Bell and Mr. M. Cohen were made trustees. Mr. H. Sereth stated he would try to get free lumber from his business to help build the synagogue. A motion of thanks was made. The secretary was instructed to write a letter of thanks for the pledges made on Pledge Night.

Pledged were as follows. J. Bercuson -\$50; Geffen -\$50; Mr. C. Bell -\$25; in the meantime. Mr. Moskovitz -\$25; Mr. Marks \$25; Mr. Kravitz -\$5; Mr. A.

Bercov -\$15; Mr. Gold -\$15; Mr. Clark -\$15. Collected for (?) and dues \$62.00.

November 22, 1908

A committee meeting was held to review finances and to select a suitable site for the synagogue. The committee reported on two favourable sites. Two lots on 5th Avenue next to Centre on the block facing north in a very nice neighborhood with nice grown trees. The price was \$2,300. One thousand in cash and the balance in six months. Seven hundred dollars is available in mortgages due in July. There are also two lots opposite facing south for \$5,200.

December 13, 1908

A Special Meeting. A report was given on the previous meeting. All members are in favour of the

lots recommended by the committee. A motion was made to empower the committee to purchase the lots if the price was reasonable.

Mr. Geffen has a plan to raise more money. He recommends buying a lady's watch or ring for \$25 or \$50. Any lady or girl who wants can collect "votes" for money and the one with the most votes will be rewarded the watch at a special concert or ball. Motion accepted. A motion was made to appoint three more collectors for the pledges. Mr. J. Diamond, Mr. J. Bercuson and Mr. J. Sirot.

Mr. J. Diamond and Mr. Cooper are empowered to meet with the owners of the lots and to come to an arrangement about the price and terms. They accepted the position. ♦