

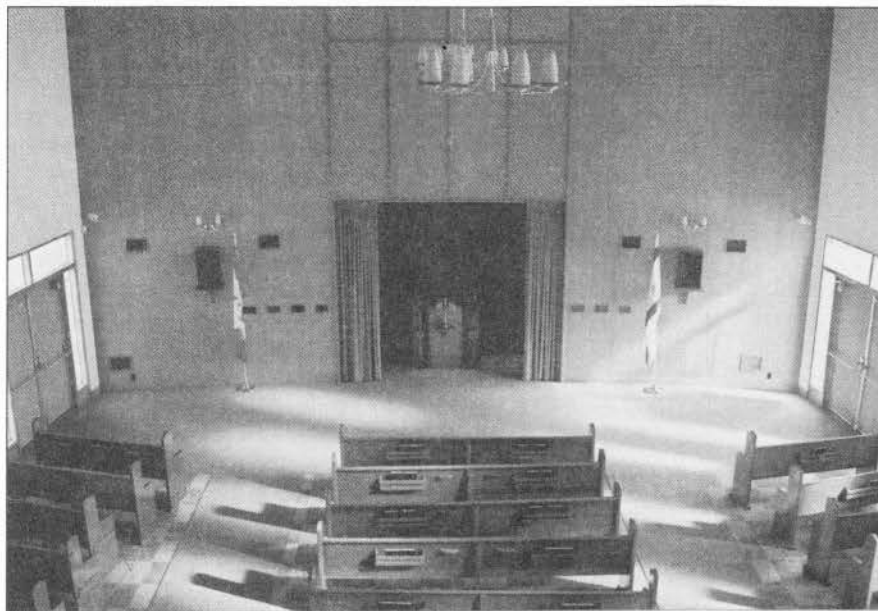
JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

of Southern Alberta

VOLUME 12, No. 3

OCTOBER 2002

Building Calgary's Jewish Funeral Chapel



Interior of the Chevra Kadisha funeral chapel. Photo: Sheldon Smithens.

by Jack Switzer

Most Calgary Jews have attended a funeral service at the Chevra Kadisha chapel, at 1701 - 17th Avenue SW. But few are aware of the building's unique features and history.

Calgary's funeral chapel and the Chevra Kadisha—Holy Society—that runs it is a "community" resource. The organization is a non-profit society, and any Jew may join. Most work is done by member volunteers, carrying on a tradition of sacred service that goes back many centuries.

The chapel is the public part of the building. The rear portion contains facilities where volunteers carry out the tradition of "Taharah"—ritually cleansing and preparing the body for burial, and where a "shomer" (watcher) continuously stays with the deceased and recites psalms.

The existing chapel is relatively new. It was opened in 1961, after an extended building period and a much longer effort to plan and finance the facility.

The Chevra Kadisha was formed in 1904 (as Calgary's first Jewish organization) when several Jews purchased land from the City in order to bury infant Goldie Bell. A few Jewish "remains" had previously been shipped to Winnipeg for burial. Local funeral homes provided pre-funeral facilities and services were held in a variety of locations—private homes, commercial funeral chapels, or at the graveside at the Erlton cemetery site.

The cemetery was periodically expanded by purchasing and demolishing adjoining homes. Some of the houses were periodically used for pre-funeral rituals. Cemetery caretakers sometimes lived in the houses. One was Alex Munro, who later became superintendent of parks for the city. In 1950 he complained that "there is not sufficient space in the house for his family, particularly when a dead body is left in the house for burial; this is also not sanitary."

Subsequently, most Jewish funeral

Don't Miss Our Annual General Meeting Monday, October 21 – Featuring "History in the Mail" and the Opening of the Shaarey Tzedec on Film

"History in the Mail" – notable letters from our archives will be illustrated and read during our 2002 Annual General Meeting on Monday, October 21st, at 7:30 pm in the Jewish Centre auditorium.

JHSSA members and guests will also see a recently-recovered 19-minute film of the dedication ceremonies at the Shaarey Tzedec synagogue on December 11, 1960.

As well, we will honor several southern Alberta Jewish pioneers. Refreshments will be served. All are welcome.

(See picture page 6.)

services were held in the premises of co-operating commercial funeral homes, mainly in the McInnis and Holloway facility on 4th Street West.

In the Chevra Kadisha minutes (translated from Yiddish by S. Heilik), the subject of a Jewish chapel was discussed at a meeting as early as 1948. Long-time president Charles Malkin, an aging founder of the association, was

Continued on Page 2

In this Issue:

Chevra Kadisha Funeral Chapel	1
Jack Hackman Pioneer Tribute	2
Ted Riback: Jewish Community Builder.....	3
JHSSA Activity Review	5
JHSSA News	6
New Photos from our Archives	8
Meyer Switzer Biography Published	9
Recent Acquisitions	9
Peretz School Scroll Recovered	10

Your membership and continuing support help us to publish Discovery. Thank you.

Chevra Kadisha

Continued from Page 1

in the chair. A committee comprised of prominent members Abe Horwitz, Charles Waterman, and Herman Nagler was set up to investigate the issue.

Horwitz reported some months later that a chapel would cost \$40,000, but that fund-raising would be difficult. "Our community is now involved in raising funds for national and local institutions, and we can't come in with a new campaign."

In 1949 the issue came up again. Z. Zysblat suggested the group should not be dependent on non-Jewish funeral chapels. Abe Belzberg pledged \$1,000 for a new building, but his motion to hold a fund-raising dinner "created such a commotion that the meeting had to be adjourned." Another motion, simply to vote in favor of the new chapel concept, was passed. A building committee headed by new president Dave Dvorkin was set up.

The committee reported in mid-1950 that the old Talmud Torah building, a stone structure on 6th Avenue East, was for sale. It was deemed unsuitable. Abe Belzberg suggested

purchase of a lot on First Street West; the committee examined the site and rejected it.

Members at the December, 1950 annual general meeting decided to get fund-raising underway despite the lack of definite plans. A fund-raising dinner for 300 was proposed. Dinner attendees pledged about \$7,300.

The project stuttered along. In September, 1951 the building committee was re-formed. New chairman Charlie Davis was authorized to recruit non-members if necessary. A wide-ranging group of 20 local men, including Beth Israel rabbi Eliezer Ebner, joined the chapel-building group. Several months later, in 1952, Davis reported that the Chevra Kadisha campaign had to be postponed because it conflicted with a drive to pay for the recently-completed community building.

1953 saw another potential property inspected and rejected. Another fund-raising conflict arose, this time with the Israel Bond campaign. Meanwhile the Chevra Kadisha maintained its usual funeral and cemetery-maintenance

activities. Land expansion, equipment replacement and construction of a retaining wall ate up available funds.

A breakthrough came in June, 1955, when it was reported that the I. L. Peretz School was planning a new facility, and their old building, on Centre Street and 13th Avenue South, was for sale. It was deemed, with renovations, as suitable for chapel use. The Chevra Kadisha executive approved an offer of \$40,000.

In November, according to the Chevra Kadisha minutes, the Peretz board accepted the offer, and a \$10,000 deposit was paid to the school. Possession was to be in the summer of 1956, but the Peretz School plans were delayed. The Chevra Kadisha grew impatient as the matter dragged on for another year, and after more negotiation the deal was aborted. (The new Peretz School did not open until 1959.)

A suitable building site was finally found and purchased in May of 1957. The site (where the existing Chevra

Continued on Page 7

A Pioneer's Tribute to his Peers

Jacob (Jack) Hackman emigrated to Canada from Bessarabia in 1905, spending a year in Montreal before moving west to a homestead near Rumsey. He ran a general store in the town of Rumsey for two years, and then moved to Vancouver and later to Los Angeles. His memoirs, 'Twenty Years of Pioneering, 1906 - 1926', are among the most colorful and complete of any in the JHSSA archives.

Another Jack Hackman manuscript recently came to the attention of the JHSSA. It is a brief tribute to the pioneering spirit, written late in his life (in 1941), and refers to both Canadian and American experiences. Following are some sections of Jack Hackman's 'He Came, He Saw, He Conquered.'

"We pioneers did conquer. It was not easy, it was not pleasant at times; as a matter of fact it was disillusionment, heartache and dangerous. But we had to overcome all that. No pioneer backs out. Most of us pioneers—be it those that went on the land, those that stayed in the cities, villages, towns—each and every one faced 'stormy weather'—so to speak.

"The occupations that were available for us were of no choosing of our own.

Hard work, long hours, low pay, etc. This involved other inconveniences such as filthy housing—in majority cases in slum districts. But all that unpleasantness was accepted with hopes of a better future.

"We had to learn the English language. As tired and worn out as we are coming home from work, we put in an hour with the dictionary, with other books, with a scribbler and a pencil in hand—we are educating ourselves.

"We built the railroads, built factories, built homes, paved streets, made cement sidewalks, crushed rocks, made clothes. We were dishwashers, laundry cleaners, and anything else that made this country what it is today.

"Don't forget the toil and sweat that has been put into this country by the first settlers, by the first immigrants. Don't let this new world go to destruction. Keep alert. Listen, look, and see. These words are from all us pioneers.

"Our legs are wobbly, our hands shaky. But don't forget, we think clear, we think straight. Don't forget the seniors. Each and every one was a pioneer."



Jack Hackman and daughter Miriam at Rumsey, 1927. Photo: courtesy Miriam Hackman Bloomberg.

Ted Riback – Calgary's Jewish "Building Chairman"

The following was compiled from several interviews with Ted Riback on file in the JHSSA archives:

I was born as Moishe Aaron Riback in Pueblo, Colorado, on July 4, 1910. My grandfather and his three sons—one was my father—came to Pueblo around the turn of the century. Pueblo in those days was very isolated, I believe, and I often wonder what would motivate them to move there to raise their families.

My father, Jacob Riback, came from Latvia, and my mother (Sadie Black) from Grovinia, Russia. They were early and ardent Zionists. My grandfather was convinced that there should be a home for the Jews, as was my father, who was an early *chalutz*—farm settler—in Palestine before 1900. He couldn't continue as he became ill from malaria.

Moving to Colorado solved two problems. Pueblo was known as a haven for tuberculosis patients, and there seemed to be business opportunities there. So the family could have a healthy place to live, and they could make a living as well. There was a factory there called Colorado Fuel and Iron; it was a huge mining company.

My grandfather and my two uncles were in the used furniture business, and my father was a junk man. He had his own horse and wagon, and I can remember riding with him while he was going around buying up metal. That is really my earliest memory as a young man. My father and I had an exceptional love for one another. Not just father-son love. It was very deep-rooted.

I guess I was seven or eight years old. I remember being on the wagon and a tin can got stuck on the wheel. It folded onto the wheel and kept on clunking. I reached down to remove it. My dad told me not to do it, but of course being who I was I reached down, and cut myself rather badly. My dad tied it with a rag, and to this day I still have a scar on my finger.

I don't remember public school much, but I do remember the *cheder* (Hebrew school) in Pueblo. My brothers went as well.

When I was about eight, in 1918, my father moved with the whole family to Portland, Oregon. We had a grocery store in south Portland. I helped in the store, of course. I delivered orders, I swept the floor, and kept the stove full



Ted Riback at Bragg Creek, 1934. Photo: courtesy Donna Riback.

of wood and sawdust.

Everybody worked. Along with many others, we were very poor. But we had a clean home and there was no sadness. This was our life and we lived it "as it was."

As I got older, I had a part-time job selling papers, on a corner, and I had to "hold" the corner by fighting for it sometimes. Later I spent a "tough" summer in a potato chip factory, working for twenty-five cents an hour.

I finished high school in Portland, but conditions were very difficult for a Jewish boy with no education at the beginning of the Depression. Let me tell you about one incident. The one dairy that delivered to my father's store gave me a job. I had two days' training and I was highly recommended by the supervisor. After another day's work I was called into the office. They said that most of the people didn't want that "Jew-boy" on a delivery route, so they let me go. That was just one incident of many. Anti-semitism was also quite prevalent in school.

So in 1930 I came to Calgary. My older sister Elsie had met a Calgarian, Rubin Maerov. In a short time they were married, and she was lonely, so she invited me to stay with them in Calgary. Elsie and Rubin treated me more like a son than a brother. They were very caring and attentive, and I can't say enough nice things about them.

Rubin found me a job washing cars at the The Blue Boys Esso service station, for twenty-five cents an hour. The station was at 11th Avenue and First Street SW, and was owned by Ernie McCullough, who owned the Ford dealership, Maclin Motors, across the street.

I became very friendly with Mr. McCullough, and with his wife Dorothy. She also came from Portland, and she used to bring me American sports pages, which I enjoyed a lot. I guess I was pretty good at washing cars, because they gave me a better job at the "front end", serving customers. I was meeting people and getting tips. I was making \$85 a month, and the tips were generous because maybe I cleaned the windows a little faster and better.

It was a whole different world for a kid from Portland; it was the start of all the progress I have made.

In 1934 the service station franchise was available because Imperial Oil and Ernie McCullough had a disagreement. Ed Lovo, another Blue Boy worker, and I decided to buy it. Ed had a large family and no money, so it was left to me to finance it. I borrowed \$500 from Rubin's brother Ben Maerov, but I had to use our furniture as collateral. Betty and I were newly-weds. She cried; she had to sign the papers too.

We couldn't use the old name, so we changed the service station to Ed and Ted's Service.

Betty and I had married shortly before this, in December, 1934. I met Betty Levin at a Young Judean convention in December of 1932. She was from Winnipeg, and stayed for several months with an aunt and uncle, Sarah and Jacob Dubisky. She went back to Winnipeg, but through correspondence and occasional visits, we got engaged. We were married on December 9, 1934 in the home of Shefra and Sam Maerov, the parents of Rubin and his brothers Ben, Morris, Alex, and Lou Maerov.

Our first home was an apartment on 17th Avenue West above the Fred Deeves plumbing company.

Elder daughter Faith was born in 1935, Donna in 1938.

We expanded into a three-outlet chain, and did pretty good business. On 9th Avenue West we had Ed & Ted's Three Star Service and we ran an outlet on 12th Avenue called Central Park Service.

Continued on Page 4

Ted Riback

Continued from Page 3

Early in World War II I tried to join the army, along with several of my employees, but I was discharged after two weeks because I had bad ulcers. In 1944 I was able to buy out my partner, and the next year I sold all three stations.

About my Jewish community activities. It started when Henry Goldberg and Charles Waterman took a shine to me. They took me to lunch—it was about the time I got married. They told me about the Jewish community's needs and urged me to get involved. I joined B'nai Brith, and prepared a program for the members about the work of the Anti-Defamation League. I also became an AZA advisor, and became very involved with young people. Morris Belzberg was one of my boys.

But my real interest was in "building" things. I helped with the Jewish Community Centre on 18th Avenue—the House of Israel. They started it about 1930, but when I got involved it was really just a basement with a temporary roof over it, and a shell on top of that. Eventually I became building chairman. It took a long time (until 1949) but we finished the building and it proved to be an asset for many years.

I didn't do any actual building, but I seemed to be pretty lucky in getting people together and I was sort of a catalyst for raising dollars. I was very fortunate in getting proper trades people, proper prices. We had a wonderful architect, Mr. MacElroy, and our chemistry seemed to work.

Of course Betty and our daughters Faith and Donna were also involved in community activities.

After the war, we brought two teen-aged Jewish holocaust survivors into our family. Marek and Lucia Janasz stayed with us for several years.

In the early 50s I bought the Olympic Bowling building on 8th Avenue West, and had my office there for several years. My brother Frank moved from Portland and ran the Olympic bowling alley. My brother Al also came up from Portland, and ran the Crescent Heights bowling lanes.

About 1951 I got interested in a new summer camp for Jewish children. The Edmonton and Calgary communities couldn't get good camp facilities in the province. All we had then was the short-term rental of a camp at Chestermere Lake.

We had one experience that really

shook us and motivated me to get involved with the Jewish camping program. We had gone out to visit our daughter Donna at the Young Judea camp at Chestermere Lake. It was a rainy day and there was a lot of mud to go through. We got to the door of her cabin and we couldn't open it—the wet weather had expanded the wood.

When we finally got in we found the kids smoking and having fun—something kids do. I took a look and saw there were straw mattresses. Between smoking, straw mattresses and a stuck door we could have had a tragedy.

I pushed, along with the others, for the B'nai Brith regional council—including lodges in Alberta and Saskatchewan—to try to build our own camp, a safe one. I took on the chair-



Ted Riback, 1938. Photo: courtesy Donna Riback.

manship, and soon we started to look around for locations. We had an offer from Medicine Hat where Mayor Harry Veiner was willing to give us some land. We went there and decided to investigate a possible camp on the river, but we decided against it.

We finally found a site on Pine Lake called "Walter's Resort." It had some old shacks on it, but it had 130 acres. It was on the lake, but we found out the lake water was unhealthy and couldn't be used for drinking or showering. In any event we made a deal with the resort owner; I think we bought it for about \$12,500.

To finance the land purchase and camp construction we had each B'nai Brith lodge in the district contribute funds on a per-member basis. That was the start of it and we raised quite a bit of money that way. Of course we never had enough and we had to go into debt and so on.

The first children used Camp B'nai Brith in 1955. In the 1990s Ted and Betty Riback led a major campaign to upgrade the camp, and it is now called Camp B.B. – Riback. Ted was also building chairman for the development of a Jewish curling club, the Meadowlark Athletic Association, which opened in 1956, and was sold a few years later to make way for what is now part of Chinook Shopping Centre.

During the 1930s we joined the new Beth Israel congregation, which used the House of Israel building for its services. During the 1950s it became a Conservative synagogue. This was due to the work of a group headed by Abe Horwitz and his son Cecil Horowitz. Late in the 1950s the more traditional group split off and formed Shaarey Tzedec synagogue. In 1960 they built a new synagogue next to the community centre.

Some of us in the Beth Israel group thought we should also have a new building, one with modern facilities. Everyone had a car, and many people were moving to the southern suburbs.

Cecil Horwitz, Murray Fromson and myself led the move. I should also mention my brother Frank Riback, and Norman Moss. Murray was very qualified and made a big contribution to budgeting and fund-raising. Cecil Horowitz was a good organizer and was a great man on the podium. My expertise was in design and construction management, so I became building chairman.

Charles Waterman had negotiated a deal on three and one-half acres of land for the Calgary Hebrew School, on 66th Avenue SW (now Glenmore Trail). The adjoining land was available, and we negotiated for the site. I had to convince some of my friends that land they wanted on 17th Avenue West was too small and could never serve our needs. I was strong in saying that we needed a lot of land, for the building, for parking, and for later expansion.

We got city permission to proceed, and from there on in it was just a matter of hard work. We had lots of problems including planning the building, getting

Continued on Page 7

Help us Preserve our Past

"Of all national assets, Archives are the most precious; they are the gift of one generation to another, and the extent of our care of them marks the extent of our civilization."

Sir A. Doughty, Dominion Archivist, 1904-1935

JHSSA Projects and Activities Supported by your Membership

• JHSSA Archives

We continue to collect a variety of original material produced by the Jewish community of southern Alberta. These include minutes books, financial records, memoirs, programs, certificates, and official documents. This original material is stored in a special closed storage area.

• Publications and Affiliations

We produce our journal, *Discovery*, 3 times a year. Presently, to the best of our knowledge, we are the only Jewish Historical Society in Canada to distribute our publication free of charge to the entire Jewish community. Our book, *Land of Promise*, has sold out. The JHSSA is affiliated with most major Jewish historical societies in Canada and we actively support the work of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Southern Alberta.

• Local Jewish Press Collection

The JHSSA has ensured the preservation of the valuable information contained local Jewish periodical publications. We have copied every issue of the local Jewish press and these are available in our office for researchers.

• Harry and Martha Cohen Library

We have developed a collection of books, journals and videos from the fields of Jewish history and biography,

genealogy, local history, atlases and gazetteers, and reference works. This collection is maintained with the generous support of the Harry B. Cohen Foundation and individual donations. The collection now contains over 280 items.



New in our photo collection: L to R: Bernie Switzer and his cousins, brothers Israel (Sruki) and Albert Switzer, with unnamed capon, Calgary, c. 1938. Photo: courtesy Chiara Switzer, Toronto.

• Oral History Collection

We have recorded local oral histories and our collection now contains over 100 audio cassettes. Most of these oral histories have now been transcribed. We have also videotaped oral histories of a number of our pioneers.

• Education

The JHSSA is committed to educating the public about the history of the Jewish community in southern Alberta. This is done through our continued involvement with local Jewish schools, our cooperation with Historic Calgary Week, the programs at our AGM, our special exhibits and the many hours spent answering research questions from around the world.

• JHSSA Photo Collection

We possess a growing collection of photographs. We make a copy of each photo for our photo index file for easy reference and for the protection of the originals. Each photo will be indexed on the computer to allow for maximal accessibility.

• Jewish Cemeteries File

We have photographed and translated every gravestone in every Jewish cemetery in southern Alberta. We have been collecting local obituaries since 1994. This is an ongoing project and the file is updated every few years.

• Rotating Exhibits

Material from our archival and our photo collections is displayed on an ongoing basis on our display board at the entrance of the Calgary Jewish Centre.

We need your support to continue our activities. Please help us by renewing your membership or by becoming a member. (Membership form on back of this page.)

JHSSA News

Annual Cemetery Tour a Success

Despite extremely cold weather, about 40 persons attended the annual Jewish cemetery tour, held on the evening of July 24th. The event was part of Historic Calgary Week, and was co-sponsored by the Chinnook Historical Society and the JHSSA. Tour guide Jack Switzer led the group through the older section of the Erlton cemetery, pointing out cemetery rituals, notable grave sites and discussed the deceased person's role as a colorful personality or as representing major milestones in the development of Calgary and its Jewish community.

Our thanks to the Chevra Kadisha for

allowing us to use the "old" Jewish cemetery to help tell the public about their work and the stories found among its headstones.

Harry Sanders' Union Cemetery Book Published

Harry Sanders, a JHSSA archivist and frequent contributor to *Discovery*, recently published his third book, *Calgary's Historic Union Cemetery: a Walking Guide*. The Union Cemetery (located directly across Macleod Trail from the Erlton Jewish cemetery) is Calgary's largest, with about 10,000 graves. The first burial was in 1890. Sanders divides the book into several different tours, each focusing on

one section of the large grounds.

The paper-bound book was produced by Fifth House Publishers, and sells for \$12.95. It is available in most Calgary book stores, or can be ordered from the author.

Donation Opportunities Recognize Friends, Help JHSSA

The JHSSA has available a number of donation formats through which you can remember special occasions and help its Jewish history work.

Historic-photo cards can be sent out to whomever you specify for any amount over \$5. Library books can be inscribed as the donor wishes for a minimum donation of \$36. Framed Book of Heritage certificates, for \$100 or more, are sent to your honoree. A duplicate is mounted in a Jewish Centre display case. This is an excellent opportunity to mark a very special event. Tax receipts are sent out for every donation.

Please call Tiby Presma, at 281-3910, or call the JHSSA office to inquire about these donation opportunities.

Tourists Learn Local History

In early August a group of Jewish tourists from New York were given a short introduction to the history of Alberta's Jewish community. At the request of the tour leader, Agi Romer Segal talked to the group of over 40 people at the House of Jacob Mikveh Israel building about the development of Calgary's Jewish community and its institutions.

Past Discovery Sponsors

B'nai Brith Calgary; Collins Barrow Chartered Accountants; Mel & Reata Polsky, Dave Waterman; Renfrew Thompson Insurance Ltd.; We Can Copy, a division of West Canadian Industries; and Joseph Libin Holdings Ltd.



A clip from the film of the dedication ceremony, Shaarey Tzedec Synagogue, Dec. 11, 1960, to be shown at our Annual General Meeting, Oct. 21st, 7:30 pm at the Calgary Jewish Centre.

JOIN US TODAY TO PRESERVE OUR YESTERDAYS

Yes, I would like to become a member:

<input type="checkbox"/> renewal	Please check:	<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor \$100	<input type="checkbox"/> Patron \$50	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
<input type="checkbox"/> new member		<input type="checkbox"/> Family \$ 25	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$18	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate \$30	<input type="checkbox"/> Genealogical Society Associate \$15	

Please make cheques payable to: Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta

Name: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ Postal Code: _____

Telephone: Home: _____ Business: _____

Please fill out and send to: Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta
1607 - 90 Avenue SW, Calgary, Alberta T2V 4V7

Do not send cash through the mail

Ted Riback

Continued from Page 4

the building dollars together, and getting dollars down the road to meet mortgage payments. Our architects, Abugov and Sunderland, were outstanding in their input, and I thought we created a very enviable, fine synagogue for our people.

Beth Israel opened in time for Rosh Hashanah in 1960.

I also developed the Beth Israel cemetery and turned it over to the congregation. The old Chevra Kadisha cemetery was running out of space, even though they were buying adjacent houses and tearing them down. At the time (1960s) I felt there was a lack of proper care of the grounds themselves, and I was unhappy with the way they were handling services. Also, there was a problem with them allowing headstones of various sizes. Over the years, there were instances when the stones were overturned and damaged by vandalism.

Somewhere down the line there should be a new cemetery concept, and the thought was that we should create something very fine, something very dignified, something that had a lot of capacity for the future.

We had been spending the winters in Palm Springs and the summers in Calgary. I bought a piece of land near Macleod Trail and about 156 Avenue and came back one summer—it may have been 1964—to lay out the project and get it moving. We had to build roads off of Macleod Trail. We had to bring in electric power. We had to drill a well for water. We had to get engineers and surveyors to lay out the land so the plots would be put together in a proper, uniform manner. Parking facilities had to be created.

I took it upon myself to get on with the job, and it was at my expense that we created all these facilities. I never accepted one dollar from Beth Israel or from any individual.

Then we donated the facility to Beth Israel, and had a proper dedication (in 1976) and so forth. My only stipulation was that the headstones had be pillow stones or flat stones. Other than that, there were no restrictions or demands of any kind. And it was not to be for just the use of Beth Israel members. The cemetery was and is for the use of the Jewish people in the city of Calgary.

We have noted above only Ted Riback's early business ventures. The Riback

interviews include a great deal of data about his many business ventures—theatres, manufacturing, land and office development, petroleum exploration, etc.

They also include many references to his "greater community" service. Very early in his career he founded the Calgary Service Station Association. He was a founder and president of the Calgary and District Community Foundation, a founder of the Calgary Safety Council and Junior Achievement. He served as a director of the Holy Cross Hospital. Ted was involved with a masonic lodge, the Rotary Club, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews.

Ted and Betty Riback have five grandchildren—Cheryl Green Ockrant, Howard Green, Adam Green, Tevy Grunberg and Mia Riback. There are six great grandchildren. The Ribacks now live in Calgary year round. Ted is now 92, and has finally retired.



Betty and Ted Riback at Banff, c. 1945. Photo: courtesy Donna Riback.

Chevra Kadisha

Continued from Page 2

Kadisha chapel now stands) cost \$26,000 and contained a disused building (the Scarboro Mennonite Church) and an old house. However, residents of the adjoining Scarboro district opposed the building permit application, so a new application, including synagogue use for the property, was submitted.

The permit was granted and late in 1957 serious fund-raising began, with a goal of \$50,000.

In March, 1958, part of the land was sold to "a new congregation," likely Shaarey Tzedek, for \$13,000. By October, both parties had realized the land was too small for two buildings, and the money was returned.

About this time the matter of "naming rights" arose. A potential donor attended a meeting and promised \$10,000 if the building would be named in honor of his parent. The executive approved the proposal, but later had second thoughts. Negotiations with the family broke down, and it was decided not to offer any more such deals. (Smaller donations were recognized; a plaque notes the contribution by Abe Belzberg of all landscaping costs.)

Nate Starr was hired to co-ordinate the project. Construction began in October, 1959. But funds ran out, and in December, with the basement and heating system completed, construction was halted. Fifteen of eighteen members at a meeting each signed notes for \$1,000, to be used as security for a bank loan. Public fund-raising was stepped up, and as well members signed many more loan guarantee notes.

The Chevra Kadisha's bank approved a line of credit of \$100,000, and in June, 1961, \$75,000 was borrowed to complete the construction process. In mid-1967 the building was finished. The August 27, 1961 minutes read: "This is our first meeting in the new 'Chesed Shel Emet' building, with Mr. Dvorkin as chairman."

Bill Milne was architect for the building, which used newly-developed wood-beam technology to create a clear ceiling span. Some people note that the building is shaped like a coffin.

Source: JHSSA Archives, Chevra Kadisha minute books.

New Photos from our Archives



Max Zack with family and friends in his Black Diamond store, early 1940s. Photo: courtesy Naomi Johansen.

Max Zack (1898-1967) came to Calgary about 1918. He was able to open the downtown Sugar Bowl Confectionery and later worked at a friend's store, Boston Hat Works & News. In 1928 he married British-born Irene Rowley. In 1930 they moved to Black Diamond, Alberta, where they raised three daughters. After selling out in 1945, the family moved to White Rock, BC and operated a motel. Eldest daughter Miriam (Haavik) died in 1995. Jacqueline (Gordon) lives in Duncan, BC, and Naomi (Johansen) lives in Calgary.



Abraham Shumiatcher teaching German to Canadian soldiers, Calgary, c. 1943. Shumiatcher (1890-1974) spoke several languages fluently, and during World War I worked as a translator for the Chief Press Censor of Canada. c. 1943. Source: Glenbow Archives, PA 2957.

Meyer Switzer Biography – Story of a Good Life

A Good Life, the Biography of Meyer Switzer has just been published by his family to honor the memory of the Calgary pioneer. Meyer Switzer (1889-1984) was the oldest son of Beila and Mendel Switzer. (Mendel was in turn the oldest son of Wolf Baer Switzer, and a brother to Bella Singer, first of the family to come to Calgary, about 1910.)

Meyer arrived in Calgary in 1920, along with his wife Etta, infant daughter, Lily, and an uncle. He was preceded from Poland by his brother Charlie, and followed by siblings David, Ralph, and Lily (Horodezky), as well as his parents.

The book was written by local author Tyler Trafford, who recently completed *Memories on the March*, which honored the Jewish war veterans of Southern Alberta.

Trafford has gone well beyond many family histories by including pertinent information about the social and economic milieus in which Meyer Switzer's life progressed. He includes concise histories of Jew-

ish Poland before, during and after the region's several 1914-to-1921 wars, as well as an overview of the post-war western Canadian economic conditions into which the Switzer family immigrated.

But the book is mainly personal in tone, drawing heavily on the recollections of Meyer and Etta's circles of family and friends. Meyer's business and organizational activities are given little attention compared to his life as a father and mentor. And the book is not a genealogical journey; it is Meyer's story, about Daddy, Zaida, his generosity and his love.

Meyer and Etta's children are Lily (who died in 1931 at age 11); William Switzer and Miriam Winston, of Vancouver; Dinah Spindel and Annie Brodsky of Calgary, and Betty Yan, of Toronto. The book has many family photos, as well as useful family trees.

A few copies of *A Good Life* are available for sale from Annie Brodsky. A copy has been donated by the family to the JHSSA.



Meyer Switzer, 1911. He spent nine years in the Russian army, and had to delay his marriage to Etta Bleviss until his discharge. They came to Calgary in 1920. Photo: courtesy Dinah Spindel.

Some Recent Acquisitions

Encyclopedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust.

This three-volume work is an English condensed version of a multi-volume project originally published in Hebrew by Yad VaShem. It features articles on every town in Europe and North Africa in which Jews resided before the Holocaust. Each entry contains a short history of the Jewish community and a description of its fate in the Holocaust.

Yiddish Music Sheets

This collection contains multiple copies of nine music sheets of Yiddish theatre music written pre-1930 and published by the Hebrew Publishing Company and Star Music Publishing Company. Copies of these music sheets have been displayed on the JHSSA display boards at the entrance to the Jewish Centre.

Medicine Hat Hadassah, L. Freiman Chapter Cookbook, 1947

This cookbook was donated from the estate of Anita Goodman. Also included in the donation are various editions of the Calgary Jewish Directory, newspaper clippings, a B'nai Brith Gentlemen's Dinner 1965 ruler and a 1963 Ralph Kalef Gentleman's Stag billfold.

1965 Ralph Kalef Gentleman's Dinner Card deck was donated by Naomi Kerr.

House of Jacob Deeds of Sale for seats

Originally owned by Abraham Rabinovitz, these were donated by his granddaughters Jacqueline and Joyce Robbins and Dorothy Robbins-Fattal. They also donated coloured photocopies of letters sent out by Buckingham Palace upon the death of their uncle, Strul Rabinovitz, recognizing his Canadian army service in World War I. Strul died in Calgary several years later as a result of illness contracted during the war.

Canadian Young Judea material

This collection, donated by Tammy Barron, contains educational and programming pamphlets for Young Judea activities ranging from the 1940s to the 1970s. Also included are two original certificates of affiliation for the Calgary branch of Young Judea from 1930 (signed by poet A.M. Klein) and 1939 and an early, undated JNF certificate for land donation of 5 dunam (for \$50) from the Agudas Zion society of Calgary.

M. David Spindel Collection

The JHSSA has received three boxes of material collected by Dave Spindel from his wife Dinah and daughters Andria and Devora. Included in the collection is an album of Calgary postcards and photos illustrating Calgary landmarks from earlier periods and the book *Calgary Then and*



New in our photo collection: Rose Jaffe (Snider), c. 1924. She was the daughter of Shaie and Leah Jaffe. Photo: courtesy Frank Kettner.

Now by V. Williams. There are also personal documents and photos relating to the Spindel/Switzer families and a large file of BBYO material from the 1960s. The donation includes a large variety of printed articles, programs, letters and photos collected by Dave Spindel through his work with the Jewish Historical Society, which was a committee of the Calgary Jewish Centre in the 1970s.

Thank you to all those who have donated individual photographs and items in the past few months.

Peretz School Demolition Uncovers Historic Scroll

A "time capsule" containing a dedication scroll was recovered, along with an inscribed cornerstone, from the recently demolished I.L. Peretz School at 1915 - 36 Avenue SW. Former students and teachers were on hand to recall the history of the school and the downtown building it replaced.

The Altadore-district school was opened in 1959 with considerable ceremony. Its Jewish occupancy ended in 1987 when the Peretz School merged with the Calgary Hebrew School to form the Calgary Jewish Academy. The building became the Waldorf School, which recently vacated it to free the site for redevelopment.

The typed scroll, browned at the edges but dry and intact, was originally written in Yiddish by then-Peretz School principal Shimshon Heilik.

The scroll, translated by Agi Romer Segal, begins with a quote from Isaiah 54:12 and includes the following:

"...we have all gathered as an assembly of families from the Jewish community in Calgary, ... in order to publicly celebrate the dedication of our national Yiddish-Hebrew school which bears the name of the immortal classic author and educator of Jewish literature, Isaac Leibush Peretz.

"Thirty years ago, and with the same reverence, many of us stood at a similar celebration—the opening of our first I.L. Peretz School in the then just developing Jewish settlement of Calgary. And when we stand here now, thirty years later, at the opening of a much enlarged and improved school site, we do not forget to have in mind all those who have departed from us through the years into the everlasting. We also do not forget at this moment of exaltation, to give thanks to Providence for the merit of being able to be among the builders and participants in such Jewish undertakings which are as eternal and as true as the Jewish nation itself.

"At this hour of laying the foundation of the home of our school with the symbol of the cornerstone which was presented with honour and appreciation to the pioneers of the first and the present

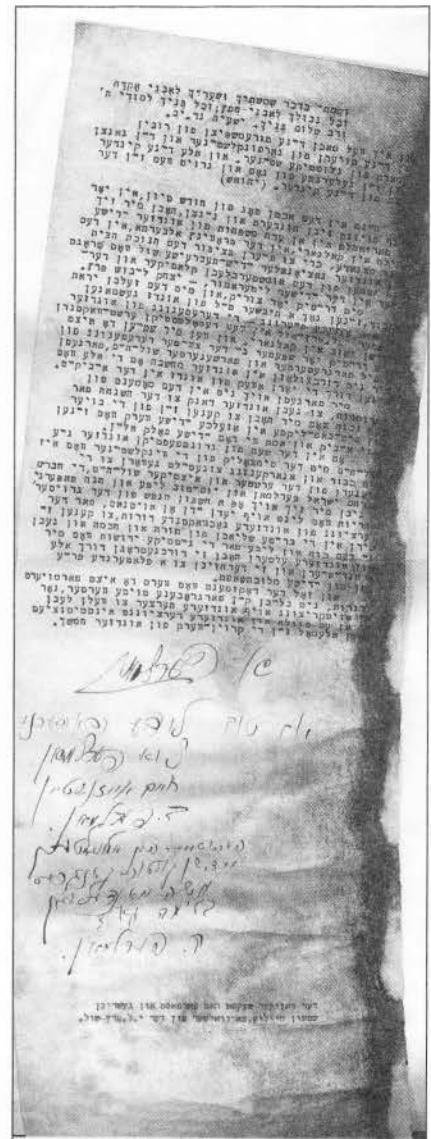
school sites—comrades Abraham Israel Pearlman and Yom Tov Lipa and Chana Paperny—we also undertake a reckoning of the great responsibility incumbent upon each Jew, without exception, for the education of our coming generations in order to be able to lead them on the wide paths of Torah and wisdom and to give them strength and love for the spiritual inheritance which we and our parents have borne through burning fires and have elevated as a waving banner of Jewish nationhood.

"And may this document, which will now be encased for generations, not remain as dead and buried words, but rather, may it be etched in our hearts to enable us to live as a treasured nation. And may our educational institutions always be the crowning work of our continuity."

Signed:

A. Pearlman
Yom Tov Lipa Paperny
Louis Pearlman
Chaim Eisenstein
B. Pearlman
Chairman of the World Jewish
Cultural Congress
Moshe Mandelman
Blima Gold
H. Pearlman

Former Peretz School principal Aron Eichler arranged the 2002 farewell event and removal of the cornerstones and capsule. The cornerstones are now at the Calgary Jewish Academy, and the scroll is now part of the JHSA artifact collection.



DISCOVERY

Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta

President: Jay Joffe
Vice Presidents: David Bickman
Emanuel Cohen
Bertha Gold
Harriet Libin
Financial Secretary: Mel Polsky
Treasurer: Henry Gutman
Secretary: Zena Drabinsky

Directors: Joe Brager, Hymie Davids, Les Diamond, Jack Edelson, Brenda Eisenberg, Florence Elman, Harold Elman, Sheila Gurevitch, Ida Horwitz, Barb Joffe, Sid Macklin, Mel Nagler, Therese Nagler, Judy Parker, Edythe Pearlman, Tiby Presma, Harry Sanders, Jack Switzer

Editors: Jack Switzer, Jay Joffe,
Agi Romer Segal

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.A.

Please address all communications on editorial and circulation matters to:

Discovery
c/o The Jewish Historical Society
of Southern Alberta
1607 - 90th Avenue S.W.
Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2V 4V7

© 2002 by the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta (a non-profit, registered society).
Donations gratefully accepted.

**Remember our Annual General
Meeting, October 21st,
7:30 pm, CJCC. Join us there.**