

# JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY of Southern Alberta

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## Calgary's Holocaust Memorial: Ashes to Life

By Jack Switzer

The Holocaust—the murder of six million Jews by the Nazis and their allies—has special significance for Calgary Jews. About two thousand city Jews, one in four, are Holocaust survivors or their children. Nearly every Jewish family lost relatives during the dark period of the European massacres.

Two Holocaust survivors, William Schwartz and Alyse Schwartz, decided in 1986 that it was time to commemorate the victims with an appropriate memorial, and funded the erection of a major sculpture, *Ashes to Life*, as the centerpiece of the Holocaust Memorial Park at the Calgary Jewish Centre.

The memorial sculpture was unveiled in a well-attended ceremony in November, 1986.

Next to the bronze statue is a curved black marble memorial wall, on which many Calgarians have inscribed the names of relatives lost in the Holocaust (also called *the Shoah*, Hebrew for "destruction"). Among the first names to be etched on the wall were those of the donors' parents, Louis and Regina Schwartz and Isaac and Celia Schwartzpelz. Donations for name inscriptions continue to fund Holocaust education programs.

An inscription on the wall also pays tribute to the armed forces who defeated the Nazis and liberated the concentration camps, as well as noting the role of "righteous gentiles", who aided and saved many Jews.

The memorial wall was installed by Community Council. A few years later it also added a cairn summarizing major Holocaust events (see Page 5).

The three meter-high sculpture was created by Edmonton sculptor Roy Leadbeater. In the dedication program he described the piece: "The sculpture '*Ashes to Life*' is designed to show that the spirit of the Jewish people could not be extinguished.

"The rough, open areas represent the scars and mutilation of body and mind which took place. The flames are symbolic of



Photo courtesy of Riki Heilik, Calgary Jewish Community Council.

the inferno inflicted upon the Jews of Europe during the Second World War.

"The bronze figures are protected by the long arm of the tallest figure. This represents the solidarity of the individual family and the universal family of Jews."

The Holocaust memorial is the focus of the Calgary Jewish community's *Yom ha-Shoah* observance, held every year just after Passover. (Nissan 27 was established as the date by the Israeli rabbinate.)

The Government of Alberta recognized the significance of this day when it unanimously adopted the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act on November 16, 2000.

Edmonton had western Canada's first Holocaust memorial; it is located in the community's Jewish cemetery. Winnipeg and Vancouver, both with active survivor associations, have both established Holocaust museum and memorial sites.

Calgary survivors and their children—the

Second Generation—have organized extensive Holocaust education programs, extending their efforts into the greater community. They are making sure the Holocaust is not forgotten and that its story, and its lessons, are presented as widely as possible.

Calgarians have an impressive public monument, the Holocaust Memorial Park and the sculpture "*Ashes to Life*", at which to learn, reflect, and remember.

Sources: JHSSA Archives; *The Jewish Free Press*; Riki Heilik, CJCC.

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This issue is sponsored by B'nai Brith Calgary Lodge #816. Their generosity and support is greatly appreciated.



Thirtieth Anniversary event honoring past presidents, Calgary Section, National Council of Jewish Women, 1950. On stage (l. to r.): Alice Abel, Annette Martin, Martha Cohen, Fanny Bloomfield, Thelma Belzberg, Molly Ross, Cynthia Tucker, Clarice Chodak, Faith Riback, Esther Silver, Ruth Selter, Esther Hanson, Sally Greenberg. Around table: unknown, Nellie Zimmerman, Elsie Maerov, Miriam Dvorkin, Florence Switzer, Rowena Pearlman, Gertie Belkin, Edythe Pearlman, Riva Wolf, Clara Pearlmutter, Anne Smith, Jennie Sklar, Goldie Radis, Eleanor Barron, Mozah Zemans, Bertha Segall, Sabine Fradkin. Photo courtesy Pat Hector.

## ***"Faith and Humanity": Calgary's National Council of Jewish Women***

By Jack Switzer

The Calgary section of the National Council of Jewish Women of Canada (NCJWC) was founded in September of 1920, following the visit of a Miriam Arnold of Philadelphia, a field worker for the National Council of Jewish Women of the United States. The Calgary section was the Canadian Council's third member, after Toronto and Montreal; Edmonton soon followed.

The American association was founded by a Chicago woman, Hannah Solomon, who was among a group of nearly 100 Jewish women attending the interfaith Parliament of World Religions at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. Impressed by the community service work of the Christian-oriented National Council of Women, she quickly organized a parallel Jewish organization.

Its motto, *"Faith and Humanity"*, was adopted in 1896. The American women became most active in immigration aid—meeting ships at Ellis Island, caring for children, locating lost relatives, and the like. The seventy U.S. sections set up English classes and other programs to help immigrant families integrate into American society. Members also kept busy with Jewish studies and social justice issues.

The Canadian branch was begun in Toronto in 1897, by Kate de Sola, New York-born wife of Montreal's most prominent rabbi. Montreal's Council section did not form until 1918, just two years before NCJW's west-ern Canadian expansion.

In 1920 Calgary had about 1,200 Jews. There were only two communal buildings—the House of Jacob Synagogue and the recently-purchased Hebrew School building. There was a Jewish "Ladies' Aid" group doing welfare work and busy Zionist clubs, formed during the exuberance of the post-Balfour declaration period in 1917.

We do not know the members of Calgary's first (1920) Council, but we can assume that, like their eastern and American counterparts, they were "middle class"—the wives of relatively well-off business men, and that most were either born or raised in the new world.

English was the language of Council meetings.

We do know the name of the first president. Sarah Zemans came to Calgary in 1913 from Chicago, the birthplace of Council activities. Before her untimely death in 1929 she served as Calgary section president for four years. Other local presidents during the 20s

were a Mrs. Greenfield, Marcia Goldberg, Mary Cohen, and Jennie Bercov.

Sarah Zemans' daughter-in-law, Mozah Zemans, later led the Calgary section (and served as national president from 1959 to 1965). She wrote the following about the early work of the Council in Calgary:

"The Council is primarily a service organization. When it first formed here, it immediately took over the relief work which had previously been done by two other groups of Jewish women ... until the Jewish Relief Committee was organized and became the sole agent for this work. Council has been a regular contributor to funds necessary for this work, and has also gladly assisted in the administration of the relief funds.

"Among the important activities during the early existence were the maintenance and management of a religious school, the establishment and maintenance of a house for immigrants in conjunction with the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society, a night school for immigrants, visiting the sick in the city and at the Keith (tuberculosis) Sanitarium, aid to the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage, sewing for the orphanage and the Red Cross, and assistance

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## NCJW

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in all ways possible for such local organizations as the Talmud Torah.

"One of the Council's main functions has been to serve as the contact group between the Jewish and non-Jewish community. It early became affiliated with many community organizations."

An annual bazaar, generally held at the Al Azhar Temple, was Council's major fund-raiser in the 1920s. Late in the decade it shared bazaar sponsorship with the Community Centre building fund, and later ceded the event to Hadassah.

A Junior Council for younger women was begun in the 1920s; both groups held frequent social events—teas, dances, even garden parties. Council meetings were always held during the day, often included lunch, and almost always featured guest speakers, many of them non-Jews.

"Famous Five" feminist and author Nellie McClung spoke to the Junior Council in 1927, and to the senior group in 1930 and 1931. Selections by Jewish musicians were also frequently scheduled.

Council Presidents in the 1930s included Sarah Bercuson, Bertha Horwitz, Nellie Zimmerman, and Elsie Maerov. Bessie Shapiro led Council from 1939 to 1941.

A 1938 *Jewish Post* article reviewed the work of National Council of Jewish Women in Calgary: "... the Council helps to support ... assistance to local relief, contributions to the Calgary Sunshine Fund (City Relief Project), the Junior Red Cross, the Calgary Welfare Board, the Institute for the Blind, the Winnipeg Orphanage, the Youth Aliyah, a bursary to Mount Royal College, and the Calgary Hebrew School."

The article notes the group's cultural programs, including study groups and guest speakers. An earlier report lauded the spiritual and educational aspects of the "Council Sab-

bath" religious program.

World War II brought additional social outreach. A 1943 article listed the local NCJW war work. Each of "our boys overseas" was sent 300 cigarettes monthly and food parcels five times a year. A German-Jewish internee, released through the efforts of the national organization, was now in Calgary and was being supported by the Section. A Jewish section of the Red Cross Sewing and Knitting Group met weekly at the Peretz Institute.

Council members took their turn as sponsors and hostesses of the YMCA Red Triangle program, providing entertainment and refreshment for Calgary-based servicemen and women. Other Jewish groups participated in a Council-sponsored "An Aid-to-Russia" tag day.

"With the assistance of our Bride's Group and Junior Section we have answered all calls for assistance from the community at large, and have helped the Red Cross, the Ration Board, the War Savings Stamp Booth, the Community Chest and many other worthy causes." (Junior groups were integrated into "senior" sections after 1946.)

The Calgary NCJWC section next turned its attention to Jewish refugee settlement and the needs of the new state of Israel. Funds were raised for the national organization's Overseas Service Program, which included homes for homeless Jewish women in post-war Europe, medical equipment for Israeli hospitals, and programs to expand teacher-training in Israel.

Locally, the Calgary NCJWC helped furnish the newly-completed Jewish Community Centre in 1949 and 1950. (Thirty years later, the group supplied the kitchen when the current Jewish Community Centre opened.)

Mozah Zemans was Council president from 1941 to 1944. She was followed in the 1940s by Bertha Segall and Sabine Fradkin.

Rowena Pearlman was president in 1950, when the Calgary Section celebrated its thirtieth anniversary.

In 1952 the Lethbridge section of the NCJWC was formed; its first president was Mrs. E. Goodman.

Calgary Council members hosted the 1954 NCJWC Western Area Workshop in Banff, and the major 1963 national conference of the association.

The Calgary Council continued a busy round of fund-raising, family-betterment programs, and social events during the next two decades. A Council thrift shop, called the Bargain Bazaar, was begun in 1952. The Friendship Club, directed at services for Jewish seniors, was Calgary's version of the national "Golden Age Club" program.

Council set up child-service programs in the Bowness and Victoria Park communities. Mental health awareness and gerontology issues were addressed. Members of the Calgary section prepared a teaching unit on Judaism and distributed it to Calgary public schools.

The Council's major social event in the 60s and 70s was the annual Angels Ball. An evening group, the Eunice Bloom Chapter, was formed, making Council work accessible to the growing number of Jewish women working outside the home.

Members formed a choir (conducted by Edythe Pearlman) which performed at many events in both the Jewish and general community. The choir was active until the mid-1970s. Late in the decade Council sponsored Capsule-of-Life, a community-wide medical alert program initiated and led by Ruth Carnat.

A typical Council year is recorded in the 1963/64 Calgary Section report. There were three clubs—Mozah Zemans, Sichu, and the Evening Branch. Council representatives met with fourteen "affiliated" groups, mainly non-Jewish health and social welfare agencies. Funds were raised at the Angels Ball (370 attended the 1963 event at the Palliser Hotel), the Bargain Bazaar, and with a booth vending Jewish delicacies at the International Food Fair.

Some of the programs Council volunteers supported in 1963/64 included Ship-a-Box (sending toys, etc. to Israel); the Cancer Dressing Station; the Red Cross Work Room; Children's Hospital volunteer roster; mental health play reading group; welcome to newcomers' committee; and a new citizen's ceremony, and the Friendship Club for seniors. Annual scholarships were awarded, study groups met, the Council Choir gave frequent concerts, and special luncheons highlighted educational programs such as "New Frontiers" and "Higher Horizons". It was a busy year.

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NCJW choir at Palliser Hotel meeting, early 1970s. Back row (l. to r.): Eta Kerr (accompanist), Joan Smehoff, Ruth Selter, Gayle Shatz, Sylvia Polsky, Veta Monson, Molly Ross, Anita Nadler, Rose Rosen. Front row: Reva Faber, Lila Mydlarski, Annette Friedman, Edythe Pearlman (director), Naomi Kerr, Lil Faider, Minnie Segal, Fran Bloomfield. Photo courtesy Naomi Kerr.



Dawson Daily News, August 13, 1915 – “Pioneer to Leave Dawson for Outside”

## 1915 – Barron Family Leaves Yukon for Calgary

*This 1915 Dawson (Yukon) Daily News item was read and enjoyed at our last annual meeting. It was supplied to us by Robert Barron, grandson of Joseph and Elizabeth Barron.*

Mr. And Mrs. J.S. Barron, well known old time Dawsonites, will be among those to sail on the steamer *Whitehorse* tomorrow. They have wound up their affairs in Dawson, and are going to Calgary to make their home. Their sons, Jack and Abe, former students in the Dawson High School, are in Calgary in the law business. The parents desire to be with their sons as much as possible, and for that reason have chosen to cast their lot with the thriving town of Calgary.

Mr. Barron has just sold out his business here after seven years of continuous residence and activity in the city. He expressed his great appreciation for the people of the Northland, and says it is with no little feeling of regret that he leaves the gold metropolis, as he believes in its future, but that Mrs. Barron and he do not care to longer remain distant from their boys.

Mr. and Mrs. Barron will make the trip out over the same historic route which Mr. Barron followed in coming into the country in the great stampede of '98. He rushed into the Yukon over the White pass route, and brought in a stock of merchandise. The goods were packed from Skagway to Lake Bennett, and freighted by scow down the lakes, through Whitehorse rapids, and the Thirtymile and on to Dawson. He was among the first independent traders to open a mercantile store on First Avenue, and was located on the site next to Gandolfo's Point, and close to the old post office, where many a line was formed by the thousands of anxious Yukoners looking for their long-delayed letters.

Three times Mr. Barron had the misfor-

tune of being burned out in Dawson. Each time he exhibited the characteristic Klondike grit, and ordered new stocks and started up anew. Two of the fires occurred in '98, within a few months of each other. The third was in 1901. As there was no insurance to be had in Dawson in those days, the losses meant much more than they would have in older cities.

Mr. Barron came to Dawson from Winnipeg. He left Skagway in May, embarked at Bennett June 10, and reached Dawson June 20. Mrs. Barron and family did not come until 1902. They remained two years, after which they went outside in order that their two sons might complete their education. They attended Chicago University and took degrees there and at Harvard as doctors of law. Mr. and Mrs. Barron give great praise to the Dawson High School for the thorough grounding the boys received in their preliminary studies.

Mr. Barron leaves a legacy to the Yukon in

the way of the Barron Drum, an invention commonly used in the Klondike and one which has proved the greatest spark and fire arrester and fuel saver as well as the most effective vehicle for even distribution of heat from the ordinary heating stove that ever has been made. Mr. Barron worked out the principle of the stove several winters ago, and its success was immediate.

On the eve of his departure, Mr. Barron states that he wishes to testify to the high efficiency of the *News* as an advertising medium, and to say that his announcements through its columns certainly got the results in short order. He sold his entire stock in less than six weeks. He wishes also to pay a compliment to the sterling worth of the Klondikers by saying that after all his years of business here he leaves with not one debt even as much as ten dollars due him in the city.

Mr. And Mrs. Barron are planning to visit the Panama Fair, and may go there direct before travelling west to Calgary.



Joseph Barron, Elizabeth Bell Barron and Bill Barron (grandson), Calgary, 1916. Photo courtesy of Robert H. Barron, grandson of Joseph and Elizabeth Bell Barron.

### NCJW

*Continued from Page 3*

By 1990 the Calgary Council sections had stopped holding most social events and fundraising activities.

Why did Council lose its impetus? Jewish women joined the work force in great numbers in recent decades, reducing the time they had available for organizational work. Many senior leaders began to spend considerable time as “snowbirds” in the U.S.A. Competing women's groups had attractive programs, and many organizations formerly closed to women began to welcome their participation. Synagogues and schools for

example, which once restricted women to “sisterhood” and auxiliary roles, saw women take many leadership positions.

As well, Jewish women became more active in the general community, joining the volunteer rosters and boards of many arts groups, social service charities, and other civic groups.

The list of active Jewish organization changes over time, but Jews tend, proportionally, to be “joiners” and volunteers far more than members of any other ethnic group.

A national exhibit of NCJW history visited

Calgary in 1998. At the exhibit opening, Jenny Belzberg, a former local Council president, reviewed the NCJW's many national and local contributions as well as its influence in her own life. She regretted that only a book club and the Council-sponsored Jewish Centre Judaica store had survived the busy decades.

Jewish philanthropy and public service can be tied to the Torah-based notions of *tzedakah*—unselfish charity, and *tikkun olam*—repairing the world. The National Council of Jewish Women may have exemplified these ideals more than most.

## Holocaust Memorial

*Continued from Page 1*

**Holocaust Time-Line**—as it is inscribed on the Holocaust history cairn at the Calgary Holocaust Memorial Park. The cairn's text is very brief and has many omissions. We have made minor corrections to spelling and punctuation.

### BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SYSTEMATIC DEPRIVATION BY LAW OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS, JOBS, PROPERTY AND LIFE OF "NON-ARYANS" BY THE NAZI PARTY.

March 1933 – The Reich judiciary fires all Jewish judges and state attorneys. They are forbidden to enter the courtrooms.

February 1934 – New laws exclude Jews from jobs, schools, libraries, entertainment, farming and public transportation.

March 1934 – Establishment of first concentration camp in Nazi Germany, Dachau.

September 1935 – Nuremberg laws on "citizenship race" took the right of citizenship from all Jews.

October 1936 – Converted Jews who became Christians were persecuted like all other Jews.

June 1937 – Reich postal ministry fires all postal workers whose spouses are not purely Aryan.

July 1937 – Buchenwald concentration camp opens.

October 1938 – Over 17,000 Jewish Polish citizens expelled from Germany to Zbąstyn.

November 1938 – "Kristall Nacht" anti-Jewish riots in Germany and Austria. 300,000 Jews arrested, 191 synagogues destroyed, 7,500 shops and stores looted.

December 1938 – Reich economics ministry freezes all Jewish property and assets.

August 1939 – After Poland is conquered 3,000,000 Jews were put in concentration camps to starve or perish as slave laborers.

September 1939 – Police impose an 8 pm curfew on Jews.

July 1940 – Reich postal ministry refuses telephone service to Jews.

August 1941 – The S.S. installs crematoriums in concentration camps and gas chambers in six death camps. Mass killings begin.

September 1941 – All Jews older than 6

years of age are forbidden to appear in public without wearing the "Jewish star".

October 1941 – The Chief of Police orders the deportation of 50,000 Jews from Germany, Austria and Bohemia to ghettos in the occupied east (Riga, Lodz, Kono and Minsk).

September 1942 – Large-scale "Extermination" began in the death camps.

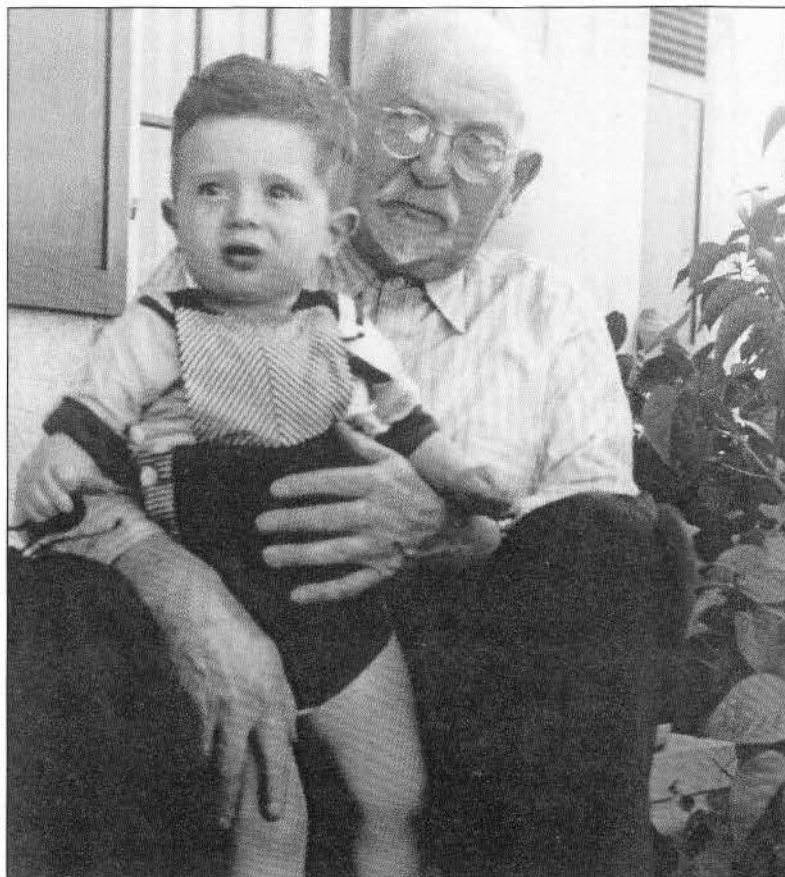
November 1943 – S.S. Chief Himmler orders that all Jews in concentration camps in Germany proper must be transferred to camps of Auschwitz and Maydanek in occupied Poland.

January 1945 – The Reich education ministry orders the destruction of files recording anti-Jewish activities of Nazi state.

April 1945 – The defeat of Nazi Germany.

**PERISHED IN THE HOLOCAUST—11 MILLION INNOCENT MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN OF ALL FAITHS MURDERED. SIX MILLION ONLY BECAUSE THEY WERE JEWS.**

## New Photos from our Archives



Aaron Sholomenko and his grandson Stanley Smith, Calgary, c. 1941. Photo courtesy of Carey Smith. This is one of a number of historical photos and documents donated by Dr. Stanley and Carey Smith.



Sarah Leonoff (nee Schatzky) and children Lyall, Vera and Melvin, c. 1918. Her husband, Louis Leonoff, was a private detective in Calgary from 1919 to 1922. Photo courtesy of Cyril Leonoff, Vancouver.

# Sheldon Chumir – Lawyer, Civil Liberties Advocate and Politician 1940–1992

By Brian Brennan

When people speak of Sheldon Chumir the Liberal politician, they use words like ethical, humane, scholarly, honest, and compassionate. Chumir actually managed to get himself elected on those qualities. He was one of those rare politicians who transcend party politics. Like the late new democrat leader Grant Notley, Chumir had the personal qualities that made people forget which political party he represented.

He first became politically active in the mid-1970s, though not initially in a high-profile way. A shy loner, Chumir hated having his picture taken and would not divulge his name to reporters. He was content to remain semi-anonymous as the Calgary lawyer who said city officials should not have the power to ban political rallies in parks. Deeply committed to civil liberties, Chumir was also active in the community on issues having to do with public education, freedom of information, and police accountability.

By 1983 he could remain nameless no longer. He founded a grass-roots organization called Save Public Education that put him front and centre in a high-profile campaign to stop the Calgary public school board from funding religion-based private schools.

For the first time the veil was lifted. In a *Calgary Herald* profile he was described as a "Jewish bachelor," former Rhodes scholar, and tax lawyer. The public did not yet know about his love of rock concerts, his collection of Kinky Friedman records, or his impish penchant for practical jokes. But the searchlight had reached into the corners and revealed that he was a Calgary grocer's son who had attended law school at the University of Alberta, played with the Golden Bears hockey and football teams, played prime minister in the university's mock parliament, reported for the *Gateway* newspaper, and had been a 1963 Rhodes scholar.

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Chumir worked for the federal tax department in Toronto after graduating from law school. In 1971 he became a partner and tax specialist with the Calgary law firm now known as Bennett Jones. Four years later he was running one of the biggest law practices in the country.

Chumir left Bennett Jones in 1976 to open his own office, which specialized in civil liberties cases. "I feel people should do things that are needed in the community," he said, "not those that are popular and prestigious." He never charged for his civil liberties work. He covered his expenses with returns from his profitable investments in oil well drilling.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Chumir's name often appeared in the news, though not yet in the headlines. That was the way he liked it. Issues were important, he said, not personalities.

After the successful Save Public Education campaign, Chumir could no longer hide his personality. His next logical step was to run for politics, and in late 1985 he announced he would run as a Liberal candidate in the provincial riding of Calgary Buffalo. At the time, Chumir said, "the Boston Strangler was more welcome at people's doors than a Liberal." Abandoning the publicity-shy pose, he had his name printed in big letters on his campaign literature.

The "vote for the person" strategy worked. In May 1986 Chumir broke the Tory blockade of southern Alberta and became the first provincial Liberal elected in Calgary in twenty years.

By the time he ran for re-election three years later, Chumir was better known in Calgary than many Tory members of the legislative assembly. A *Calgary Herald* editorial characterized him as a "specialist in obtuse causes." But he still garnered more headlines than his Tory opponents did.

His strategy for the 1989 election was to "bribe" the voters with fridge magnets. It was a gimmicky tactic, but it worked. Chumir doubled his 1986 victory margin, thus becoming—at least by vote count—the most popular provincial politician in Calgary.

His personal popularity might have carried him to the leadership of the party, but Chumir opted to let someone else seek that job. He limited his political leadership



Sheldon Chumir. Photo courtesy of Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership.

experience to the prime ministerial role he had played in the mock parliament in Edmonton. He dropped out of the race that brought Edmonton mayor Laurence Decore to power, saying he "didn't have the fire in the belly for the position."

With Decore ensconced as party leader, Chumir played Liberal critic for all the important government portfolios, shadowing the provincial treasurer, energy minister, attorney general, and solicitor general. He also served as unpaid ombudsman for his Calgary constituents, using his legislator's salary for the extra office help required. Six months after his death, people were still calling his office for help on workers' compensation claims, landlord-tenant disputes, and other matters.

Chumir died of lymphoma in 1992 at age fifty-one, three years into his second term as a member of the legislative assembly. He left the bulk of his estate for the creation of a foundation to promote ethical leadership in government, business, and community affairs. The foundation would be based on his belief—exemplified by the way he conducted his own life—that significant changes for the betterment of society could only be achieved through leaders who were motivated by high ethical purpose. "There is an absence of participation by individuals in advancing the public good through public life," said Chumir. "I perceive a failure of members of our society to respond on an individual basis to a higher calling which should be part of an examined life."

Reprinted with permission from 'Building a Province: 60 Alberta Lives', by Brian Brennan. Published by Fifth House Ltd., Calgary.



## Sheldon Chumir – His Jewish Roots

By Jack Switzer

At the time of his death, Sheldon Chumir was Member of the Legislative Assembly for the Calgary Buffalo constituency. He grew up in the riding; coincidentally, his mother and father, Clara and Harry Chumir, ran the Buffalo Grocery and Confectionery, at 105 Fifth Street SW, across the street from Calgary's main baseball field, Buffalo Stadium.

The Chumirs had previously operated the McDougall Grocery at 414 Sixth Street SW. The family home was nearby, at 824 Fifth Avenue.

Sheldon was their only child. He attended the Peretz School from kindergarten through grade five, and then went to neighborhood public schools and finally the old Central High School. He was active in AZA (the youth branch of B'nai Brith), and in high school student government.

Long-time friend David Horodezky and Chumir ran Brimstone Productions, bringing popular rock-and-roll acts to Calgary for several years in the early 1970s.

Chumir brought a touch of Jewish humor to politics. He ran a phantom candidate named Moishe T. Pipik in a university student election. Fortune cookies at a Chinese-food fund-raiser held Yiddish proverbs.

Sheldon Chumir had several Jewish affiliations, including participation in the Calgary Jewish Council's community relations committee. He freely identified himself as a Jew, but made it clear that he was first and foremost a citizen of the greater community.

In a *Jewish Free Press* article about Chumir's life, the editor states: "Chumir was a Universalist. He did not see himself as a 'Jewish politician,' but rather as a politician who was proud to be Jewish."

He sometimes took stands that were at odds with the Jewish establishment. In the early 1980s he strongly supported a "Save Public Education" campaign, even though the group helped end major funding programs for Calgary's two Jewish day schools.

And he opposed the Jewish community's support for the prosecution of former teacher James Keegstra on hate-crime charges. "The publicity tended to make him (Keegstra) look more credible, more moderate, and a martyr," Chumir said in a *Calgary* magazine article. "You can't kill ideas with the law."

The JHSSA has a copy of a long 1983 letter Chumir sent in reply to a mother of

## Lethbridge Jews Face Uncertain Future

By Tamara Stecyk

Like many small centres across Canada, the Jewish population is dwindling in Lethbridge, Alberta and the synagogue is struggling to remain open.

What remains are the strong memories of living as a Jew in the city, which now has a population of 72,700. About 35 people gathered at Lethbridge's Beth Israel Synagogue on October 6th to share past experiences and see the Temple before it possibly closes for good.

"Sitting in this synagogue brings back memories. The synagogue was loaded on High Holidays. It was like a big family. Everyone took care of everyone. Everyone in this community was an auntie or an uncle to me," said Fran Snukal, one of 14 people who travelled from Calgary for the day.

Jews began moving to Lethbridge in the early 1900s. The Beth Israel was established in 1935 when the community purchased and renovated an old church. As the number of Jews grew, a new building was constructed in 1955.

The peak of 75 Jewish families has now shrunk to 10 or 12 families, says long-time Lethbridge resident Hymie Davids. The congregation still gathers for High Holiday services but it is a struggle to stage Shabbat services.

"We have to count the women now to make up a minyan," said Davids, who

helped organize the day's event with the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta.

He hopes that the synagogue will remain open and is worried that the day will come when it will be sold.

"We are going to hold onto it as long as we can. It's tough. Medicine Hat sold their building and gave their Torahs away," said the 83-year-old. "What is going to eventually happen, I don't know. I hope there will be a community here."

Garry Kohn, one of the younger members, says he received a call from a real estate agent wanting to know when the synagogue will be up for sale. A decision to close the synagogue is up to the whole community.

Another purpose for the gathering was to preserve the history of Beth Israel and its community. A videographer was on hand to record the stories and the tour of the plots at the Jewish cemetery.

"We wanted to review the roots of Lethbridge. It was really good for the people who lived in Lethbridge," said Emanuel Cohen, a member of the JHSSA.

Cohen also grew up in Lethbridge but now lives in Calgary. "We are trying to preserve all the historical documents," he said.

*This article originally appeared in the Canadian Jewish News, Toronto. It is reprinted with the permission of the author, Tamara Stecyk. She joined a recent JHSSA-sponsored tour of Jewish sites in Lethbridge.*



JHSSA visitors stand in front of the building used as the Lethbridge Synagogue in the 1920s. Photo courtesy of Emanuel Cohen.

some of Keegstra's students in which he systematically refuted the teacher's anti-Jewish allegations. He reports examining an 18-volume copy of the Talmud in order to make his points. He invites Eckville parents and students to visit him and offers to go to their homes if asked.

It appears that Sheldon Chumir devoted many hours to answer the writer's questions about Judaism, as part of his mandate as an advocate of liberty, learning and ethical behavior.

He was truly a mensch.

# Membership Update

## Thank You To All Our 2003 Members

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