



DISCOVERY

The Journal of the

תגלית

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY of Southern Alberta

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In this issue is a brief history of the Katzin family (page 4). Seen here on their Trochu farm (circa 1915) are: Mother & Father Ida & Morris Katzin and their children Mike, Lil and Harry.

Doing your own Oral History

This issue of *Discovery* focuses on family history. Our purpose is simple. We want to encourage you to record your family history. Write it down. Put it on video or audio tape. Label and protect your family pictures. Keep and store old papers, artifacts, souvenirs.

Most of us have an aunt, uncle, parent, or grandparent with a story to tell. The story need not be one of pioneering and hardship. A relative's story - even forty or fifty years in the past - is of interest to everyone who knows the person telling it - it tells us more about that individual, about our families, about his or her times, and about ourselves.

Discovery this month includes part of an oral history interview - the responses of a woman to simple questions put by an interviewer and recorded on audio tape. We also include a simple account of an early life on the farm written by a Jewish farm pioneer.

Both are incomplete, personal, and

may be historically inaccurate with regard to exact dates, names, and so on. That's not the point. Such records are good for the family member reading or recording the history. It helps one to learn more of one's heritage and history, to be closer in touch with one's roots.

They are good for the person providing the history. It can connect generations, add status to declining years, and provide some focus for activity in later life stages. A parent or the family friend being interviewed about his or her life can find new self-respect, many happy memories, and a sense of continuity with younger generations.

Family history is also good for the community. Your story is important to

Be Sure to Attend our Annual Meeting

A preview of our book "Land of Promise: a Pictorial History" will highlight the 1995 JHSSA annual meeting, set for 7:30 PM on Monday, October 23, at the Jewish Community Centre.

The book, a printed version of the Society's popular Land of Promise photo exhibit, will be published early in 1996. It will contain over 300 photographs, including many not shown in the original display.

Proof pages from the new book will be displayed, and those in attendance will have the chance to reserve their copy.

Area pioneers will be presented with special certificates and there will be a short special entertainment program.

those who are trying to preserve our recent past and weave individual stories into the context of a larger historical mosaic.

But your family history need not become part of a museum or library collection. Just having one's story available for children and grandchildren is reason enough to put your family's history into the record.

An oral history, a recording on audio tape, is a simple and convenient way to preserve a person's voice and memories. Video cameras can be used, but they may be uncomfortable for some, and can be boring for an extended interview.

Most homes have a tape recorder, some sort of a "blaster" or cassette player. A built in microphone is fine, but a desk mike or lavalier may have better sound.. Plug-in machines are best. Shorter tape formats (30 minutes per side) are more reliable, but need to be watched and changed more often. Learn your recorder's features and test it well before the actual interview.

continues next page

Featured in this issue

- Doing your own Oral History
- JHSSA News
- Annual Meeting October 23
- Bessie Diamond's Oral History
- Katzin Family Written History

Oral Histories cont'd

Prepare a brief outline and questions that should be covered. A chronological outline works well - questions about birth dates, parents and siblings, school years, courting, jobs, children, and so on that follow a person's life story.

Sit down over a kitchen table with the recorder and a cup of tea.

Break the ice with informal chatter, then turn on the recorder. State the date, place, name of the respondent. Then get that person talking. You can start by asking "When and where were you born, Auntie?" Remember that even if you know certain facts - like birth dates - other relatives may not.

You can take side trips during the interview to explore an interesting job, a special event, a colorful relative, and so on, but you should go back and try to complete your planned questions.

Avoid questions that can be answered yes or no. Ask what a reporter would ask: who, when, where, why, how? Encourage continuous response by nodding, by eye, contact, by gestures. Try not to interrupt if a recollection is going well. Basically, be quiet and listen. Allow your respondent time to reflect, to pause, to think about the past. Be patient. You will know when it's time to ask the next questions.

Approach sensitive areas with caution. Not everyone wants to relive the holocaust, a tragic accident, or an abusive parent. Such areas can be covered, but you should back off if you sense resistance.

Photographs can stimulate information. You may be able to discuss every person in an old photo. Try to connect the talk to the actual photo - "Is that Uncle Albert next to Zaida in the top row?"

An hour and a half or so may be the maximum time an older person can be interviewed, so you may have to plan more than one session.

Be aware of tiredness or stress.

When you have completed recording, get the tape duplicated, and give the respondent a copy. Get copies distributed to your children, or others close to the interviewee. The oral history is of little use if it is put away and forgotten.

Tapes donated to museums or historical societies should be accompanied by clearance letters approving use of the material for particular purposes. Such forms are available from the receiving institutions.

Oral histories are more convenient to users if they are transcribed - if the words are recorded on paper. This is

difficult, and it may be more convenient just to prepare an outline of the interview. Tape location references (in feet) are matched to topics covered. For example, 150 feet, train trip to Winnipeg; 170 feet, cousin Zelda's wedding, problems with ring-bearer, and so on.

This serves much the same function as the table of contents in a book, and does not require the time-consuming work of typing out or writing every word in a long tape.

It's worth the effort to record your family's history.. (You can do your own history, just you and a tape recorder or a pen and paper.) Please do it soon. people get old and forget. Sometimes they die, with their stories left untold.

Please do it. Your children, and their children, will thank you.

DON'T FORGET. . .

Jewish Historical Society
of Southern Alberta
ANNUAL MEETING -
Monday, October 23, 1995
7:30 p.m. -
Calgary Jewish Centre

Switzer Family Reunion

by Jack Switzer

Almost 500 members of Calgary's largest Jewish family, the Switzers, met for their second reunion during the recent July long weekend. Major events were held at the Metropolitan Centre and at the Bragg Creek ranch of Sam Switzer.

There are now over 1400 direct descendants of Wolf Baer Switzer (1847 - 1924) who lived in Radom, Poland, and died shortly before his scheduled emigration to Canada. About 600 still live in Calgary.

Wolf Baer Switzer and his two wives had eleven children and 75 grandchildren. Seven of his sons and daughters, and over 50 grandchildren, with their families came to Calgary. The first was Bella Switzer Singer who came in

1910. She soon brought over two nephews, and each newcomer in turn sponsored other relatives.

The last of Wolf Baer's grandchildren to reach Calgary were Dinche Groner and Sidney Cyngiser, who came after surviving World War II in Europe.

(Let me put the scope of the Switzer presence in Calgary another way. In 1931, my father, Mendle Switzer, who came in 1927, had his father, Jacob Switzer, and ten aunts and uncles in Calgary, plus over fifty first cousins - and their husbands, wives and children - in this city. I estimate that the Switzer family accounted for about 250 of the approximate 1650 Jews in Calgary in 1931.

Another large group were Switzer in-laws and their families - people like my mother's brother, Berl Aizenman.)

Nine branches of the Switzer clan had most of their members in Calgary. They were the families of Mendel

Switzer, Mindell Bleviss, Rifka Belzberg, Sarah Aizenman, Jacob Switzer, Jessie Fishman, Bella Singer, Myer Switzer, and Gershon Switzer.

Two of the eleven Switzer branches, those of Faiga Switzer Cyngiser and Noma Switzer Farber, were largely lost in the Holocaust, but the remainder, who followed Bella and Abe Singer to Calgary, have survived, prospered, and thrived.

Mel and Deana Fishman have computerized the family records, which have been published as a 210-page Switzer Family Guide and as a poster-sized family tree.

David Brodsky chaired the reunion committee, which hopes to have another family gathering in the year 2000. By then there may be 2000 Switzers to celebrate 90 years in Calgary.

Excerpts from Bessie Diamond's Oral History

As told to her granddaughter Catherine Lisa Cohen of Los Angeles



Bessie Diamond (seated, centre with cap) at get-together in early Calgary, c. 1915. Directly behind her is Lou Diamond. On her left is Herman Nagler. Please help us identify others in this photo.

"I was Born in London, England, October 15, 1897."

"My father's name was Isaac Marks. He left Russia with an older brother, Philip, and they came to South America, to Rio; he was 13 years old.

"They went from there to London. I've never heard them talk about Russia, never. Neither did my grandmother. But I know they came from Minska Gubernia.

"Eventually he became a foreman in the Coward shoe factory.

"My grandmother Goldberg lost her husband and she brought my mother and the other kids from Russia to London. There was my mother, uncle Al, and uncle Joe and there was an uncle Joe who also went to South Africa and uncle Sol, who was the youngest.

"My father had his older brother, Philip, and one sister, who married in London and went to South Africa. My father's oldest brother was in New York. The family's name was Shimarkofsky, and they changed his name when he entered New York. They said 'you don't need a name like that, take Simonoff.'

"When my father and uncle Philip came to London, they said 'take the middle syllable of Simarkofsky, and you can be Marks. You don't need a long Russian name.'

"My mother was 18 when she and my father were married, in 1893. He was six years older.

"My father left for Canada earlier than us. He came to Calgary in 1905.

There were nine Jewish families. He looked for a job and there were just no jobs. There were no factories, and certainly no shoe factories.

"But even with such a small community of Jewish people, there was a shochet, the one who used to kill the cattle. There was an influx of

Jewish immigrants at that time to Alberta and Saskatchewan, and they had to work on farms because that the only way the government would allow them into this country.

"My father didn't have to become a farmer. My father was from England already, so it was easier for us. The others all came from Russia.

"They all became farmers - home-steaders. All these farmers had to have kosher meat. The Calgary shochet said to my father: 'Let me teach you how to be a butcher, how to kosher the meat and so on. You'll make a good living. There are many many farmers throughout Alberta and in Saskatchewan who will be your customers'.

"And that's exactly what happened. He had no alternative. He didn't like it particularly, but he made a good living at it.

After six months Isaac Marks sent for his wife and five children.

"I can remember the train trip across Canada more than I can remember the boat. There was my mother, five children, my grandmother, and Auntie Esther, my mother's youngest sister, who was 16 years old.

"When we got to Calgary, there was already a house. My father was already a butcher.

"There was always food. We had ten for meals. We had a great big kitchen. Our big meal was at noon, always meat. Friday night was in the dining room.

"My father was the type of person who the minute he met somebody would say 'come to dinner on Friday night.' One time he brought home on a Friday night the Cherniasky brothers. They were giving a concert - a trio. They were a very big name.

"He sold the butcher shop and his brother Dave took over. He bought three acres of land in north Calgary, and he said 'I think were going to buy cows, and were going to milk them and were going to have a dairy.'

"Jacob Woolfe, Harry Woolfe's father, also from London, and also with about five children, was a carpenter. He built a house, and the john was outside with two little holes, and a great big barn.

"Harry Woolfe was courting Debby (her sister) at that time. Joe (Diamond) used to come around on a motorcycle. I was 15. Debby was only eleven; oh, she couldn't have been seeing Harry then.

"We used to have barn dances. The dairy progressed. My grandmother used to live with us, of course. Auntie Esther got married.

"I've never milked a cow in my life. I went to business college.

"I got my first job when I was 16 (about 1914) maybe younger, as a stenographer, with a lawyer. I was very naive and very young, and I can remember after a few days there, he put his arm around me, and I got scared, and I quit. True, true, true. I was scared, and I quit.

"And then I went to work for the present Mozah Zeman's father, Henry Goldberg, as a stenographer, in his office (Northern Grain Co.) By now Calgary had grown tremendously and there were many more Jewish people. I worked there maybe a year.

"By the time I was not quite 18, through R.B. Bennett (prominent Calgary lawyer and politician, Prime Minister 1930-35), who was very friendly with auntie Esther, who always lived with us ... And he was a friend of the Jews, and if ever a Jew got into trouble auntie Esther would go to R.B. Bennett, and he would do his best.

"Oh, some Jews got into trouble.

continues page 5

Katzin Family

A Short History of the Katzin Family was written by Max Katzin in 1975. It was provided by Bev Katzin-Walker, of Blyth, Ontario.

Max Katzin, my father, was born in Russia in July 1867, and emigrated from that country with my mother, Ida Katzin, and their three children to the United States in 1904. They lived in Newark, New Jersey for about two years, during which time my father operated a retail clothing and grocery store.

In the spring of 1906, attracted by the free land that the Canadian Government was giving away in order to settle the vast prairies of Western Canada, the family moved to Saskatchewan.

They homesteaded about 60 miles northeast of Regina, where my father built a cabin and barn of logs and covered them with sod. The nearest village or hamlet was Lipton, which meant a three day trip by ox team over open prairie without roads or fences. To augment the meagre income that the farm provided, and to help support his growing family, Morris Katzin worked during the fall in the harvest fields and on threshing crews, often doing shifts. In the winter he worked on construction crews for the railway that was being built at that time.

After five years of pioneering, the family moved to Edmonton in 1911. There, my father made a livelihood by delivering lumber, bricks, construction material and coal, with a team of horses and wagon.

Early in the spring of 1915, Morris Katzin again took up farming, settling 12 miles southeast of Trochu, near the banks of the Red Deer River.

While life on the farm was a little easier than the backbreaking pioneering in Saskatchewan, it still meant very hard work to clear the land of rocks, break and cultivate the heavy gumbo soil and prepare it for seeding. Then, of course, barns and granaries had to be built, fences erected and numerous other jobs had to be done that are required to start a farming operation.

In those days, when not all farmers had enough machinery or manpower, the seasonal work - like haying and harvesting - was very often a co-opera-

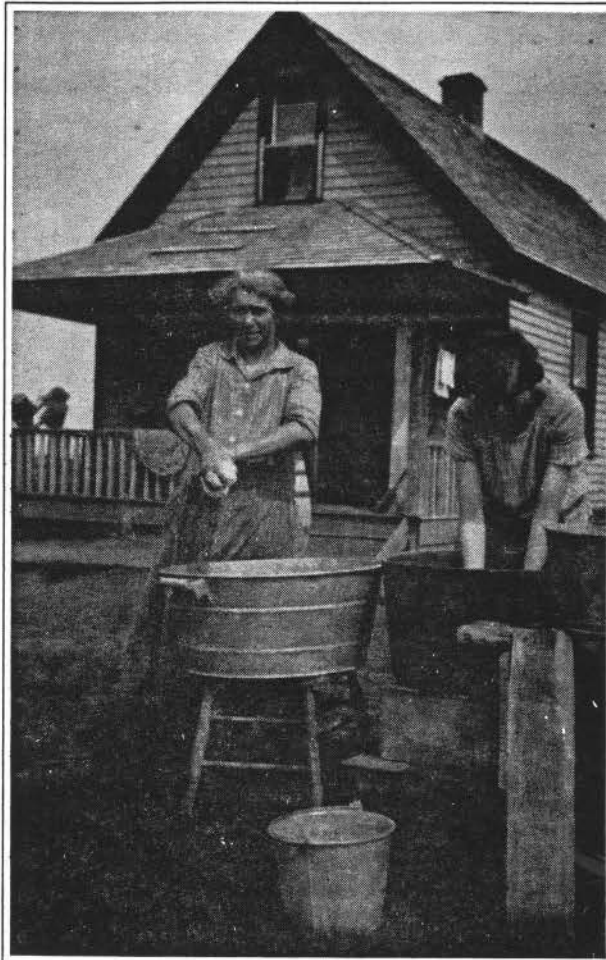
tive endeavor. Several farmers would get together, pool their equipment and do these operations, first on one farm and then move on to the other's farm, and so on till all their work was done.

Until around 1917 or so, there were very few threshing machines in our entire area. These were usually operated by large steam engines and the outfits would move from farm to farm. The grain was bindered and stooked. After the stooks were dry, the sheaves or "bundles" as they were called, were loaded on hay racks, taken to a convenient location and stacked. Then late in the fall the threshing outfit would move up to the stacks to thresh the grain. This, of course, was long before the days of the modern grain combines that replaced the binder and threshing machine.

1916 was a very good crop year in our district, but the frost hit early in August, which reduced the grade to number three or four. Our father had arranged with two of the neighbors to do the grain stacking co-operatively. Unfortunately he hurt his back, so my older brother, who was 13, and myself, aged 11, had to stay out of school for several weeks to take father's place making the stacks. Luckily, we had been taught how to do this work and we managed fairly well, but those bundles were very big and heavy for an eleven-year old kid.

When we first moved to the farm, my brothers and sisters attended the Harrow School, which was 4 miles from home. In 1917 the Greenleaf School was built and we then had to drive only two miles.

In the following years our area became fairly well settled. The number of pupils reached about 30, in eight grades all in one classroom.



Ida Katzin and daughter Lil on wash day at the Trochu farm in the 1920's.

Two of our first teachers at Geenleaf School were Mrs. Huxley and Miss Gertrude Keohan.

In the fall of 1918, at the end of the First World War, a severe epidemic of Spanish influenza struck the Trochu district and many died. Schools were closed for a time, and people were told to wear over their faces masks made of several layers of cheesecloth.

Time moved on; and since there wasn't enough work on the farm for all members of the family, the older boys moved to the city to find other employment.

In December, 1926, we moved to Calgary where father passed away in April, 1950; Mother in July, 1960. Their descendants were in various cities across Canada and the United States.

Help us preserve our history
by becoming a JHSSA member.
Applications at the
Calgary Jewish Centre.

Bessie Diamond cont'd

They bought stolen goods, they did this, they shouldn't have done that, they got into trouble. No, no murdering or anything like that. R.B. Bennett knew what lawyer to go to, and gave them advice and so on.

"I went to work for the government for \$60 a month. The cheque went right to my mother, but by the same token I was never short of anything.

About her husband, Joe Diamond:

"Joe came over with his father (Phillip Diamond) from Russia when he was 13. He came from a family, on his mother's side that was very cultured, and wanted their children to have a very good education. So Joe was put in a Yeshiva in Vilna and was going to train to be a rabbi. He was the youngest one ever to graduate from that Yeshiva as a full-fledged shochet

"He came to Calgary and they were in need of someone to go kill cattle, kosher, but he didn't last very long because he didn't like it at all.

"They were all brought up in Canmore, where Joe's father, Philip, had a general store. During the next two or three years he worked as a lumberjack, cutting down trees. Then he went to Calgary (about 1913) and worked with his uncle Jake (Jacob Diamond, Calgary's first Jewish settler) who had a liquor store.

"When did I meet Joe? There was no such thing as 'meeting' someone. He was part of the Jewish community. All the young people used to go together, go to parties and dances and things. Joe was the first one in Calgary to have a motorcycle, when he was about 20. He lived with his sister, Rebecca, who had married Peter Block (parents of Martha Cohen..)

"He had this motorcycle, and very often he would ride up to the dairy on a Sunday, and always take us for a ride. I would be on the back, and whatever girlfriend was visiting me would ride on the front. There was no such thing as dating, we all went together.

"During the first war Philip sent his two boys to the United States, to a relative in Chicago, to keep them out of the war. His father had been in the Russian army, as a purchasing officer, and he said 'my boys aren't going to fight.'

"My family had sent me to New

York (to get her away from an older suitor who they felt was not acceptable) and on the way back I stopped in Chicago, and I called him. Everyone knew they were in Chicago. We were friends, you know.

"He said 'I'm coming around to take you for a ride,' and he did. He borrowed a friend's car. We went for a ride. We went to dinner. The next night he came around again and took me to dinner.

"Anyway, he came back to Calgary after the war. We were really good friends until about 1922. We became engaged in December of that year. He was very good looking, and he was very kind, and he was very considerate. What else can I tell you about him?

"He got into the liquor business with his brothers. It was legitimate at that time. It was during prohibition in the States. They had a little company and they were selling to bootleggers who would come in.

"When we were engaged, in December of 1922, he decided he wanted to go to Vancouver and start a liquor company, doing the same sort of thing. We were to be married in June of the next year, and with all the relatives it would have been a huge wedding, which neither Joe nor I wanted.

"We didn't wait until June. Joe had to go to Spokane, where he was to meet a bunch of bootleggers. He said why don't we take your mother and father to Spokane and let's get married there quietly. So my mother and

Debby came with me to Spokane. Joe was already there.

"We were married on the morning of February 5 in Rabbi Lieber's study. He was a reform rabbi. Joe arranged for a little dinner for the rabbi and his wife and he and I and Mom and Debby. I told him 'Please Joe, don't make a fuss. Please don't tell them, at the restaurant that we've just been married.' But as we walked in the dining room of the hotel, there was an orchestra playing Here Comes the Bride.

"Joe looked at me - 'What do you want from me; I didn't tell them.' And coming through another door was a whole retinue with a bride and a groom and all the others. It wasn't for me at all.

"The next morning there was a knock on our hotel door. It was one of the bootleggers Joe was doing business with, and he didn't want me to meet him. He kept me apart from that sort of thing. He said 'go in the bathroom until I can get rid of him.' It took only about 20 minutes and I was sitting on the john waiting.

"One of the bootleggers had an airplane, and Joe wanted to go up with him. I said 'are you crazy, is that what you think of being married to me, that you want to end it today?' He said 'no, but I've never been in an airplane, and I would just love to go'. So I said 'well, go.' He was only gone about an hour.

"We stayed there about three days, and then took the train to Vancouver

continues next page

DISCOVERY

Editors **Jack Switzer, Jay Joffe**

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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JHSSA News

Abe Arnold to speak in Calgary

Jewish historian and journalist Abe Arnold, of Winnipeg, will discuss his new book *Judaism: Myth, Legend, History and Custom*, from the Religious to the Secular, at the Calgary Jewish Centre on Thursday, November 9, at 8:00 pm.

The program is co-sponsored by the Jewish Historic Society and the Calgary Jewish Community Centre.

Oral History tapes in the JHSSA Archives

The JHSSA has in its archives many audio tapes from the Society's oral history project, in which local Jewish pioneers are interviewed and their recollections recorded. Some are accompanied by transcripts of the tape, others by outlines. A few have no written material with them.

The tapes may be used by members, in the society's office, where a cassette tape player can be used. Many are also available at the archives of the Glenbow Museum. The tapes were recorded between 1974 and 1992.

The following tapes are held by the JHSSA:

Hinda Belzberg	Constance Kline
Rose Belzberg	Bee Lewis
Blanche Bercovich	Leo Lewis
Max Bercovich	Doris Miller
Abe & Gary Bickman	Edythe Pearlman
Becky Levitt Cohen	Ted Riback
Bessie Diamond	Marie Samuels
Eva Duke	Robert Sattin
Jacob Faber	Leo Sheftel
Pat Hector	Charlie Switzer
Lily Horodezky	Harry Woolfe
Hattie Joffe	

The society has only transcripts or outlines of the following interviews; some of the tapes are in the Glenbow collection:

Curly Gurevitch	Ben Roginsky
Nate Horodezky	Bertha Segall
Harry Isenstein	Bella Singer
Joe Moscovich	Harry Weiner

Bessie Diamond cont'd

It was on the dining car of the train that I introduced him to salads; then he became addicted to salads.

"We stayed in the apartment Joe had

Thank you to our Tribute Card users

Beautiful museum photo tribute cards displaying five scenes from Southern Alberta's Jewish history are available to honour special occasions. Minimum donation (tax deductible) to have a JHS card sent out is \$5.00.

Please call Tiby Presma at 281-3910 to have a card sent out.

Thank you to the following persons who used our historical photo cards in 1995 to honor their friends:

Jay & Barbara Joffe	Certie Belkin
Mel & Therese Nagler	Sol & Evelyn Gurevitch
Vav & Helen Walker	Allan & Ruth Narvey
David & Delsie Dworkin	Rose Hallis
Mark & Helen Swartz	Ethel Allman
Burt & Leni Hoffman	Jack & Betty Sharp
Allan & Naomi Kerr	Sondra & Joe Spier
Liby Levin (Richmond Va.)	Joe & Min Fayerman (Vancouver)
Mel & Reata Polsky	Harold & Goldie Barsky

The following card users also had their name and tribute inscribed on one or more new books purchased for the JHSSA Harry B. Cohen Genealogical Library:

Phil & Harriet Libin
Bill Schwartz
Sabine Helman
Harry & Ruth Nolan (Edmonton)
Alfred and Annie Groberman (Vancouver)
Cheryl Cohen

Harry Sanders to edit Historic Journal

JHSSA director Harry Sanders has been invited to be the first-ever guest editor of *Alberta History*, the journal of the Historical Society of Alberta.

Sanders will supervise preparation of the Winter, 1996, issue of the prestigious journal, which has been edited for many years by Hugh Dempsey.

Sanders, a former City of Calgary archivist, says the issue will deal with Alberta business history.

rented in downtown Vancouver for only two months, then we rented a furnished house on Glenham Street for about six months. Then we went into the Angus apartments. I was pregnant,



Former Calgarian **Dr. Gerald Fasman** was recently elected to the prestigious **National Academy of Sciences** at a Washington ceremony. Fasman is a professor of biochemistry at the Graduate Department of Biochemistry at Brandeis University. Raised in Munson and Calgary, he left in 1949. He is the brother of Reata Polsky of Calgary. Dr. Fasman recently donated his collection of Jewish American Historical Society Journals to the society. (Photo circa 1945, Calgary)

Help us to complete our book "Land of Promise"

We need your help to get *Land of Promise - A Pictorial History* into print. Donations are still being sought for inclusion as Friends of 'Land of Promise.'

Your name can go down in history. A minimum donation (tax deductible) will prominently note the support of you, your family, or your organization.

Publication of *Land of Promise* is set for early 1996. Over 300 photos will be included, many are not seen in the popular *Land of Promise* pictorial display.

Our thanks to these persons who have already become "Friends of 'The Land of Promise' "

Harriet Barrett	Annie Hackman
Doreen Belkin	Passovoy, &
Gertrude Belkin	Rebecca
Les & Mim Diamond	Hackman Weissner
Annette Friedman	Allan & Naomi Kerr
Miriam Hackman	Aziel & Tiby Presma
Bloomberg,	Zena Drabinsky

and Marsha was born.

"When Marsha was a year old, we moved into the house on Angus Avenue. We stayed there for 32 years."