



**DISCOVERY**

The Journal of the

תגלית

# JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY of Southern Alberta

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*Celebrating Our Tenth Historical Year*

FALL 1999

## Meeting to Feature Synagogue Model

Two exciting events will be featured at the 1999 annual general meeting of the JHSSA, at the Jewish Community Centre at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, October 18.

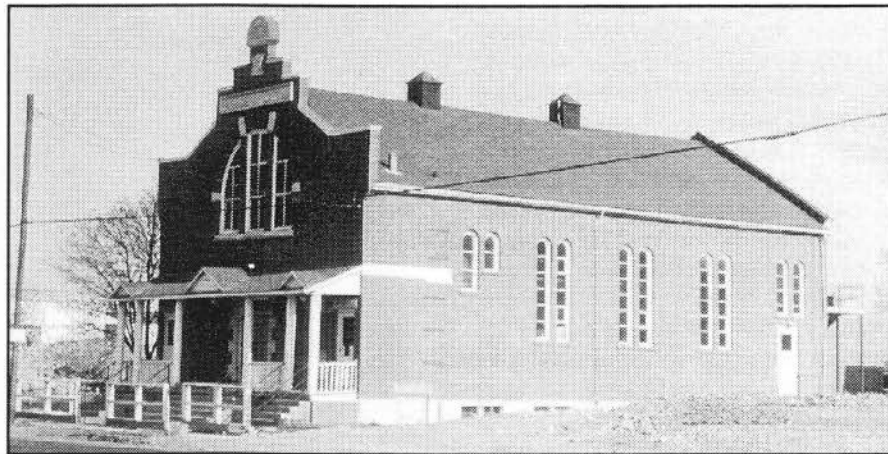
A model of the original House of Jacob synagogue will be unveiled by Martha Cohen, niece of long-time congregation president Jay Diamond.

Also for the first time will be an oral history videotape, showing members some of the results of a new oral interviewing initiative.

### Synagogue Model

The House of Jacob Synagogue model is a unique effort to present both the exterior and interior details of the building as accurately as possible.

University of Calgary Architecture student Vance Harris produced detailed drawings of the building. He worked mainly from photographs, but also had other resources. A plot plan of the 325 - 5th Avenue SE site was acquired from the City of Calgary archives, and former congregants were interviewed for their recollections of building features.



House of Jacob, 1968, just prior to demolition. Photo: Jack Switzer

Some original elements of the building were also used. The synagogue's successor, Congregation House of Jacob Mikveh Israel, still uses The House of Jacob's original pews, and the JHSSA acquired a brick from the building's exterior, allowing the model builder to match exterior colors perfectly.

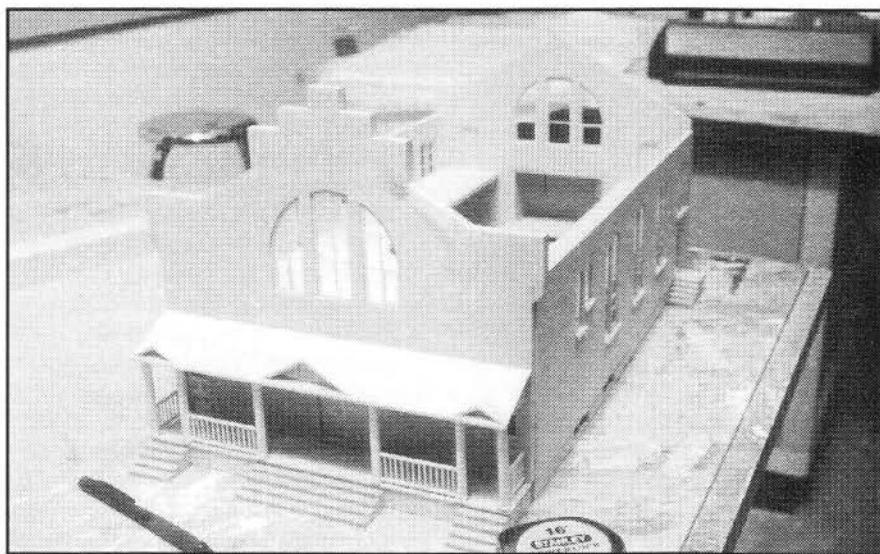
The model has a partially-open roof, so that viewers can see inside the building.

Harris was recommended by architect Harold Hanen, who has assisted the JHSSA with this project.

The model, enclosed in a Plexiglass cover, will be on loan to The House of Jacob as part of the congregation's 90th anniversary celebrations. It will later be placed on permanent display at the Calgary Jewish Centre.

The House of Jacob synagogue was erected in 1911, the culmination of several years of planning and fund-raising. Calgary politician R.B. Bennett (later Prime Minister) spoke at the official opening on September 21, 1911.

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Model of synagogue nearing completion, September, 1999. Photo: Jay Joffe

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## My Story: Becky Levitt Cohen (1908-1997)

Becky Levitt Cohen was born in Montreal in 1908, shortly after her parents, Jacob and Fanny Weinborn emigrated from Romania. Aside from a few years in Vancouver, she lived in southern Alberta from 1912 until her death in 1998. Becky married Hymie Levitt; her second husband was Eddie Cohen. She and Hymie Levitt had one son, Mel Levitt, of Calgary.

Becky was interviewed by Bertha Gold and Helen Goldenberg in 1994.

"My parents met in London, England. From Rumania, they met in London. They married there and then they came to Canada, to Montreal. My dad applied to the government for some land in Alberta, so that's how we happened to come here, to homestead at Rumsey. I was three or four years old; it was 1910 or 1911.

"We didn't live in a house. We came from Montreal and we lived in a bourdet (a sod house). I remember that. I helped carry the pieces of sod. Before that we lived in Rumsey, in town. My father had a sister there and we stayed with them. They ran the creamery—people used to bring their cream in and they used to measure it.

"There were two or three kids then. There were ten children in all. Bennie is the oldest one, then me, then Rolla, Peggy, Sally, Izzy. There's four more. There's Lil. Gee Whiz. Cecil and Hymie. Getting close. Margie was the youngest sister; she was the only one born in a hospital, in Edmonton. I'm the oldest living now.

"We moved into the Soddy sometime before World War I, in 1914. It was a short time before my father built a proper house. It was kind of below level. The inside was whitewashed and that was kind of nice.

"The Srolovitzes (Sanders) were there, and the Haptons lived across the the road from us.

"My father had no farming experience before he came to Rumsey. How did he manage? You just go ahead and do it.

"The neighbors helped, and so did us kids. Our farm was 'virgin' land and when it was plowed up there were rocks. We were old enough to go and pick the rocks and put them in a flat thing (a stone sledge) and then we'd pile them beside the fence.

"We couldn't speak English until we started public school. It was all Yiddish. First we went to Rumsey school, then to



Becky Weinborn posing in front of Joel Levitt's threshing machine, Rumsey, 1926.  
Photo: Glenbow Alberta Archives

Thompson school, which was closer. It was two and a half miles to Rumsey.

"The teachers stayed at the home of a parent. One, Miss McKittrick, stayed at our place. She was really nice. She stayed at other places but says ours was the best place, because there was the most food. My mother was a good cook and a good baker. For ten kids, you need a lot of food.

"We were close to the neighbors and they used to come to our place, or we'd go to theirs. We'd put all the kids in a sleigh, or whatever, and we'd go to the shul for Yontif (religious observances.) One Yom Kippur Mrs. Srolovitz stayed with us.

"The men went to shul and their wives stayed home with us kids and no one was supposed to eat. I remember my mother saying 'close the kitchen door' because we smelled the food. But, we ate.

"We really didn't need amusement

because there were ten kids in our family and we had our own baseball team. We had everything. We also had baseball teams at school and we joined them.

"But there was something we used to do for amusement—and for money. During recess we'd set traps for gophers and we'd tear the tails off, and let the gophers go. We sold the tails to the government for two and a half cents each. So we made money during recess.

"My brother decided we were going to get rich, by scrubbing the floors at the school, a job that paid \$50 a year. Usually the teacher did it, but she didn't want to do it that year. We went every Sunday morning to do it, but instead of going on our hands and knees to scrub it, we took pails of water, poured it on, and swept it out. Anyway, we got some books wet, and that was the end of our job.

"We used to go and pick saskatoons. A whole bunch of us, like two or three wagon loads. We'd go down to some coulee. My mother would make jam and different things from the berries. My mother would bake bread. She'd bake twenty loaves, every week.

"My mother used to sew all our clothes. We never had a dress that she didn't make, with bows at the back and all fancy.

"We had no time for 'relaxation.' We had to carry the water in and help my mother. One thing—we didn't milk the cows. That was the boys' job.

"Every Saturday, my mother would drive us in the wagon to Rumsey for music lessons. The boys took violin and the girls took piano.

We had a piano at home—that's the first thing we bought. We were the first Jewish family to own a piano there.

"My mother once took me for my music lesson and Uncle Tom's Cabin was playing, in a big tent. I cried and I wanted my mother to stay but she said we had to go home to feed the kids and get the cows milked. Anyways, a freight train stopped at the crossing and we couldn't go home because the train crew went to the show. That was very convenient, and we saw the show.

"On the land we picked rocks and we stooked bundles (made sheaves of cut grain plants.) There was one piece of land, maybe twice the size of this room, and every year my father would say 'whatever

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## Becky Levitt Cohen ...

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this land yields, you kids can have.' I don't know what it yielded, but every Chanukah, we'd each get a 'shin-plaster'—a paper quarter.

"There was another thing important to my father. Our upbringing was Jewish (Yiddish) reading and writing, and we had to sit at the table and do Jewish homework. My dad did the teaching.

"My mother started out keeping kosher. The meat used to come from Calgary, from Friedman, I remember, because I had to write all the orders for the meat. I wrote in the letter what my mother told me. 'Please send me a little bit of meat for \$50.' We'd put in \$50 and we'd get the meat.

"The we got a shochet (ritual slaughterer) in Rumsey. He used to kill chickens for us. And beef, then we'd divide it with different people. I don't know where the shochet came from or how we paid him. Maybe with vegetables.

"We did a little shopping in Rumsey; Mrs. Engle had a store there. In the fall we would go to Calgary. My mother, in the good times, she would buy 25 boxes of apples and 200 pounds of sugar. Stuff like that. Vegetables we had from the garden.

"We used to get our matzos from Calgary. One year—I don't know what happened—the matzohs didn't arrive. So the head man in Rumsey—I don't even know who he was—got special permission from a Rabbi. The people went to the grain elevator and picked, is it every tenth sack of flour or twentieth? We made our own matzos. My mother did it. She just made a flat thing without yeast.

"My dad was a successful farmer, because everyone pitched in to help, and the neighbors were all there to help each other. In the first war wheat was high in price and we had good land. That's when we built our house.

"I remember the flu epidemic (1917) when we had to wear ski masks across our face every time we went into town. It was cheesecloth, four layers, tied around here.

"When I finished grade eight (about 1921) we moved to Calgary. We stayed with my father's mother. Her name was Wagman, and she lived in Riverside.

"At school, we were put down two grades. Then we moved to Edmonton and then to Vancouver where my father bought an apartment block. My dad had a second-hand store in Edmonton, but he just wasn't a businessman.

"We lived in Vancouver and I had my

appendix out. Because the incision wouldn't heal, the doctor told us to go to a dry climate. My sister and I went to Calgary, stayed a couple of months and went back to Vancouver.

"My mother said, 'Go to a Jewish butcher shop and ask him if he knows someplace where there's a room for both of you.' And we did, and got a room with Mel Stein. I think that was his name. I was about 17 (1925 or 1926).

"In the butcher shop were Mrs. Levitt and her son, Hymie Levitt, down from their farm (near Rumsey) to buy meat. Mrs. Levitt asked us to come out to the farm to visit. So we went out there for one day, and they drove us back to Calgary. That's how I met Hymie.

"Hymie came to Vancouver to see me, and we corresponded, for four years. We

were married in Vancouver (in 1929) and moved to his farm. Then we moved to Calgary, where we lived while he ran the farm with his brother Jack Levitt.

"In Vancouver, I went to University for two years. My oldest brother didn't want to go to university; he worked to help support the family. He said if I want to go, I should go, as I was very studious. So I went. But when the money ran out I had to quit.

"Once I went to the Army Navy Store. They had a sale on, and they were so busy I asked them if they needed somebody and I went to work right there as a cashier.

"When I worked in Vancouver, I always went to night school. I took typing. I took up show card writing. I took up millinery. I took up psychology. *LC*

## From Our Photo Archives



Sophie Aisenstat (Starkman), Calgary, c. 1925. This photo won first prize in the Hudson's Bay Co. beautiful baby contest. Sophie's parents were Sam and Anne Aisenstat; they lived in several Alberta towns before settling in Calgary, where they ran the Sunnyside Grocery and later, other businesses. Their son was Ben Aisenstat, a well known RCMP veteran. *Photo: Jessica Starkman*

## My Story: Lily Horodezky (1900-1990)

Lily Horodezky was interviewed by Trudy Cowan in 1989. Lily was the third of five children of Mendel Switzer and Bella Rosenzweig.

All five were born in Poland, and all five moved to Calgary—Lily and her brothers Meyer, Charlie, David and Ralph Switzer. Charlie Switzer was one the first relatives brought to Calgary, in 1912, by his aunt Bella Switzer Singer, matriarch of the huge Calgary-based clan. Lily was

"brought over" to Calgary in 1921.

"I was the only sister; I had four brothers, and others that died. I think Mama said there were eight kids altogether. I remember one was a girl, she must have been a year or less when she died.

"We lived in Radom on the third floor of a house, but no elevator, just steps. We had three rooms, and we always had a lot of people sleeping over. Relatives and friends, they all mingled around.

"We always had an open house—I had an open house in Calgary too. The other day someone phoned me that I hadn't heard from for a long time to tell me she's coming. I don't know if it's good or bad but that's the way we were brought up.

"We didn't have it very good—I don't know if we had enough to eat, but we had to be satisfied—it was always a struggle. To tell the truth, it was mostly the women that earned a living. I don't know why, but that's the way it was.

"My mother sold milk. It came from a farm maybe three miles away and she distributed it—she had customers lined up for it. We had a horse and wagon.

"We were religious. We didn't know any other way. We never had treif (non-kosher.) We didn't know anything else. We didn't have it so good but my father brought someone home every Friday from the shul to eat with us for Shabbos.

"We had one brother in Canada. Charlie (Switzer) came in 1912. He left because he didn't like Poland. He could see it wasn't good for the Jewish people. He was very young, ten or eleven when he came, but he had already learned a little tailoring. He went to work for Macleod Brothers in Calgary and stayed there for many years.

"When he made a little bit of money he sent it, and we survived. Then he sent for an older married brother, Meyer Switzer. Meyer was in the army for many years. Then he came back from the army and got married and had a little girl already. My aunt, Meeme Singer helped a lot—Charlie had been staying with her.

"A few years went by and more and more came. Most every year they sent for somebody. In 1921 it was my turn. I came all alone, but there were a lot of Jewish people on the boat. We were eight days on the boat, and we were very friendly.

"I was 20 years old, but everyone said I looked twelve. On the boat everyone watched over me because they thought I was a young girl. A man on the boat was eating a banana. I had never seen one. I said to him please give me a taste of that stick.

"I had money because my brother had sent me some dollars for the boat. On the boat there was a store—you could buy an apple and all kinds of vegetables. Nearly everybody was seasick but I was healthy. When I came here Meeme Singer said I



Lily Switzer Horodezky, in Poland, c. 1920. Photo: Bertha Gold

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## Lily Horodezky ...

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looked better than her kids. I'll never forget that.

"Charlie lived in Riverside and Meyer already had a house, so I stayed a few days here and a few days there and with Meeme Singer. I went to a graduation at the Hebrew School with Ida, Charlie's wife.

"Charlie was there too and the man who would be my husband, Nate Horodezky, came up. He knew Charlie very well because they came to Calgary the same year. He went over to Ida and he said, 'Who is this little girl?'

"Ida said, 'This is my sister-in-law, Lily Switzer.' He said, 'Can I come over to your place to talk?' So he came one night, and the next night, and that is how we came to know each other."

Lily Switzer and Nate Horodezky were married in 1923. They lived briefly at his farm near Rumsey, where his father Louis, and brothers Jack and Fred had also homesteaded. They soon moved back to Calgary, where Nate opened a second-hand store on 8th Avenue East.

Lily helped Nate in their store, and, after many miscarriages, gave birth to their only child, Bertha, in 1924. She also became an active volunteer in Jewish and community organizations. Lily discusses her volunteer work in the 1930's, 40's and 50's.

"The last thing we did and I'm very happy about it—I went to the nursing homes where Jewish people were, and we took them out once a week. We went to every nursing home where there was a yiddishe shut-in.

"As a matter of fact we wanted to build a Jewish nursing home. I went around to ladies and I said we need fifty signatures (guarantors.) Some said to build first and later we'll see. They let us down, and we couldn't make it.

"It was a long time ago. We had organized—we had five or six ladies my age, myself, Mrs. Florence, Mrs. Libin. I didn't drive, so my part was to have it at my home. But I got tired already because at one time there were thirty people at my house, and it was too much already, so I had to stop. After that we took them out to tea, just a few at a time.

"I worked thirty-five years for the Chevra Kadisha (beginning in the early 40's). For many years I was president of the ladies' section, that washed the bodies of (deceased) women and sewed the wrappings we dressed them in for burial. I

wasn't alone. I had another dedicated lady, Mrs. Shumir. Mrs. Florence came to sew. Mrs. Libin came to sew. We came because we were willing and we wanted to keep traditions.

"Mrs. Dworkin was the first president of the ladies' part of Chevra Kadisha. We used to go to her house to sew—we didn't have a funeral chapel. Her husband was president of the men and she was president of the ladies."

Lily ends the interview with a description of her efforts to change the entrenched "ability-to-pay" fee system of the Chevra Kadisha. Her persistent lobbying resulted in major changes to the attitudes and policies of the male executive.

Daughter Bertha Gold added the following to the interview tape in 1997.

"Lily Horodezky was an extremely modest person and she played an important part in our Jewish community. Through her volunteerism she had a profound impact on the community as well as on many of our relatives who immigrated from Poland.

"When she speaks on the tape of visiting the older ladies, what it really means is that it was my mother and her volunteer friends that started the Golden Age Club from those visits. It's now called the Friendship Club. It is still running.

"From her dedicated work at the Chevra Kadisha, doing the sewing and cutting and Tara (body-washing) work, etc., and most importantly, the years of urging, urging the men's executive to accept the principle of charging one price for funerals to everyone. She felt that their approval of this principle was a great accomplishment for her.

"My mother was honored by the Cancer Society and the Red Cross for rolling bandages weekly for over thirty years during wartime and peacetime.

"To me what was so inspiring all my life was the openness and the generosity in our home, from my mother and my father.

"Shortly after I was born my grandparents—my mother's father and mother came from Poland. They lived with us until their deaths—in their eighties—in our home. My mother's younger brother Ralph Switzer came with them and he lived with us until he was married, in his thirties, two weeks before I was married.

"Many other relatives came one at a time and stayed with us. As the expression goes, 'they stayed until they were settled.' One cousin stayed with us for six years. While this was great for me—an only child—to have a full house of extended family members, I worried about the responsibility it put on my parents.

"Only a few years ago I asked my mother if anyone had paid anything for staying with us. She said 'no, no, no. They were there until they got settled.' No wonder my dad had an ulcer in his mid-thirties, being responsible for all those people.

"But the main thing I think is that my mother's positive attitude and her love for her community and family have set a great example for her grandchildren and great-grandchildren and everyone who knew her. We all have a loving memory of her. She was truly a great, great, lady." *B*



Lily Switzer and Nate Horodezky, wedding day, 1923. Photo: Bertha Gold.

## My Story: Harry Isenstein (1891-1982)

Harry Isenstein was a Calgary Jewish pioneer whose life story differs from his shop-keeping and homesteader contemporaries in a major way—he spent his working life working for large companies, first Burns Meat and then Canadian Pacific Railway.

Isenstein's interview took place in 1974. The interviewer is not known, and the tape had many inaudible sections when it was transcribed.

"I was born in southwest Russia, in 1891, in a small village named Aubanakan. I came to Calgary in 1907. December 3, 1907. I came with a group of seven people, when I wasn't quite sixteen. The oldest of the group was Henry Belkin; his sister was with him. Another couple was a brother and sister Tevie and Elke Hanen.

"It was quite well known in Russia that after people came to Calgary the Canadian government would give you a little homestead, a quarter section of land.

"My people had a farm in Russia. We were raised on the farm. Jewish people were very seldom allowed to have their own land, but my father rented, quite a size farm, probably 700 or 800 acres. We grew vegetables and rye, barley.

"At the age of 21 you were supposed to go in the army. Well the Jewish people were not anxious to go in the army and my father sort of told me to go to Canada.

"The winter of 1907 and 1908 was hard times. I think it was worse than the 30's. In Calgary there were very few factories or industries at that time. The exception was the Canadian Pacific. Also there was the Burns packing plant. There was also huge flour mills.

"The first job I got was the packing plant, Burns, in 1908. It was ten hours a day, hard work, and like a kid I was over-ambitious. I was quite tired. My first paycheque for a month was \$15.00. I worked for them for almost a year and a half.

"I used to be on the killing floor. My job was very heavy. That was the hardest thing I ever did. We were killing 300 animals a day.

"The railways were expanding at that time and building new bridges and they were looking for help. A few of the young fellows I knew at Burns started with the railroad and they persuaded me that there was no future in the job at Burns.

"So I remember I went over, but I was still only 17. At that time the CPR wouldn't hire you unless you were 21. The clerk told me he was sorry but they couldn't hire me as I was under age. But someone else happened to



Harry Isenstein, CPR engineer, Calgary, 1955. Photo: Saul Isenstein (see also Isenstein family photo on page 15)

overhear so he came and signed me up. I was a pretty husky lad and well built, so he said put down 21.

"On my retirement I had lots of problems about my age, but I finally got it straightened out.

"I started as a labourer, at twelve cents an hour. I worked 12 hours a day. I worked in the roundhouse, where the locomotives go in and out. They also had repair shops. After about nine months my pay was increased by one cent an hour.

"The peculiar thing about railroads is that with all the hardship it gets in your blood and you stay with it."

(Many inaudible tape portions follow.)

"Then I became a fireman (shoveling coal into the boiler of a locomotive). In 1914 when business was slow, I was taken off passenger trains and got put on freight trains.

"We didn't have any benefits. The company had a pension and they held it like a club over your head. If you were dismissed you lost all of your pension.

"I joined up with the union in 1911. I never held office. I didn't have the time. I raised a family.

"When I came here originally I stayed with my sister. Then I got my own room in a rooming house, on 6th Avenue East, for \$3 a month. It was just a room. I took my meals out.

"There was a Chinese restaurant on 2nd Street East. You could get a good meal for 25 or 35 cents. I remember a club on 8th Avenue and I ate there once in a while. It was a bit more expensive, about 50 cents.

"I gradually brought my family over. In 1909 I brought one sister, Victoria, and in

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## Harry Isenstein ...

*Continued from Page 6*

1913 a brother and a sister, Jack and Marsha.

"After Dora (nee Ashkenazy) and I were married in 1913 we had a house over where the General Hospital is now Bridgeland. There was quite a settlement of Russian Jews in that district. It was within walking distance of downtown.

"It was a nice little cottage, with two bedrooms, and the back yard had a nice little garden. I used to plant potatoes and grow flowers. It had a full basement, with a coal furnace.

"My wife's two sisters stayed with us, they boarded. They paid a small fee, I think it was ten dollars a month or something.

"We rented that house until 1922, when I went on that trip to Russia. I knew there was no way I could get the rest of my people out of Russia unless I'd go there myself. My parents were already over 65.

"It took me almost six months by the time I got my people out of there. Father and mother, a brother, and two more sisters, my wife's two sisters, cousins and relatives.

"I brought that time about 35 people. Not at my expense. People from here paid the transportation. It was actually the first legal party that left Russia at that time. It broke the ice.

"Most of them came to Calgary. Some were grateful, but they never ... later on in years when they met me on the street they thought they were doing me a favor if they greeted me.

"My compensation was that my father and mother appreciated it. They have been here for over 40 years. It was actually a sacrifice on my part. I left my wife and two children. I had no income from the CPR when I was away. I had some money saved up, but I was in debt when I came back.

"I wasn't active in the synagogue, but I was active in Jewish (Yiddish) culture. We organized a cultural club in about 1911. There were only about 18 Jewish families in Calgary, and amongst these were quite a few single men who were very intellectual and very cultured.

"They came over as grown-up men from Russia. They knew Russian and Jewish (Yiddish) and were very culturally educated. They knew the Russian classics. There was a Harry Shooner; his younger brother Sam was a very cultured young man.

"After 1908-09 there were quite a few Jewish immigrants starting to come in. They did not have a charity organization in the city at that time. So a group of Jewish people started a little loan company. They started by putting a few hundred dollars together. I

remember I loaned \$20 from them during that winter.

"I never regretted coming to Canada. I was always happy and all of my family is here except for one brother who was in the army and they wouldn't let him out at that time (1922). A few months later he got married and he became an army officer and he got killed in the last war."

Harry and Dora Isenstein had five children, twins Simon and Saul, and daughters Sara Donin, Lilli Simkin, and Pearl Kass. Simon was killed in Italy while serving in the Canadian army in World War II. Harry retired from the CPR in 1956. Dora died in 1981, Harry in 1982.

Harry was intensely proud of his community's achievements. An article he wrote about Alberta's Jewish farmers is in the JHSSA archives. In it, he states: "I look back to the year 1920 when I visited Rumsey and other small settlements in that district collecting funds for the war orphans of the Ukraine. ... I collected \$2000 for the cause. This was an almost unbelievable sum to have collected from such a small group.

"These hard-working farmers and the small shopkeepers were an example of devotion to those in dire need. These are the people I salute: the pioneers. Theirs was the spirit, the courage, the dedication, the generosity that helped build our country."

Harry Isenstein's 1922 trip to post-revolutionary Russia to facilitate the emigration of a large number of relatives and other Jews was noted in a local news story. The *Calgary Daily Herald* reported Harry Isenstein's return in its October 6, 1922 edition (excerpted):

### **Relatives of Jewish Citizens Arrive in City—Harry Isenstein Brings First Legal Party Since the Armistice.**

Members of the Jewish community of the city, numbering about 400, turned out at the CPR station on Thursday evening to greet Harry Isenstein, CPR Engineer here, who was returning from Russia, where he had gone to bring out his family and also relatives of other Jewish Citizens of Calgary.

He landed in Canada with 32 in the party, and after leaving a number in both Quebec and Winnipeg, where they had relatives waiting to greet them, he arrived in Calgary with 10 in the party, including his aged father and mother, two sisters and one brother.

It took Mr. Isenstein just six months to make the trip to Gomel, Russia, and return. "It was the first legal party to come out of Russia since the armistice," he told the *Herald*. "The trip was a success in every way and

no difficulty was encountered in leaving Russia. Of course, we all had passports," he added.

In answer to a question, he said the Soviet government will now allow any person to leave the country except young men who are liable for military service.

Gomel, Russia, where his mission took him, is situated southwest of Moscow.

Conditions around Gomel were exceptionally good, as excellent crops had been harvested there for the last two years. No hardships were being suffered in this district. The people had plenty to eat. In the famine districts, the government was looking after the people and, of course, they were not so well off. The railroads which he travelled on were all in good condition, and the locomotives were well looked after, but they were short of rolling stock.

Moscow had almost returned to its normal state. There were theatres there of all kinds, and plenty of eating houses.

He was in Russia about three months and had no trouble getting about. British subjects, he said, were greatly respected by the government as well as the people themselves."

Isenstein also described a well-equipped, well-fed army, and a prospering, if inflationary, economy. Historians might question the accuracy and objectivity of his account. The new Soviet government, then isolated from international recognition, was anxious to maintain good relations with sympathetic emigrés. As well, Isenstein likely shared the optimism and high hopes that many Diaspora Jews held out for the ideology of a young communist state. And prominent Jews in the Soviet hierarchy had not yet been purged.

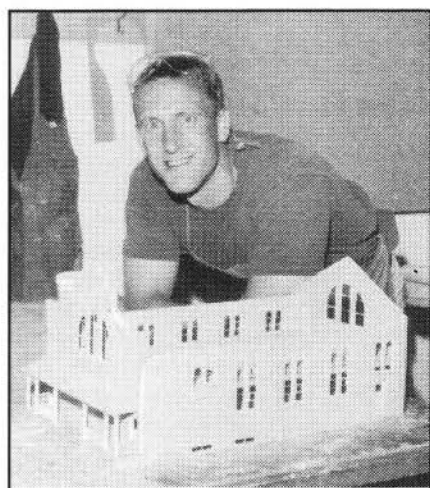
The "famine areas" he mentions were largely in Ukraine, where over a million peasants opposed to forced collectivization were to die in the 1920's as a result of Communist policies.

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## Annual Meeting ...

*Continued from Page 1*



**Second year U of C Architecture Student Vance Harris working on his model of the House of Jacob. Photo: Derek Boddington**

The congregation was organized in 1907, and incorporated in 1909. Early in 1909 two lots were purchased on 5th Avenue East near Third Street, and a small building, "used for worship and for teaching our children religion" was built at the rear of the property.

Jacob Diamond was president of the congregation for many years; H.J. Cooper was the first treasurer. Charles Malkin was vice-president. The first building fund pledge came from Diamond, who was pleased that the congregation had chosen the name House of Jacob, which was also his given name.

Henry Noah Sereth and his brother Alexander, then the city's wealthiest Jews, are reported to have donated many building materials from their Riverside Lumber yards. Jacob Woolfe, a carpenter and cabinet-maker, is believed to have built the first bimah (reader's platform) and torah ark.

Building cost was, according to a news item, "in the neighborhood of \$5000."

The building, designed with traditional orthodox features and classical lines, seated 400, many more than then lived in the Jewish community, which had only about 50 families in 1911. The bimah stood in the middle of the main floor, reserved for men, with the ark at the front. Women sat in the balcony.

The synagogue complex was Calgary's only Jewish communal building until 1926, when a Hebrew School building was purchased. (A cemetery, without buildings, had been acquired in 1904.) The House of Jacob was the city's only permanent reli-

gious facility until 1935, when Beth Israel congregation began meeting in the 18th Avenue community centre.

The House of Jacob building was purchased by the City as part of its east-end urban re-development project, and was demolished in 1968. Bow Valley College (formerly the Alberta Vocational Centre) now occupies the site.

The House of Jacob moved for a few years to the former Moose Lodge building at 13th Avenue and 12th Street S.W. It remained there until the almost inactive congregation was revived about 1980. It used community centre facilities until its new building, The House of Jacob Mikveh Israel, was built on 92nd Avenue.

### Interview Video

The new video is an introduction to the JHSSA's newest oral interview medium, that of recording interviews on videotape, rather than just on audio tape.

The abridged videotape shows highlights of the eight interviews completed. It was edited by Jonathan Joffe, who operated the professional-quality color camera equipment during the interviews.

Those initially interviewed were Max Bercovich, Martha Cohen, Leo Sheftel, Bertha Gold, Dorothy Goldin, Mel Polsky, Willie Sengaus, and Ida Horwitz.

The interviews lasted an average of one hour each. Bertha Gold and Jay Joffe, who conducted the interviews, say the video format provides a more intensive format than audio taping, and report that respondents really "opened up" to the camera.

The JHSSA is considering using these interviews, and future ones, as material for one or more television programs. Funding sources are being explored.

### Focus on Family History

This issue of *Discovery* is largely devoted to reprinting excerpts of the many oral interviews in the JHSSA archives. All originally had a question and answer format; responses have been re-formatted for ease of reading.

The Historical Society has nearly a hundred interviews in various formats. Most are audio tapes. These are rapidly being transcribed into text form. Recently, several interviews have been done on color videotape. We have a few transcripts or summaries of interviews from other sources, like radio broadcasts.

We also have several family histories in text form, written by family members or with the assistance of professional writers.

Last issue's article on the Srolovitz family is an example.

Other archival materials have been submitted for the family history section of *Land of Promise*, but these were, in large part, very abbreviated summaries. We also have short recollections, such as funeral eulogies, which are very useful sources. And of course, we collect all the local Jewish obituaries we can.

These interviews and data are not just for our archives. They are for survivors, for descendants, for friends, for students and scholars.

The voice, the face, the words of a loved one can be recorded and kept for future listeners, viewers, and readers to enjoy.

The JHSSA wants to help you record your family history. We can interview respondents ourselves, or help you do it yourself. We can reproduce and store your old photos. We can advise you on historical object conservation methods, on genealogical computer software, on the various print and electronic media available to help you keep your family's history alive.

Bertha Gold is chairperson of our oral interview committee. Please call her, or the JHSSA staff, if you have questions about family history conservation, or if you wish to suggest yourself or a friend as an interview subject.

## JHSSA News

### Jewish Business Project

Calgary's Jewish business history is the focus of a research project being undertaken by a group of JHSSA volunteers, led by Sheila Gurevitch. They are sending a questionnaire to persons they know to have been part of "old" Jewish businesses, and welcome your contributions of memorabilia, data, photos, documents, etc.

Please contact Sheila Gurevitch or the JHSSA office if you can add your memories to this valuable Jewish history project.

### Thank You to Our Casino Volunteers

Special thanks are due to all the volunteers who staffed our August 16/17 casino. This major fund-raiser would not have been possible without your help. Thanks again.

### Book of Heritage Honorees

The family of Azriel Presma recently honored him on his 75th birthday by dedicating in his honor a page in the JHSSA Book of Heritage. Mr. Presma was presented with a framed certificate, a copy of which is shown in the Heritage display case at the Calgary Jewish Centre.



## My Story: Harry Isenstein (1891-1982)

Harry Isenstein was a Calgary Jewish pioneer whose life story differs from his shop-keeping and homesteader contemporaries in a major way—he spent his working life working for large companies, first Burns Meat and then Canadian Pacific Railway.

Isenstein's interview took place in 1974. The interviewer is not known, and the tape had many inaudible sections when it was transcribed.

"I was born in southwest Russia, in 1891, in a small village named Aubanakan. I came to Calgary in 1907. December 3, 1907. I came with a group of seven people, when I wasn't quite sixteen. The oldest of the group was Henry Belkin; his sister was with him. Another couple was a brother and sister Tevie and Elke Hanen.

"It was quite well known in Russia that after people came to Calgary the Canadian government would give you a little homestead, a quarter section of land.

"My people had a farm in Russia. We were raised on the farm. Jewish people were very seldom allowed to have their own land, but my father rented, quite a size farm, probably 700 or 800 acres. We grew vegetables and rye, barley.

"At the age of 21 you were supposed to go in the army. Well the Jewish people were not anxious to go in the army and my father sort of told me to go to Canada.

"The winter of 1907 and 1908 was hard times. I think it was worse than the 30's. In Calgary there were very few factories or industries at that time. The exception was the Canadian Pacific. Also there was the Burns packing plant. There was also huge flour mills.

"The first job I got was the packing plant, Burns, in 1908. It was ten hours a day, hard work, and like a kid I was over-ambitious. I was quite tired. My first paycheque for a month was \$15.00. I worked for them for almost a year and a half.

"I used to be on the killing floor. My job was very heavy. That was the hardest thing I ever did. We were killing 300 animals a day.

"The railways were expanding at that time and building new bridges and they were looking for help. A few of the young fellows I knew at Burns started with the railroad and they persuaded me that there was no future in the job at Burns.

"So I remember I went over, but I was still only 17. At that time the CPR wouldn't hire you unless you were 21. The clerk told me he was sorry but they couldn't hire me as I was under age. But someone else happened to



Harry Isenstein, CPR engineer, Calgary, 1955. Photo: Saul Isenstein (see also Isenstein family photo on page 15)

overhear so he came and signed me up. I was a pretty husky lad and well built, so he said put down 21.

"On my retirement I had lots of problems about my age, but I finally got it straightened out.

"I started as a labourer, at twelve cents an hour. I worked 12 hours a day. I worked in the roundhouse, where the locomotives go in and out. They also had repair shops. After about nine months my pay was increased by one cent an hour.

"The peculiar thing about railroads is that with all the hardship it gets in your blood and you stay with it."

(Many inaudible tape portions follow.)

"Then I became a fireman (shoveling coal into the boiler of a locomotive). In 1914 when business was slow, I was taken off passenger trains and got put on freight trains.

"We didn't have any benefits. The company had a pension and they held it like a club over your head. If you were dismissed you lost all of your pension.

"I joined up with the union in 1911. I never held office. I didn't have the time. I raised a family.

"When I came here originally I stayed with my sister. Then I got my own room in a rooming house, on 6th Avenue East, for \$3 a month. It was just a room. I took my meals out.

"There was a Chinese restaurant on 2nd Street East. You could get a good meal for 25 or 35 cents. I remember a club on 8th Avenue and I ate there once in a while. It was a bit more expensive, about 50 cents.

"I gradually brought my family over. In 1909 I brought one sister, Victoria, and in

*Continued on Page 7*

## My Story: Minnie Gorasht

Minnie Gorasht was interviewed by Bertha Gold in 1996. Minnie was the daughter of Yankel and Esther Mendleman, and the sister of Morris Mendleman.

"I was born in Zveline, a little village in Poland, about 50 or 60 miles from Radom, the big city. I went to a public school, up to grade five. The school was next to where we lived with my grandmother, Freedman, while my father was in the war. He wasn't educated, so he delivered food to the front.

"Moishe (Morris Mendleman) was my only brother. My mother had other children who died from typhoid fever, but I don't remember them at all.

"After my father came back from the war he tried to make a living, in the village market, selling horses and cows. Some days it was good, and if it wasn't a good day, it wasn't. My grandparents had a cow—they were quite comfortable—and my mother sold milk to people that ordered.

"We lived in one room—five people; the building was my aunt's—Aunt Musha. We were lucky to have the one room. After the war they (soldiers and refugees) started coming back and there weren't enough rooms to go around.

"After grade five I had to find a profession. I was ten or eleven. In Radom, I went from one dressmaker to the other and asked if they could use a girl for an apprentice. I worked for one, and every six months to a year I went to a different one. You always wanted to improve yourself. I did this until I was seventeen, when I came to Calgary.

"My brother went more to a rabbi—he went to cheder (Hebrew school) and stayed with that until his Bar Mitzvah. I had a little Jewish education—from a Rebbetzin (rabbi's wife.) She was an old lady who came to our house. She knew the Hebrew words and everything, but she didn't explain it to us.

"I dreamed about coming to America. Your bubbe (interviewer Bertha Gold's grandmother) and my bubbe were sisters. Your bubbe wrote from Calgary maybe twice a year to keep contact, and this is how it started. They intended bringing somebody out from our family to make life easier for us.

"One cold day we got a letter from America, but the postman didn't come up—we were in the attic. He yelled 'Mendleman, a letter, Mendleman.' So I went down and got the letter, and read it as fast as I could. It was Yiddish writing,

and I took it to a more experienced Yiddish reader and he explained that in the letter they wanted to bring somebody over, and somehow they chose me.

"It was from your bubbe, Bayle Switzer, but I think Myer (her son) signed it. We started to correspond and they told me what to get ready and what to bring.

"The ticket was bought in Canada. I had to go to Warsaw, by the freight bus, to get papers. My dad took me to the village where I was born and I

got my birth certificate there. I took a train to Danzig, Germany, where I took the boat. I went with Henry Ryder's mother. She was sent back; her papers weren't right.

"I was seventeen. It was 1928. Hundreds of us were going to America—one to be with a father, one to join a sister, some were whole families.

The boat trip took six days. It was a lot of fun, but what did I know, I was in third class. I was on top of a girl in a lower bunk. She was very sick, but I was very well and I had fun. The food—what did I know about food—was OK. They had fish every day.

"It took four days on the train to come from Halifax to Calgary.

"I came here on a Sunday morning. There were a lot of people waiting for me at the station. Some I recognized, but I didn't know all of them. I was bewildered, and then they had a beautiful lunch, at your parents' house on the north hill.

"It was a wonderful welcome, and I stayed with your mother and father (Lily and Nate Horodezky) for three years.

"Everything went nice until I started to look for work. I started night school because I didn't know the language. I got a job after six weeks. Your uncle Charlie



Minnie Gorasht, 1990's. Photo: Minnie Gorasht

knew a lot of tailors and he got me a job with a furrier. After the winter was over there was no work.

"Henry Ryder worked at Empire Cleaners and he got me a job there, until his sister Dena came. She was also a dressmaker, and they let me go to give her the job. That disturbed my life.

"It was hard to get work and the wages were so low. But I saved up enough money to send a ticket to Moishe. I saved really to pay back your Bubbe, but she sent the money for Moishe.

"I met my husband (Sam Gorasht) about six years after I came. Moishe and Jack (his brother-in-law Jack Fishman) had a little furniture store, with very little furniture. Saturdays after work I used to go to see Moishe, and Sam was there, whether by plan or by accident, I don't know.

"We were introduced, and he asked me to go to a show, and I went. Your mother and dad asked when I got home, 'How did you like him?' I said I liked him so much there won't be another date. I'm sure it was matchmaking from someone.

"He didn't give up and he phoned again, and I went with him, and little by lit-

*Continued on Page 10*



## Minnie Gorasht ...

*Continued from Page 9*

tle I guess we grew on each other—it took a whole year. Then his relatives—cousins from Los Angeles, came, and he took me to introduce me to them. They said they wouldn't go home until we were engaged, to make sure I was going to be his.

"Sam was a peddler, taking fruit to the country and exchanging it for cattle, eggs, everything. He made a living. He had two brothers, Alec Gorasht and Harry (Goresht) and they brought the mother and two sisters over. Harry washed his hands off and got himself a job in the bakery that Rachel (Rosenthal's) parents had. Rachel was a cute little girl and right away there was a shidech (match.)

"About my wedding? It was in a little way sad.

"I was a stubborn mule, and it came to the point where Sam made the wedding. He bought me my wedding dress, he did the whole thing. The wedding was in Sam's house, and he invited all the people that he knew from his side, with only the immediate family from my side, so just your Mom and Dad and Bubbe were invited. Bubbe was sick so she didn't come.

"The next morning, all the relatives who weren't invited were up in arms. I said, 'I didn't make the wedding. Sam did it.' But I can't complain that I had a bad start. There were worse.

"We took a two room suite in Avrum Belzberg's house—it was a duplex on 22nd Avenue in Mission. I had a stove, but the water had to be shared. We lived there and I started looking for a little bit of work here and there. Sam left me five dollars a week.

I started making a little bit of money for myself, working for tailors.

"When I got pregnant we moved into better conditions. This suite had a private bath—it was not far from Avrum's. By the time I gave birth, we moved to the north hill, on 16th Avenue Northwest.

"It was a storefront suite, with a front window that you could make into a store of any kind. There were two and a half rooms behind the store. I wanted to have a dry cleaning store with my sister-in-law Clara. She had a good job and didn't want to quit, but she agreed to be a partner if I would stay in the store all day.

"I was still pregnant, and how much strength could I have? Sam looked around and bought a second-hand press machine, but it didn't work out and we gave up that business.

"I had our first baby—Blanche. She was a lovely child, and your mother—Lily—she raised her more than I did. Life went on—a new life. I was pregnant again, and had Sonny (Mervin Gorasht.)

"We moved downtown to the police station area. There was bungalow on Third Street East. Mendle and Rifka Switzer lived behind it, on Seventh Avenue.

"It was a cute little brick bungalow. We rented the place and this is where I raised my kids. I started to accept dressmaking work. I don't know how the word got around that I was doing sewing, but Jewish people started to come around and this is how I got my start in my business.

Sam got sick while we were renting that little house. He was out in the country on a

buying trip, and when he came home he was white as a sheet and said he was dizzy. Dr. Wilson examined him and said Sam had a leaking heart valve. Now it's like a joke, but then nobody knew of any operations on the heart—you live or die.

Dr. Wilson said Sam should do nothing, but Sam didn't give up. He went out in the country again and he did all kinds of things. He worked for Sam Sheinin (who had a large poultry and egg wholesale) for four or five years, until it got to such a point that it bothered him. He couldn't breathe well. His feet swoll up and he was a sick man.

"I got more serious in the sewing so I would have enough for my needs and the kids as well. We moved to a bungalow on the north hill, but then we looked for a house with an income. We got the house on Thirteenth Avenue and sold the bungalow; we made money on it and started a new life.

"It was a sixteen-room rooming house. We occupied six rooms, and rented out the others. And I was sewing very serious.

"Sam started working for Charlie Switzer in his clothing store. It was a light job, but even that got to be hard for him. The kids were growing up and I was working harder, but I was young and everything was attended to. Our quality of life didn't go down. Thank God it went up a little.

"Fifteen years after Sam had the first heart attack, he died. He was fifty-two. I was forty-five. It was July fifth, in 1955. That September Sonny left for college in Seattle.

"I stayed in the 13th Avenue house until 1981."

*Minnie Gorasht still lives in Calgary. Her children, Blanche and Sonny both live in Seattle with their families. She has four granddaughters.*



### From Our Photo Archives

Moses Demsky and Jack Faber, Calgary, c. 1940. Moses Demsky's daughter Mary was married to Jack Faber, proprietor of Jack's Suit Store on 8th Avenue East. Photo: Sophie Aisenstat Starkman (granddaughter of Moses Demsky)

### From Our Newspaper Archives

The JHSSA archives has a copy of almost every Jewish newspaper issue published in Calgary from 1962 to the present, as well as a few older issues. Here is the front page of a 1963 issue. The faces and the stories should be familiar.



# Calgary Jewish News

Published by Jewish Community Council

VOL. 1, No. 6

MARCH, 1963

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## 'TERRIFIC RESPONSE' TO WOMEN'S DIVISION SPECIAL GIFTS LUNCHEON

The first Women's Division Community Council U.J.A. Special Gifts Luncheon will go over the top. This is the report from Special Gifts Chairmen, Mrs. Pat Hector and Mrs. Betty Riback. The Special Gifts Luncheon, \$25.00 and over, will be held on Thursday, March 28 at the lovely home of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Kalef. Mr. Samuel Belzberg of Edmonton will be guest speaker.

This event culminates several weeks of planning and interpretation with the objective being to receive the support of all women in the Community for the Community Council and its fund-raising program. The response has been most gratifying. At press time there were 115 prominent and active women who endorsed Community Council and the Women's Federation Plus Giving Campaign. Reports indicate that more will follow.



MRS. R. KALEF

MRS. T. RIBACK  
Co-ChairmanMRS. S. HECTOR  
Co-Chairman

### Garcy Visits Calgary

Zvi Garcy, Area Director for the Jewish Agency for Israel's Immigration Department, will be addressing the four largest Jewish communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan on behalf of the United Jewish Appeal on March 24 - April 1. Mr. Garcy was brought up in pre-State Israel under the Agency's Youth Aliyah Department. Since 1949 he has been playing a dominant role in the area of immigration. He will be in Calgary on March 24 - 25.

Financial Chairman for the Women's Division of U.J.A. is Mrs. Robert Radis. The following women have already pledged their attendance.

Mrs. Jack Abzug, A. L. Barron, Richard Barron, A. Belkin, A. Belzberg, Hy Belzberg, Maurice Belzberg, Mackie Belzberg, Rose Belzberg, Sarah Belzberg, G. Berman 14304 Stanley Drive, I. Blackstone, I. Boryowski, Samuel Brown, M. Bruser, J. Busheikin, M. Carstiel, M. Carnat, M. Chodak, Alexander Cohen, Eddy Cohen, Harold Cohen, Harry Cohen, Jack Conn, Jack Crystal, H. Davidson, Billy Davis, Sam Davis, Mrs. Eda Diamond, Joe Dubinsky, Ted Dvorkin, Jack Edelson, Sid Faidler, Marty Fine, Jack Fishman, Sabine Fradkin, Sonny Frankel, Joe Garfur, Barney Gelfand, Sid Gelfand, Gerald Gornah, David Helpern, Sam Haron, Sam Hashman, Eva

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## COMMUNITY TO HEAR B.B. INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT

On Sunday, March 31, 1963, the Honorable Label A. Katz, B'nai B'rith International President, will be visiting Calgary. The visit to our city of an International President is unique.

L. KATZ  
B'nai B'rith World Pres.

an unprecedented. Plans are already under way to hold several functions in his honor, and to commemorate the 120th birthday of B'nai B'rith.

President Katz will be welcomed to our city at a breakfast Sunday morning to which invitations have been extended to the current B'nai B'rith executive and all past presidents. He will then hold a press conference after which he will visit with the BBYO. He has also been invited to be the guest speaker at a luncheon held by the Calgary Jewish Community Council U.J.A. Committee.

(Continued on Page 3)

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ELECTED

TED RIBACK  
Honorary TreasurerHARRY COHEN  
Honorary SecretaryAL RUBIN  
Vice-President

The new Board of Directors of the Community Council unanimously elected the slate of officers as submitted by Nominating Committee Chairman Harry Resse. The Nominating Committee included Mrs. M. Chodak, Mr. A. Eshier and Dr. A. Belkin.

Morris Hector was re-elected President, with First Vice-President Saul Koschitzky, Joe Busheikin and Al Rubin, Vice-Presidents; Honorary

Treasurer, Ted Riback, and Honorary Secretary, Harry Cohen.

Mr. Hector thanked the Board for their confidence and he expressed a pride in the progress Council has made in one short year. He stated that he was honored to be a member of a team that included such dedicated and communal-minded men as Ted Riback, Harry Cohen, Saul Koschitzky and Joe Busheikin.

"The people of our Community are beginning to feel and think like a community. Our Council will give them the opportunity to speak as a Community," he added in response to a vote of thanks extended by the Board meeting held on March 7 at the Community Building.

The standing Committee Chairmen were: Kashrut and Religious Commit-

(Continued on Page 3)

## CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVE FOR 1963 \$125,000.00

The Fund Raising Committee of the Community Council as their first official act gave approval to the Council's United Jewish Appeal objective of \$125,000.00.

Chairman Jack Edelson and representatives from the Zionist Council, Kashrut Committee, House of Israel Board, Calgary Jewish Family Bureau and the U.J.A. Committee leaders reviewed budgets and set their sights.

"There is a new wonderful feeling throughout the Community," stated Mr. Edelson, Chairman. He referred to the addition of new young men in the community who responded to the need for a communal effort essential to further communal development. Newcomers include Bill Belzberg, Alvin Libin, Albert Ravvin, Marty Fine and Sam Switzer.

JACK EDELSON  
Chairman

The objective of \$125,000.00 was set to meet "our total need." This includes local beneficiaries and the operation of the Community Council, the Canadian Jewish Congress, and the Joint Distribution Committee, the United Jewish Relief Agencies and the U.J.A., Karen Hayes and the Jewish Agency in Israel.

Local and overseas needs are estimated as follows: Administration of the Community Council, Capital Debt, Community Building and, Poultry Building, Kashrut Program operating deficit, Community Building operating deficit, Calgary Jewish Family Bureau Deficit, Traditional Institutions (Moshavim), Yeshivot, Orphanages, Hospitals in Israel, Old Folks Homes, Winnipeg and Vancouver and the United Israel Appeal and the Canadian Congress.

## U.J.A. TEAM SHOWS STRENGTH

MORRIS HECTOR  
General ChairmanBILL BELZBERG  
Top Gifts

The Calgary Jewish Community Council Board of Directors pledged full support to Morris Hector who was appointed General Chairman of the Council's 1963 United Jewish Appeal. High enthusiasm greeted his announcement of the U.J.A. Campaign Committee which included: Messrs. Bill Belzberg, Alvin Libin, Sam Hashman, Marty Fine, Albert Ravvin, Lionel Ravvin, Chas. G. Smith, Joe Busheikin, Lisa Faber, Saul Koschitzky, Ted Riback, Sam Hector, H. Shetel, Ben Pearlman, H. Cohen, Jack Edelson, Maurice Pepermy and Sam Switzer.

The committee, stimulated by the addition of young, skilled men in our Community, are confident of achieving the goal set by the Council's Fund Raising Committee.

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## My Story: Sabine Helman (1904-1999)



Sabine Nagler (left) and sister-in-law Fanny Nagler (centre), Calgary, 1920's. The third woman is not identified. Photo: Mel Nagler

Sabine Helman was interviewed by Therese Nagler in 1990.

"I grew up in Zbaraz, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, when Franz Joseph was Emperor. Zbaraz was beautiful little town, and I was a very happy little girl. We had beautiful rivers and beautiful gardens, and when I found out we had to leave it, I was very sad.

"We were a family of seven children. Mother (Esther Nagler) stayed home and looked after us, and my dad (Meir Nagler) was in business—he had a hardware store and also sold farm machinery. With seven children my dad had a hard time making a living and my mother persuaded him to think about going to Canada.

"My mother's brother, Henry Sereth, had been living in Calgary for a few years, and when he returned to Zbaraz after my grandmother died, he was persuaded to take my oldest brother, Herman Nagler, back with him to Canada.

"Herman loved Calgary, and kept writing to mother that we should all come. In those days most Jews saw no reason to leave Austria. But my mother was a very clever lady, and she could see no future for her children in Europe.

"My dad went alone to Calgary, in 1912. My uncles (Henry and Alexander Sereth) gave him a job at their lumber

yard, but he had never done very hard work, and they helped set him up in a small store. In 1913 my dad brought my older brothers Saul Nagler and Emil Nagler to Calgary. Saul was only 17 and Emil was 13, so it was very brave of them to come all the way by themselves.

"Later that year my mother, my sister Marjorie, and my little brother Sammy, just two, and Leo, just one year old, and me all got ready to leave Zbaraz. We travelled to Lemberg to Vienna to Switzerland and then to Antwerp, Belgium, where we embarked on a ship for Canada.

"It was stormy, in November, and it took us two weeks before we landed in Montreal. We had a nice long train trip to Calgary. It was on this train that I saw a banana for the first time. My father met us when we arrived.

"My uncle sold us a house in Bridgeland, for I think a dollar down and a dollar a week. The Sereths lived far away from us, on 24th Avenue, and it took almost half a day to get there on the streetcar. We had no cars then. I'm ashamed to say that for a long time the Sereths didn't give my parents much time. But after a while our relatives sort of rallied around us.

"My uncle engaged a school teacher from Riverside School to come and give us English lessons at home. We weren't

admitted to school until January. We were all put in Grade one, which was very disturbing to my sister and Emil, but I didn't mind. After a few days we were put into grade two for a few days, and then into grade three. We finally all caught up.

"As for Jewish education, when I had been here a few weeks my dad marched me down to the Hebrew school, which was taught by A.I. Shumiatcher. My mother was not impressed by what I had accomplished in Hebrew School, so she had a private teacher, Mr. Shumiatcher's father, come to the house. He read us Yiddish translations of the bible mostly.

"My mother observed the holidays with great joy and great respect. I remember a shabbos before Yom Kippur. Mother wouldn't let us go to the show, so we had to sit home and read the Chumash (prayer book.)

"Downtown was growing. We all shopped at the Hudson's Bay and somehow or other every holiday mother marched Marjorie and me down and we got new outfits. I don't know how she managed that, but with the little bit of income she had she managed to save something.

"She always saved a little tzedakah (charity) money in a sugar jar. When anybody came who needed money or one of the Shaluchim (Jewish charity solicitors) she received them like royalty. They were seated and had tea and mother gave them whatever she could afford from her sugar jar.

"Calgary's population was only about 30,000 and there were very few Jews, but many had arrived about the same time we did. I remember the Shumiatchers most distinctly.

"I kept going to school. Sammy and Leo grew up—they were little teenagers and they were wonderful. They decided to get a little cart and a horse and they delivered papers. All through the winter and summertime they would get up at five in the morning and deliver papers all over Crescent Heights. They just couldn't run home fast enough to give their money to mother.

"We moved from Bridgeland to a very big house on Fourth Avenue. That was where most prominent Gentiles lived and we moved into a house that belonged to Mrs. Arcon. My dad didn't want to move, but my mother insisted that the girls were growing up and that it was time to move.

*Continued on Page 13*

## Sabine Helman ...

Continued from Page 12

"We were delighted with the house. We refurnished it a bit and we started to entertain a bit. Each one of us would have a party and invite their friends. We had a big yard and our years in the house were very happy.

"At the Hudson's Bay corner there was a drug store called Liggetts. That's where we used to meet our friends. As for restaurants, we went to the Palliser Hotel. There was also the Club Cafe on Eighth Avenue, where all the businessmen used to meet. And the Tea Kettle Inn.

"The Tea Kettle Inn was just wonderful. I wish we had a place like that now. It was run by two brothers—their name was King. Part of their place had antiques and the other part restaurant. We used to go for sandwiches and tea.

"In the depression years I finished grade twelve and then I went to Normal School and got my teacher's certificate. I went out to teach in the country.

"Fanny (Malkin) Nagler was the first Jewish school teacher in Calgary, and I was bound and determined that I too would be a teacher. It was hard to get on staff in Calgary; first I had to put in two years in the country.

"I taught in Lineham, near Okotoks. I had grades one to eight in one room. Anyway I stayed there only three months because I was too far away from my parents. Then I went to teach in Dalroy, just twenty miles out of Calgary. I stayed there for two years.

I tried to get a teaching position in Calgary, but we had a difficult superintendent. He was not very receptive to Jewish girls. He said Jewish girls were interested in getting married, not in teaching. He had studied in Vienna and stayed with a Jewish family and a Rabbi there told him that Jewish girls want to get married, that their mothers want them to marry.

"He wanted teachers that would stay on forever and not get married. Teachers had to quit if they married.

"One day he phoned me in the fall, in the beginning of the term. He said could I start teaching for him tomorrow. I said, 'Dr. Scott, I can't start tomorrow—it's Yom Kippur. I'll start right after.' He said take it or leave it. I was very sad and thought that's the end of that.

"A week later he phoned again, and asked, 'Are you still free to teach?' I said yes, and I was given a school—Riverside School, where I had started as a young immigrant child. I taught with the teachers

who had first taught me, and they made a fuss over me. It was about 1926.

"I had some Jewish students, though most were Russian and German children. I taught Leo Sheftel, and Sarah Belzberg. She was a beautiful child; I can just see her. I taught Sammie Belzberg, a beautiful blue-eyed child. I remember when Leo Sheftel came. He didn't speak a word of English, but I used to speak to him in Yiddish after class. He learned very quickly—he was a very ambitious little boy.

"I stayed at Riverside school for four years until 1930, when I was married. Dr. Scott was almost right. Fanny (Malkin) got married as well. I tried to get back on the staff, but there was no way.



Sabine Helman, 1920's. Photo: Sabine Helman

"Lou Fradkin and I had a very quiet wedding at our (new) house on 24th Avenue (on July 9, 1930). It was beautiful. The house was decorated—I was dressed in pink. Lou was a very respected man in the community. He was a (law) associate with Mr. Ginsberg.

"We moved right into the Barnhardt apartments (on 12th Avenue West) that were just new. We paid \$60 a month. Everyone thought we were extravagant. Most Jewish couples lived in the Devenish apartments—they were about \$45 a month. Our apartment was lovely and clean and modern, on the top floor.

"The professional people were having a terrible time, but some of our Jewish people did well—the Grobermans, the Libins, the Gurevitches. They partied a great deal. We were younger and they wanted us to be with them. They give beautiful big par-

ties and we were part of them.

"New Year's Eve parties were held at the Palliser Hotel penthouse and they would be wonderful. Sometimes there would be a party at someone's home but usually we ended up at the Palliser. We dined and danced far into the morning and usually came home at breakfast time. Mom and Dad thought it was awful, but we enjoyed it.

"We bought a little house with three levels on 38th Avenue in Elbow Park and then Lou became ill. Apparently he had heart trouble but he never complained. He was able to tolerate great pain; he never said a word. He became ill one Sunday, and we took him to the hospital. He lasted until Saturday and he died.

"My father had died six months before Lou died. He lived with us for 17 years. That must have been about 1959.

"I couldn't live in the house alone, so I sold it and moved to Rideau Towers. Then I went to the school board to see if I could get on staff again. I still had my inspector's reports. Most of them were excellent, and they took me on immediately.

"I taught at Ogden for a year, and because I didn't like driving all that way, they gave me that little school—Park Hill, and I really loved it. I taught grade three.

"Then Sam Helman came into my life. I had always admired him. We got together and decided to get married and we lived happily ever after."

*Connections—Sabine Helman died in Calgary in 1999. Her mother Esther Nagler died in 1942; her father Meir Nagler in 1959, at 90.*

*Samuel J. Helman was the brother of Amelia Barron, wife of J. B. Barron, with whom he completed his law articles. Louis Fradkin's articulated law students included A. I. Shumiatcher, later his partner.*

*Fanny Malkin quit teaching in 1929 in order to marry Sabine's oldest brother, Herman Nagler. Their daughter-in-law, Terese Nagler, is the interviewer. Other early Jewish public school teachers were Blanche Lipkind (later married to Max Bercovich) and Pat Bercuson, later Pat Hector.*

*Meir Nagler and his son Herman ran a grocery stall in the City Hall Market, and later moved to a bigger store across the street. They bought the site, and developed the business into Nagler's Department Store. In 1967 it was closed; the site is now the main branch of the public library.*





## B'Nai Brith Welcomes Home WWII Veterans, 1946

Calgary's World War II Jewish war veterans were honored May 19, 1946 by the B'Nai Brith lodge at a "Welcome Home Banquet" at the community building.

Israel Florence, chairman of the lodge's War Efforts Committee, arranged the dinner. Speakers included the mayor, J.C. Watson, lodge president R.B. Bercoff, and Captain Albert Hanson, who had been badly wounded and had received the Military Cross for valor as an engineering corps officer.

An honor roll naming all Calgary-area Jews who had served in the allied armed forces was presented to the lodge. It listed nearly 200 men and one woman, T. Volovnik, RCAF (now Tanya Sklar).

Eight BB members who died in the war were given a special tribute. Wreaths were placed at a memorial cenotaph by F. Silver and by Dave Rosenthal, an RCAF flying officer who had returned from a German POW camp.

Calgary-area war dead honored were P.O.

Paul Belkin, RCAF; Lieutenant Simeon Besen, Army; P.O. Bernard Bercuson, RCAF; Flt. Sgt. Charles Green, RCAF; F.O. Cecil Gurevitch, RCAF; Private Simon Isenstein, Army; W.O. Charles Margolis, RCAF, and Private Leo Smith, Army.

One-tenth of Calgary's Jewish population was in uniform in World War II, a notable achievement and sacrifice, properly honored by B'Nai Brith at the dinner.

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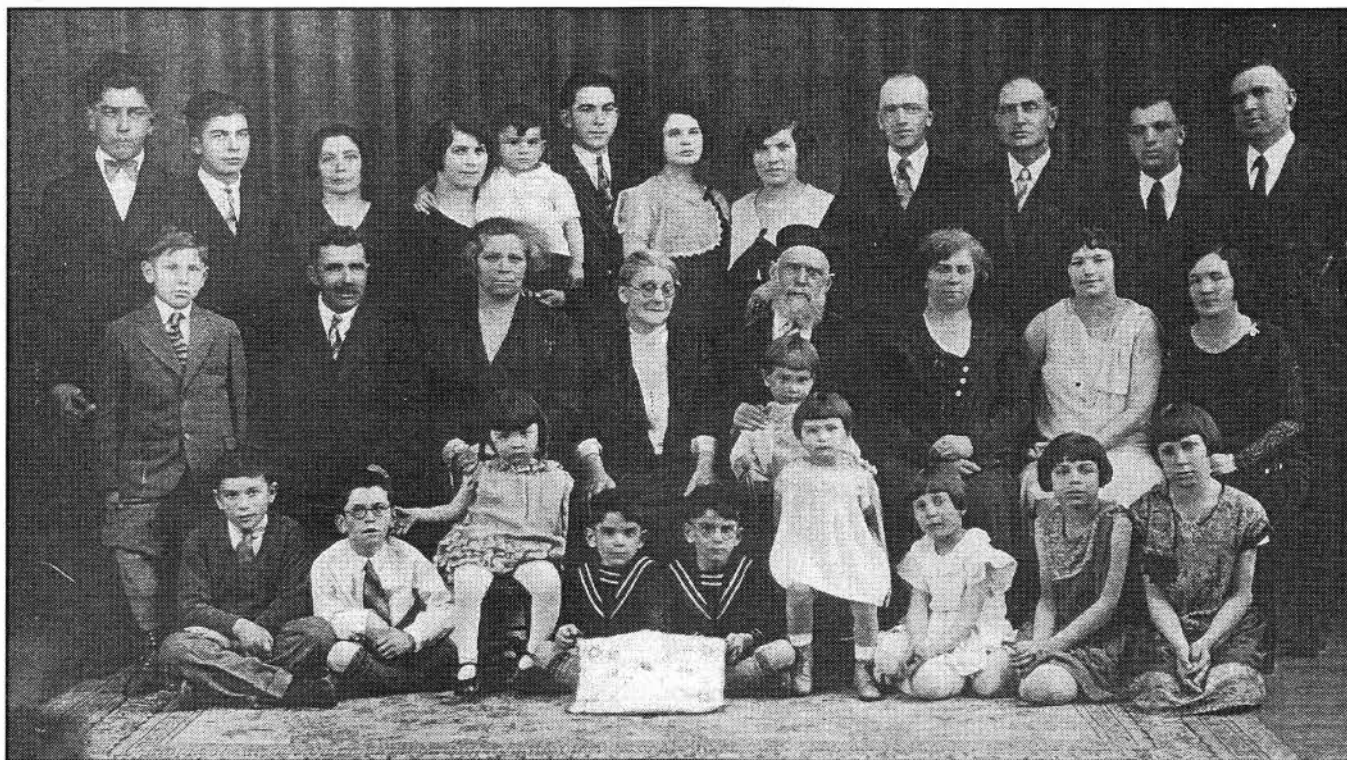
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## Pictures From Our Past



Isenstein family at the 50th wedding anniversary of Basha and Elchanon (Allan) Isenstein, Calgary, 1929. Eight of their nine children were present: Vechne Sengaus, Leah Smehoff, Rebecca Silberstein, Albert Isenstein, Sophie Friedman, Masha Rosenblatt, Jack Stein, and Harry Isenstein. Back row (l-r) Harry Silberstein, Harold Sengaus, Vechne (Victoria) Sengaus, Leah Smehoff (holding Leon Smehoff), Albert Isenstein, Sara Donen, Sophie Friedman, Nate Friedman, Louis Rosenblatt, Jack Stein, Harry Isenstein. Middle (l-r) Eddie Rosenblatt, Elias Sengaus, Rivka (Rebecca) Silberstein, Basha and Allan Isenstein (holding Dorothy Rosenblatt), Masha Rosenblatt, Minnie Stein, Dora Rosenblatt. Front (l-r) Willie Sengaus, Sam Silberstein, Pearl Isenstein, twins Saul and Simon Isenstein, Florence Isenstein, Sara Rosenblatt, Lil Isenstein, Esther Silberstein. Sons-in-law Ben Smehoff and Chaim Silberstein were not present, and son Isaac Isenstein lived in Russia. Photo: Joan Smehoff, additional data from Cheryl Kemp.



Musical revues were among the highlight of Jewish social life in the post-war years. They were directed by Sid and Evelyn Goldenberg, and were sponsored by B'Nai Brith. This photo is from a Revue in 1946, staged in the basement of the Israel community building. (L-R) Norman Martin, Annette Martin, Sid Faider, ?, Ben Martin, ?, Shirley Singer, Mel Polsky, Muriel Kovitz, Jack Edelson, Sally Viner, Eddie Martin, Martha Cohen. Photo: Mel Polsky



## Our Mission

The purpose of the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta is to collect, preserve, and provide access to archival material and memorabilia relating to southern Alberta Jewish history.

To achieve this purpose, the JHSSA seek to obtain unpublished records such as documents (correspondence, minutes, reports, diaries, drawings, family histories, etc.), photographs, audiotapes, videotapes, film, scrapbooks, and other selected artifacts as space permits. The Society also collects printed material such as bulletins, pamphlets, and internal publications.

Our archives are open to the public at no cost, except for reproduction and publication fees as established by the Society.

The Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta seeks to play an active role in the preservation of southern Alberta Jewish history and in providing access to researchers. To that end it encourages donations of suitable material.

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## JHSSA News

### Jewish Genealogical Society

The Jewish Genealogy Society (Southern Alberta) has elected its 1999-2000 slate of officers. Returning as president is Florence Elman. David Bickman is vice-president. Other officers are: Labie Doctor, general secretary, and Deana Fishman, treasurer.

Effective use of available genealogical resources will be the programming focus of the coming year, according to Elman. Internet access to the LDS data banks was featured in September, and on October 25 JGS members will visit the Castell public library genealogical section.

For more information about the Jewish Genealogical Society (affiliated with the JHSSA) please call Florence Elman at 850-4337 or e-mail her at <haflo@cadvision.com>.

### Local Jewish History Appears in Major Journal

JHSSA archivist Harry Sanders, a professional historian, is the author of "The Jews of Alberta," recently published in the Fall, 1999, edition of *Alberta History*. This is the first time the prestigious journal has published an article on an exclusively Jewish topic. The article was commissioned by the JHSSA.

*Alberta History* is edited by Hugh A. Dempsey, curator emeritus of the Glenbow Alberta Museum.

### Students Visit Jewish Homestead Sites

Several JHSSA members were pleased to guide a group of Edmonton Talmud Torah students through sites connected to the former Jewish farm colonies at Trochu and Rumsey in central Alberta.

Manny Cohen, Sid Macklin, Morris Sanders, Bertha Gold, Barbara Joffe, Jay Joffe, and Jonathan Joffe were on hand to show the students through the townsites and adjoining rural

areas where several hundred Jews once lived. Joining them was Ed Mickelson, of Edmonton's Jewish historical society, as well as two Hebrew School teachers, Joyce Teplitzki and Naomi Sharir.

Highlights included visits to a Jewish history display at the Trochu museum, to the Rumsey cenotaph, where the name of Great War casualty Samuel Hackman is among those inscribed, and to the 1917 synagogue building, where services were once led by homesteader Elias Sengaus, and which is now a Sengaus family home.

Students heard personal accounts from many old-timers, including Morris Sanders, who grew up on a Rumsey-area farm, by retired local farmer Willy Sengaus, and by Bertha Gold, whose father Nate Horodezky was an early homesteader.

### Donor and Sponsorship Opportunities

The JHSSA has several ways for you to remember your friends and at the same time contribute to our work. Pages of the Book of Heritage can be dedicated for a donation of at least \$100 (tax deductible.) Smaller gifts (\$36 minimum) can be directed towards books for the Harry B. Cohen Genealogical Library, or (\$5.00 minimum) by having the Society send a historical photo card to a recipient.

Please call Tiby Presma at 281-3910 for information on the Book of Heritage, library gifts, photo cards and other sponsorship and donor opportunities.

### Land of Promise Nearly Sold Out

Fewer than eighty copies of *Land of Promise*, the JHSSA photo history of Jewish life in Southern Alberta, remain for sale. We do not expect to reprint this book. Extra dust covers are available free to current book purchasers, and presentation sleeves are available for \$10.

If you plan to give a gift of the *Land of Promise*, ORDER NOW as quantities are limited.

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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.

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