

JHSSA DESCRIPTIVE LEVEL RECORD

TITLE: Medicine Hat Jewish Community fonds

No.: MHC

DATE RANGE: 1936-1982, [199-]

EXTENT: 4.5 cm of textual records.—6 objects

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY:

The first known Jewish residents in the Medicine Hat area were Isidor Feldman and family, who began homesteading south of the current city in the early 1880s, and Inky Finkelstein, a cattle dealer with the federal government through the 1880s -1890s. By the turn of the century the first permanent residents had arrived, including Harry and Jenny Lewis, Josef and Rachel Friedman, and Max Conn, as well as the Silvers, Grands, Schecters, Tuckers and Plotkins.

From its earliest days, the community drew people from farms and towns throughout southeastern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan, including Hilda, Fox Valley, Hatton, Oyen, Lemsford, Redcliff, Suffield, and Maple Creek. The Sons of Abraham Congregation was established in 1912, with services conducted in various homes or rented halls. A Torah scroll was purchased by a group of several of the community's patriarchs, and religious leadership and education was provided by a succession of rabbis and lay leaders, including Rev. H Kopelovitz (c1922-1926). Ben Grand, from Maple Creek, sometimes provided cantorial services. The Lewis family donated land on their farm in Finn's Lake, north of the city, to be used as a cemetery, with these early graves later being moved to the Hebrew Section of Medicine Hat's Hillside Cemetery.

In the mid-1930s, the Hebrew Ladies Aid spearheaded the purchase and renovation of a former garage, which became the Sons of Abraham synagogue. The community, now grown to almost 40 families, also supported a Lillian Freeman chapter of Hadassah-WIZO and a B'nai Brith Lodge, and community members were affiliated with larger Jewish initiatives such as State of Israel bonds and Jewish National Fund. They also participated in the wider Medicine Hat community, including the political arena. Most notable among the latter was Harry Veiner, who served as the city's mayor for a total of 20 years.

The Medicine Hat Jewish community peaked at almost 60 families in the mid-1950s. By the late 1990s it had dwindled to only a handful of active members, and the synagogue building was put up for sale. The original Torah scroll was "lent" to Temple B'nai Tikvah in Calgary, while a second scroll, commissioned by Max and Esther Conn in 1936, found a new home with a Conservative congregation in California.

In 1993, a flood in the basement of the Sons of Abraham building destroyed the community's photographs and record books. A minute book of the Cemetery Committee covering 1941-1955 was reported to be the only original document remaining. A description of the book notes appendices including a map of numbered burial plots in the Hebrew Cemetery, a 1947 letter regarding the removal and reburial of the early graves, and a City of Medicine Hat Cemetery Register. In 2018, the whereabouts of the book was unknown.

SCOPE AND CONTENT:

The fonds consists of community histories, cookbooks compiled and printed by the Medicine Hat Hadassah Lillian Freiman Chapter, B'nai Brith certificates and plaques, and wooden display items from the Medicine Hat Sons of Abraham synagogue building.

The fonds has been arranged into the following series: Sons of Abraham Congregation; Histories; Medicine Hat Hadassah; Medicine Hat B'nai Brith.

SOURCE OF TITLE: title from content of fonds

SOURCE OF ACQUISITION: Karen Belzberg; Lionel Conn; estate of Anita Goodman; Naomi Kerr; L & B Lewis; Cynthia Maerov Prasow; Calgary B'nai Brith (donor un-named)

ACCESS CONDITIONS: no restrictions on access

ASSOCIATED MATERIALS: Esplanade Archives

ACCRUALS: no further accruals expected

RELATED GROUPS OF RECORDS: JHSSA Photo Collection; JHSSA Oral History Collection (Leo Lewis)

GENERAL NOTE: Some information for the Admin Histories is taken from *A Joyful Harvest* ©JHSSA, 2007
Includes material from the following accessions: 2002-003, 2002-012, 2013-002

Series Title: Sons of Abraham Congregation

No.: .01

Date Range: 1936, 1952-1955

Extent: .5cm of textual records.--2 objects

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY:

The Sons of Abraham Congregation was originally established in 1912, using various rented spaces for worship, study and social activities. Although in 1929, the congregation made an offer of \$500 to purchase some city property on Third Street in order to build a synagogue, it wasn't until some years later that the Hebrew Ladies Aid spearheaded the purchase of a former garage on Fifth Street SE. Renovations to the building began, and the Sons of Abraham synagogue building opened in 1936. Further renovations occurred during the 1940s, to keep up with the continued growth of the congregation, and the building was (re-)dedicated in 1955. The building was sold in 2000, when it could no longer be maintained by the remaining congregants.

One of the congregation's torah scrolls had been commissioned by Esther and Max Conn in 1937. In 2000 their granddaughter, Miriam Fishman, arranged for it to be gifted to her congregation in Santa Cruz, California.

SCOPE AND CONTENT:

The series consists of a "Sons of Abraham Synagogue Dedication Service" program; three foldable cards printed with the "Memorial Service for the Departed"; a photocopied service for the naming of a baby girl (annotated "Mellisa (sic) Shaina Grainger"); a Jewish National Fund certificate inscribed by the congregation on the occasion of the appointment of David Croll to the Canadian Senate; a wooden *Magen David* [Star of David], made by congregant Max Conn for the front of the Medicine Hat Sons of Abraham synagogue building; a wooden "ten commandments" from the Medicine Hat Sons of Abraham synagogue building.

SOURCE OF TITLE: title from content of series

ACCESS CONDITIONS: no restrictions on access

Series Title: Histories

No.: .02

Date Range: 1940, 1974, [199-]

Extent: .5cm of textual records. – 1 object

SCOPE AND CONTENT:

The series consists of a transcript of an oral history of Dr Leopold Lewis, a long-time Medicine Hat resident; a history of the Medicine Hat Hebrew Cemetery, written by a former resident; an empty envelope, sent in 1940 from M.W. Rosen in Calgary, addressed to Mr & Mrs L. Kohn, Medicine Hat Alberta; a framed Jewish National Fund certificate inscribed by "The Jewish Community of Medicine Hat" in honour of the 80th birthday of Harry Wise, March 18, 1974.

SOURCE OF TITLE: title from content of series

ACCESS CONDITIONS: no restrictions on access

Series Title: Medicine Hat Hadassah, Lillian Freiman Chapter

No.: .03

Date Range: 1947-1951

Extent: 3cm of textual records

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY:

The Medicine Hat Hadassah chapter, Lillian Freiman, was established in November 1940, with Sophie Lesk serving as President and Fanny Veiner as Vice-President. Always a smaller chapter, Medicine Hat Hadassah fully supported the aims and initiatives of the parent organization. The chapter was still active through the 1990s, with ten life members continuing to raise funds through the sale of cards, and an annual tea.

SCOPE AND CONTENT:

The series consists of a mailing for the Annual Tag Day and fund raising drive [195-], and two paper-bound cookbooks compiled and printed by the Medicine Hat Hadassah Lillian Freiman Chapter. The 1951 volume is missing its front cover, and the first and last pages were received taped in place.

SOURCE OF TITLE: title from content of series

ACCESS CONDITIONS: no restrictions on access

Series Title: Medicine Hat B'nai Brith Lodge #1506

No.: .04

Date Range: 1942, 1957-1982

Extent: .5cm of textual records.- -3objects

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY:

Medicine Hat B'nai Brith Lodge #1506 (originally spelt B'nai Brith) was established in June 1942, with 36 men listed on its charter. It was part of North West Canadian Council (NWCC), District 6, of the Jewish service organization B'nai Brith Canada, which is in turn part of B'nai Brith International. NWCC and the lodges of Eastern Canada of B'nai Brith amalgamated in 1981 to form Canadian B'nai Brith District 22. The organization's primary focus has always been to strengthen and support the Jewish community, and to combat antisemitism, bigotry and racism.

In addition to its local activities, Medicine Hat B'nai Brith was also involved with the projects and activities of other Alberta B'nai Brith lodge, including the development of Camp B'nai Brith at Pine Lake, Alberta (later Camp B.B.-Riback) and curling bonspiels.

The Medicine Hat B'nai Brith lodge was a regular recipient of awards bestowed by the National B'nai Brith organization, particularly for membership retention and "In recognition ... of life-giving support to the agencies of B'nai Brith... ", specifically including "youth agencies".

SCOPE AND CONTENT:

The series consists of certificates and plaques issued by, and given to, Medicine Hat B'nai Brith Lodge #1506, and a letter regarding the 1981 certificate of amalgamation.

SOURCE OF TITLE: title from content of series

ACCESS CONDITIONS: no restrictions on access